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Effective marketing of libraries in a *never-better* world even if it *ever-was* that way

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Abstract:

The internet has fundamentally changed the world. Some think that the opportunities provided by the new technologies mean the situation of libraries was never better; others lament the past and wish the changes had never occurred; and still others view the current situation as part of a continuum – it has always been this way. Is the marketing of libraries responding to the changes occurring, capitalizing on new approaches to strengthen and grow the library brand? Or have libraries remained in the past, indeed retreating into oblivion, by failing to market their services? This paper explores the issues.

Introduction

There is no doubt that significant changes are occurring in society at large and in the information business as a result of the impact of changing information and communication technologies in a mobile, wireless, cloudy world. Scholarly journals have almost completely converted to electronic formats accessed from a remotely located publisher or aggregator. The print newspaper is a dying phenomenon and is becoming a mass market giveaway to morning and afternoon commuters with more erudite versions available online. "News" and "infotainment" are streaming from cable television stations and digital boxes attached to television monitors permit viewers to choose what they watch when they want on computer or television screen - any pace, any space, any time. "Apps" make newspaper, magazine and other content available on mobile devices like I-Phones, I-Pads and androids. Street directories and maps are embedded in mobile devices and cars find their way with Global Positioning Systems. E-books are outselling real books. The collapse of Borders and the sale of Barnes and Noble on the strength of its Nook technology[i]

pay testimony to the changing status of the printed book. I-Tunes provide music, movies and podcasts and the CD seems to be going the way of the dodo bird. On its sixth birthday in May 2011, YouTube announced that 48 hours of video were uploaded to its site every minute, documenting visually such events as a 17th birthday greeting to Justin Bieber, a baby's first steps, and protests in Syria, not to mention mashes creating new versions.

A recent article in *The New Yorker* commenting on the growing body of literature on the Internet phenomenon categorized the perceptions portrayed into three approaches – the *never-betters*, the *better-nevers* and the *ever-wasers*[ii]. Many organizations are re-examining their current and future roles. Depending on the perspective, the views range from pessimism, despair and nihilism to optimism, anticipation and expectation, with endless possibilities between the two extremes. The current and future state of libraries has been described in a similar manner. To some, the internet has provided the opportunity for re-invention and re-imagination of the role of libraries in the twenty-first century in the provision of improved information delivery and services - better than ever. The literature describing the roles of libraries and strategic plans for library development from this perspective use all the "re" words – retool, rethink, renew, reinvent, regenerate, reposition, In discussing library staff development and library facilities, there are more "re" words – reenergize, refresh, revitalize, refurbish, revive, renovate, revamp, rejuvenate. For others, the emergence of the enhanced internet heralds the end of the world and strikes the death knell for the library. Knowledge gained in snatches from the internet will not be as long-lasting or as effective as knowledge gained from reading print on paper. The old world was definitely better than the new one and it would be better for everyone if nothing had happened. For still others, the internet presents new ways of fulfilling the same role the library has always played – connecting information seekers with the information resources they need, and so it has always been this way.

Marketing trends

As one would hope, if not expect, marketing experts approach the technological changes from the never better perspective. Ten marketing trends for 2011 have been identified[iii]. Against the context of a struggling world economy and growth in social media, the trends to be noted particularly by small business are presented as:

1. Building reliable brand advocates
2. Excelling in one area rather than being all things to all people
3. Creating quality content as a viable marketing tool
4. Moving more marketing dollars to social media
5. Tracking brand reputations on the social web in greater detail
6. Increase in branded online experiences to meet diverse consumer needs
7. Pursuing mobile marketing
8. Geotargeting and localized marketing will become a top priority
9. Accepting that silo marketing is ineffective
10. Co-marketing to boost returns and lower marketing costs

Other trends have identified the need for transparency and trust, and the need for brand loyalty and advocacy. Building relationships and brand loyalty are seen as

extremely important, focusing on a strong core of services and products. A trusted brand has enormous value and authority figures/personalities are still trumps as marketing tools. The appearance of the Duchess of Cambridge (Princess Catherine) in a Reiss dress when meeting with the Obamas caused a frenzy – the Reiss website crashed and the dress sold out in moments – a definite sign of the power of significant individuals in marketing.

Conversation remains king[iv]. There is a swiftly flowing worldwide conversation with social media and blogs. The community is talking to each other – all the time, using Skype as well as SMS and email and are passing on product messages. A simple search on Starbucks in Google will find worldwide what people think of its services. Tripadvisor can make or mar the future of a tourist attraction – *find reviews you can trust* is its mantra. Consumers have growing expectations and are looking for added value as well as value for money. Another factor to be considered is that people all over the world are suffering from disaster fatigue – they need reassurance, security and comfort. There must be proof of the value of products and services – show it don't tell it. Increasingly, consumers experience contact with products and services from afar. The website must stand out. Consumers will be engaged with an organization through its website, Twitter, Facebook, programmes of activities, events, advertisements and direct involvement. As already noted, partnering with others and linking to other services is a significant trend.

