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New and Noteworthy

Blowing Our Own Horns: Library Marketing as an Essential Management Skill

Jennifer A. Bartlett

How do you get the word out about all the great things going on at your library or information center?

Librarians often see themselves as not having enough time or expertise to do marketing and promotion campaigns. Shouldn't it be enough that we do a great job at preserving and maintaining collections and services, keeping up-to-date with new technological developments, and just connecting people with the information they need? The adage that "if you build it, they will come" is not necessarily true. It's not enough to be good; people need to KNOW that you're good. Word-of-mouth will only take our organizations so far when it comes to promoting our collections, services and facilities to our audiences. The titles highlighted in this issue represent only a few very recent books and articles dealing with library promotions; there are definitely many more that can help us in our efforts to promote our organizations! ¹

Moving beyond your managerial comfort zone in the area of promotions is the theme of a new title by Ben Bizzle (with Maria Flora), *Start a Revolution: Stop Acting Like a Library*.² Bizzle, the director of technology at Craighead County Jonesboro (Ark.) Public Library, recounts how a complete redesign of the library's website into a thriving digital library morphed into an organized and creative promotional and marketing plan, involving flyers, bookmarks, posters, billboards, and social media. The success of the organization's "Meme Your Library" campaign, featuring redesigns of popular ecards, resulted in its winning the John Cotton Dana Library Public Relations Award in 2013.³

Bizzle shares some of the ideas that have made this comprehensive public relations campaign successful in a readable, easily applicable way, with numerous examples. Some topics presented include designing the virtual library website, a Twitter feed and a Facebook presence,⁴ creating effective television, radio and newspaper advertising; working with graphic design and branding; and (very importantly) communicating with key decision makers. All of this effort, Bizzle emphasizes, is in the service of letting people know how we can help them; library promotion is actually one of our more important tasks as librarians. "These are the reasons we do what we do," he writes. "We're here because somewhere along the way, we realized we could make a difference in people's lives by working in a library" (p. 165).

Although an older title, Kathy Dempsey's *The Accidental Library Marketer* (Medford, N.J.: Information Today, 2009) remains an excellent, easy-to-read primer for those librarians new to public relations and marketing.⁵ Very few of us have been trained on marketing techniques, and

getting started can be a definite challenge. Dempsey discusses key topics such as the marketing cycle, the importance of environmental assessment, using data and statistics effectively, avoiding mistakes, marketing plan writing, and more. Although leaning toward an emphasis on public and academic library environments, the book is packed with examples and links that are applicable to any information organization. ⁶

Another interesting, easy-to-read piece on library marketing comes from Erin Shea of the Stamford (Conn.) Ferguson Library, writing in the Spring 2015 issue of *Reference & User Services Quarterly*.⁷ Librarians need to continually take stock of their institutions' marketing plans, Shea writes: "Just as librarians weed their collections to make sure materials are relevant, up-to-date, and in good condition, they should also weed their marketing efforts" (27). Activities to consider include determining services needing to be highlighted, conducting a community assessment survey, and taking a print and digital marketing materials inventory.

Digital marketing promotions are definitely an essential part of any library public relations presence; a recent LITA guide discusses the importance of social media in library marketing. *Marketing with Social Media*, edited by Beth C. Thomsett-Scott,⁸ is an interesting group of essays dealing with key topics such as Facebook, wikis, blogs, Pinterest, Twitter, QR codes, video-sharing sites YouTube and Vimeo, Foursquare, and Google+. As Thomsett-Scott states in the introduction, there are hundreds of articles dealing with library involvement in each of these technologies; the purpose of this book is to pull together basic information in an organized, comprehensive way. Illustrated with numerous examples, each chapter is a clear and interesting overview of how these technologies can be used in various library settings to enhance institutional marketing.

Obviously, marketing is important. But with all the other things library managers have to do over the course of a day, how are we to find time to conduct surveys, do community assessments, and develop marketing campaigns? Annie Jensen, writing in the June 2014 *Felicitier*, advocates for hiring a dedicated communications/public relations librarian for your institution.⁹ Langara College Library in Vancouver, British Columbia hired its first communications librarian in September 2011; that position is responsible for not only marketing and communications initiatives, but also reference, instruction and subject area work. Administrative support of this position has resulted in an increased library profile across the institution. This brief, yet profusely-illustrated article is a great snapshot of easy, relatively inexpensive promotion methods applicable to all types of libraries.

As library leaders, we understand the power and value of what we and our employees do every day in our institutions to help library users. What are some ways you have found to effectively communicate that value to our communities?

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¹ Of course, a quick search of WorldCat and periodical databases will reveal scores of useful and interesting titles geared towards all types of libraries, as well as varying philosophical approaches towards promotion. A good example is Brian Mathews' 2009 title, *Marketing Today's Academic Library : A Bold New Approach to Communicating with Students* (Chicago, American Library Association). Mathews, author of the popular "The Ubiquitous Librarian" blog (<http://chronicle.com/blognetwork/theubiquitouslibrarian>), states that his book "focuses on proactive and targeted communication strategies aimed at establishing an emotional and interactive connection with our users. By offering a balanced array of academic social, creative, and cultural experiences, the library can become a premier campus destination, rather than just a place that students have to go" (1).

² Bizzle, Ben, and Maria Flora. 2015. *Start a Revolution: Stop Acting Like a Library*. Chicago: ALA Editions.

³ More information about the John Cotton Dana Library Public Relations Award may be found at <http://www.ala.org/llama/awards/johncottondana>.

⁴ Also see Shulman, J., et al. (2015). "Leveraging the Power of a Twitter Network for Library Promotion." *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 41(2): 178-185. This study examines the Twitter accounts of the library of The Richard Stockton College of New Jersey and the library at the California State University San Marcos and the influential accounts that connect to them. The article's introduction to networks in general is interesting; further, information about networks of connections is useful as institutions plan their own social media strategies.

⁵ Dempsey, Kathy. (2009). *The Accidental Library Marketer*. Medford, N.J: Information Today.

⁶ More information about *The Accidental Library Marketer* is available at the "Libraries Are Essential" website, <http://www.librariesareessential.com/the-accidental-library-marketer>.

⁷ Eva, N. and E. Shea (2015). "Taking Stock of Your Institution's Marketing Efforts." *Reference & User Services Quarterly* 54(3): 27-29.

⁸ Thomsett-Scott, Beth C. (2014). *Marketing with Social Media: A LITA Guide*. Chicago: ALA TechSource.

⁹ Jensen, A. (2014). "Partners in Success: Langara Library Formalizes Its Culture of Collaborative Promotion." *Feliciter* 60(3): 23-26.