

Marketing for Libraries

For many years, marketing was thought as a practice that only businesses and for-profit organizations should pursue. Libraries were taken for granted and, at the same time, libraries took for granted that their patrons will always use them. Modern technology and this new information age changed the most fundamental paradigms of what a library must offer and how to present it.

There has been a strong debate on the matter of library marketing for the last few decades. Some believe that it is an indispensable tool for the survival of the institutions. Others fear that the use of tax dollars to promote their services, might mean that we don't need them. It is not the purpose of this article to make a dissertation on the validity of each argument. The truth of the matter is that, independently of the position in which we may find ourselves, every organization - for profit or not- should devote effort and resources to marketing if it wants to survive. Libraries are no exception. The reason for that is the extraordinary amount of information that is produced constantly, relentlessly, and exponentially that is affecting our lives in ways we still can't grasp entirely. We are so bombarded with data that we need to be reminded continuously about almost everything. Pedersen (467) clearly states that "inventions as the World Wide Web compete with the libraries as providers of information, the library needs to take a more active role in making people aware of what they have to offer to customers" which is bigger in scope and more socially oriented.

Marketing is not a new concept. What is new, though, is how we tackle it nowadays. We all are competing for attention. There is so much out there that we have to be efficient and creative in putting our services in front of our patrons eyes. But it is much more

than that because the functions of libraries have also evolved. Libraries have been historically an important force for lifelong learning and also a “catalyst for providing knowledge and information” but lately it “has a tremendous scope to social cohesion”(Gupta, 126) Currently, there are two important functions, according to Gupta, that have been added to libraries. They are sharing and publishing of information. These two new functions require a conscientious amount of marketing efforts. For this, libraries “must develop channels of engagement, which makes content-driven activities essential” (Halevi, 342)

Marketing, as it has been understood in recent years, is not simply promotion for selling goods. It is much more than that. In libraries, success is measured, among other things, on the use of the circulation desk, the reference services, as well as the use of equipment for training and creative activities. In Gupta’s words “marketing is not a function it is way of doing business”. Within the marketing concept, exchange is the central focus.

In the past, many librarians hesitated to market their organizations because there was a dislike on portraying themselves as sellers. The truth of the matter is that any interaction we have is a “selling and buying” one, as Gupta (126) asserts, “marketing is marketing-everywhere [...] marketing is universal in nature”. For new librarians, the issue is not whether or not to market anymore. The issue is doing it effectively or lose the patrons.

According to Duke (52), marketing has become essential for any service oriented institution that wants to keep in touch with its consumers. The point is to market programs on a regular basis trying to reach new users as well as to keep reminding current users of the resources available within the library.

Doucett (6) suggests few main steps. First, identify the audience. Secondly, develop stories that will resonate with the target audience and, finally, make those stories attractive to grab their attention. By offering something of their interest, both parties exchange benefits. Patrons acquire what they need, libraries increase circulation. With the increase of usage it is possible to set the tone of an agenda that promotes more investment in libraries. Marketing the services and promoting the results is the best PR a library can get to help its case during budgetary decisions.

Most importantly, librarians need to get involved in the marketing of their own libraries. This brings an interesting point by Auman in which she affirms that “marketers often overlook one of the most important pieces to branding and marketing: getting the staff on board early and developing brand ambassadors [...] in other words: internal marketing”

Important changes can only be obtained if they are first done on the inside. No matter how strong is a marketing campaign outside the walls of the libraries, if the personnel inside is not involved and does not believe in the process, the results will be poor. To start an effective marketing campaign, it is indispensable to start from within. It is necessary as Auman says to promote a “marketing vision to those who make it successful”(20)

In conclusion, libraries need to assume their marketing roles. We all live complex lives, so patrons have to be reminded of the library services constantly. Librarians need to assume the role of ambassadors of their own institutions. If we are not motivated internally, we won't be able to convince people to stay with us. Finally, we shouldn't assume that everybody knows the value of the libraries and how relevant they are. We need to keep promoting them with enthusiasm, creativity, and perseverance.

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