Further attention is being paid to services marketing. Services marketing emphasizes 8 Ps rather than 4 and this approach is guiding some of the thinking[v]. Product, place and time, price and other outlays, promotion and education, process, physical environment, people, and productivity and quality are important considerations in understanding client needs. The emphasis is on creating the appropriate service product, designing a communications mix, ensuring appropriate distribution of services, improving the role of intermediaries, crafting the service environment, managing people for service advantage, building relationships and loyalty, improving service quality, educating customers and positioning services in competitive markets.

Some other trends in the marketing space relate to segmentation of markets. It remains important to target specific groups in the market place, whether one groups the client base by family status, including couples, those with children and those without, and the increasing number of single person households; by leisure interest e.g. cultural or eco tourism, sports like golfing, walking or cycling; or by age, with particular interest being paid to the growing percentage of people in the community aged over 60 (and sometimes over 50). This latter group is sometimes described as the "young at heart" (a category in one Australian health insurance company's offerings), grey power, seniors or the silver market. A considerable amount of attention is being paid to effective means of marketing to this generation. The need for "age-friendly" service providers has been identified. Services like supermarkets, financial planners, and the health sector (hospitals and general practitioners) are significant service providers who may need to change their approach.[vi] Older people want personalized attention and meaningful relationships with service providers. This is scarcely surprising. Most consumers want this, regardless of their age. For many years, it has been noted that consumers wanted basic personalized services – "they do not care how much you know until they know how much you care".

Consumers want help when experiencing difficulties and frustrations; they want pleasant and inviting surroundings and experiences – delivered in a timely fashion. They want honesty, empathy, competence, reliability and responsiveness.

Work on what has been described as neuromarketing provides the basis for understanding some of the needs for basic targeted services. Writers like Renvoisé and Morin[vii] have examined the brain. They have identified three brains, the new brain which does the thinking and processes rational data, the middle brain which feels and processes emotions and the old brain which makes decisions with input from the other two brains. The old brain is the trigger for most activity and its functioning is typified by the "fight or flight" syndrome. Human beings make decisions on an emotional basis and justify those decisions on a rational basis. There are six characteristics which have been identified as significant. Human beings are self-centred. Marketing should focus on the audience not the service provider and the website and brochures should focus on consumer needs and values and not those of the service provider. Human beings need contrast and clarity to make decisions. Marketers should avoid neutral statements like "We are one of the leading providers of…". People need tangible input – simple messages like 24 hour turnaround time. They want concrete recognizable messages from familiar and friendly providers. People need anchor points. They want to know where the beginning and the end are. Provide the information content at the beginning of any communication and reinforce the message by repeating it at the end. The first part of an experience will be remembered if it is rewarding, Visual stimuli are also important and finally the old brain is triggered by emotion. There are 100 billion neurons in the brain but events which are experienced with strong emotions are remembered better.

Other work in the marketing space which has lessons for service providers is work done on what goes wrong with the relationship between service provider and consumer. Customer rage is an issue for providers of services in hotel, retail, library and similar environments. An examination of the triggers for rage has identified some managing strategies for dealing with unhappy customers[viii]. There are distinct tipping points for customers to become angry. There have usually been a series of events involving multiple service personnel and several failed episodes in service delivery unfolding over a period of time. Angry customers consistently complain of a lack of empathy and a lack of caring by service providers. Angry customers react strongly to perceived unfairness and a lack of empathy. They are first surprised by a service issue, then become frustrated and finally angry, after repeated broken promises. Angry customers can then become resentful and seek to wreak vengeance. In dealing with angry customers, prevention is obviously easier than any cure. The trick is to prevent customers from failing; to take preemptive action at the first sign of failure; to recruit the right people for the front line; to train staff to anticipate and cope with not just dissatisfied but angry customers; to encourage staff to seek help from senior staff; to empathize with the customer; to ensure the situation does not deteriorate further; and to empower staff to solve problems early on. Analysis of complaints periodically will also assist in prevention in the first place.

Trends in the marketplace

Large and small business and government enterprises are using the marketing strategies outlined above and capitalizing on the new opportunities presented. The changes are reflected in slogans they are using. Toyota is still imbued with *Oh what a feeling* but is also *Filled with Drive, Moving Forward,* encouraging us to *Meet the Team* and it notes that *The dedication of our people makes our cars great.* A simple website presents a lifetime of Toyota advantages and allows one to book a test-drive online as well as contact a dealership. The Obama election campaign in 2008 was a masterful marketing approach and its success was judged not only by the election of President Obama but also by advertizing awards. Branding has become a significant piece of the marketing approach. A brand is a collection of symbols, experiences and associations connected with a product, service, person or any other artefact or entity[ix]. AA strong brand should deliver the message clearly, confirm credibility, affect the target prospects emotionally and motivate the buyer. A brand involves reputation, expectations, a promise, a visual identity, accountability, performance, reliability, trust, and commitment. Obama and his team successfully developed the Obama brand. Local community support was effectively targeted. A simple powerful slogan *Yes we can* was used, integrated with *Change*, which appeared everywhere. Every form of social media was used and the *mybarackobama.com* website was established. It sought campaign donations and involvement and gained both elector support and small amounts of money from a vast number of people, ensuring ultimate success. The 2012 campaign has begun with a www.barackobama.com website encouraging involvement and donations – *Are you in*, *Get involved*, *Connect with the campaign*, *Donate now*, are key messages - and the site figures his meeting with that other significant world figure, Queen Elizabeth II.

Oprah Winfrey is another important brand and another example of an excellent marketing campaign. Her departure from the show after 25 years has been a remarkable event. She too has her own website www.oprah.com. It features a store, encourages comments and provides videos. Her Book Club has been a powerful determinant of the nation's (indeed the English speaking world's) reading habits and has been very instrumental in encouraging library use and book purchasing. She has also championed libraries and ensured donations to libraries through the Wonder of Reading campaign which focused on *Renovate, Restock and Read*, a campaign aimed at hundreds of school libraries. A key feature of one of her final shows was the refurbishment of an elementary school library and the commitment of Target Commercial Interiors and the Heart of America Foundation in the United States to refurbish a further 25 school libraries, one for each year of her show[x]. Even the U.S. State Department markets itself with social media and communicates via Twitter[xi]. Schools and Council authorities are now sending birthday messages to their alumni and ratepayers. E-newsletters update those who visit galleries, use transport systems or go to the theatre.

What is the competition doing?

Libraries have been reluctant to acknowledge their competitors. Some libraries have embraced the notion that service delivery was never better. Others see no change and deny the existence of competition - of course libraries are a "good thing", which is recognized by all – maybe. There is competition – it is all available free on the net

is a constant mantra – and there is much to learn from the competition, as well as from the general trends in marketing and from what is happening in the marketplace itself. Who is the competition? There are the sites that encourage the asking of questions – *Ask.com*[xii] is one of them and *AskJeeves* is its British equivalent. One of the popular questions asked concerned Oprah Winfrey's age. The answer of 57 is provided – and a whole host of other information besides. *Just Answer* provides links to experts for answers. Sites like YouTube and Amazon have many ideas worth emulating. YouTube provides personalized recommendations. Amazon provides deals and recommendations listing best books and books under broad subject categories. It analyses searches and sends customers updates of books which might be of interest. Sources like Amazon and the Book Depository provide images of book covers, contents pages, reviews, and actively seek input from readers.

Other competitors may be sites which provide social bookmarking, like Delicious[xiii] or Library Thing[xiv], which promises a "home for your books" and a community of 1.2 million book lovers. The techniques of competitors can be followed. McDonalds analyzes precisely where to locate its outlets. Burger King follows along afterwards, copies the initiative and locates itself as closely as possible to its competitor.

Is Google a competitor? It really is a Google world and *In Google we trust* might be a customer catch cry. The Google Book project has been abandoned in its earlier format but books are easily searchable via Google and large slabs of text can be read gratis online. Google Scholar makes some research content available. Many libraries provide easy links to Google and some use its search engine. It is only recently that library search engines seem able to employ the *Did you mean?* approach and to use spellcheckers.

Are large libraries the competitors of small libraries? The viability of small libraries has been seriously eroded. What is the role of consortia? Everyone is providing information. Suppliers of equipment provide links on their websites. Publishers who have traditionally sold only through libraries are going directly to customers selling individual journal articles.

Many websites link to Facebook, Twitter, I-Tunes and YouTube or Vimeo. Vimeo welcomes its viewers with *Welcome, You're new, aren't you?*[xv] Customers who want to be visually stimulated, informed, updated or involved in conversations can link to many sites. Tracking ideas or tips on branding, for example, takes one in many directions. One can find scholarly articles, ideas from the popular press, educational presentations and individual expert views – available in sound bites from I-Tunes, expressed in words on the web, or in images on YouTube with entrepreneur Alex Calderwood encouraging creativity and intellectual curiosity rather than chasing the "cool" in brand development[xvi]. A quick summary of the video is provided and links made to related content. The viewer is invited to give the thumbs up – or down – to the content. Libraries have much to learn from these approaches.

Library initiatives and responses

Libraries have been slow to adopt marketing strategies despite much effort by key professional associations, sessions at IFLA on marketing, the @your library campaign initiated by ALA and IFLA, and encouragement from some individuals in

the profession. The tumultuous changes in information and communications technology are occurring at a time when the global recession has put funding of libraries under a harsh spotlight. Libraries across the world are being closed or amalgamated as public funding shrinks. Others are seeing major reductions in their funding base. Many members of the community have sprung to the support of libraries some of whom are struggling to maintain their community connections. Marketing of the Library and its services must take new steps. The suggestions coming from services marketing, understandings from neuromarketing about client behaviour, and the trends in marketing and the marketplace must all be taken on board by libraries if libraries are to survive in the never better world. They must abandon notions that things will go back to normal, whatever normal might be, and accept that growth is part of a ongoing continuum.

It is vital for libraries to understand their clients' changing needs and to provide new products and services to meet those needs. Some library marketing strategies[xvii] appear more related to the outmoded *better-never* world view than the possibilities provided by the *never-better* approach. What is the library brand and how is the library perceived? Is the library seen as a custodian of books and other information resources – and predominantly older books? Will clients buy newer material and access it directly from other sources and rely on libraries for access to older archival material? Is the library seen as a source of friendly people providing help and a source of expertise on information access and use? Is the library a pleasant relaxing place? A supplier of electronic information? A website guiding information access and use? A link to other providers of information? A community asset where one can meet other people? A supplier of loans? Libraries are stuffed with opportunities for adding value to clients. Libraries are not just about books and information – they are community centres, quiet relaxing places, sources of literacy and a focus for family history. They can be great providers of customer service and hold the world's heritage. Clear compelling stories must be told about the library and the powerful role it is playing in the community[xviii]. E-marketing presents new ways of reaching clients individually or in segmented groups. Many libraries are using their websites and social media in compelling ways to communicate with their clients and to convey their messages. They provide links to many other sites and collaborate with others. Other libraries are sticking to old ways. Some libraries are capitalizing on their people and ensuring they make connections with their clients through new means.

Public libraries in British Columbia have launched the *Library to Go* initiative - the *Library Without Walls*[xix]. With the assistance of Overdrive software[xx], they are providing access to audio books and e-books for access on IPods and various mobile devices as well as PCs. Covers of books are available on the website for browsing. Other libraries have taken similar initiatives in providing access to e-books. The provision of e-books for lending is not without its challenges as some publishers seek to stifle the initiative[xxi]. Some libraries are lending content only. Others are lending a variety of devices by which e-books may be read. Many libraries, particularly those using the OCLC search interface, now provide reproductions of covers of books on their websites. OCLC is to be congratulated on its many achievements which have provided new marketing opportunities for libraries, particularly through its Worldcat interface and its links with Google. Clients can easily connect with their local libraries through this means. OCLC's Worldcat in its marketing strategy has moved from *Window to the World's Libraries* to *The World's*

largest library catalogue. Exposing holdings through Google has meant they have firmly embedded their services into the world's largest search engine.

The way forward

The last few years have seen the publication of a significant number of books emphasizing some of the changes libraries and librarians need to make to transform themselves (several of them were published by the American Library Association). All provide insights into the marketing activities which must be adopted by libraries. One title is <u>Marketing today's academic Library:</u> a bold new approach to communicating with students by Brian Mathews[xxii]. While it seeks to challenge libraries and persuade them to focus on their users and their needs, it commences less than boldly with a statement that libraries do not perhaps need to advertise. It would be fair to say that only a small percentage of today's librarians entered the profession with a passion for marketing. Marketing however has become a key element and an essential component of the success of any library. Mathews encourages all libraries to use Twitter and Facebook as well as Xbox and similar services to communicate with their communities. He emphasizes the need for segmentation of the market. There are the connoisseurs, the regulars, irregular guests, vacationers and the invisibles – a useful way to think about library users. All have different interests in the Library. Brian Mathews maintains his own website[xxiii] and its slogan is *The Pursuit of User-Sensitive Libraries.* Some libraries target their existing customers, maintaining a constant dialogue. This can very easily be done. Other libraries seek to attract new and potential users. Direct marketing, advertsing and public relations are important tools. Segmentation can also occur via age, discipline or interest – the geeks and the gadget guys. All writers are emphasizing the need for developing brand strategies and designing appropriate messages.

The American Library Association also published a book on a similar topic by Jeannette Woodward in 2009 <u>Creating the customer-driven academic library.</u> She postulated that libraries are large and impersonal, vast and unfriendly, with outdated signs and lack of creature comforts to guide users on their way. Library staff were virtually invisible, nowhere to be seen and customer convenience was ignored. *We're spinning our wheels worrying about whether questions are worthy of our librarians' attention when students are scarcely aware of our existence. We're failing to convince our users that they need us!*[xxiv] Library education must ensure that librarians being trained emerge with appropriate skills sets and knowledge, not to mention attitudes. Care must be taken in recruiting and selecting the right staff and considerable staff development and training are required to ensure existing staff expand their knowledge and skills base – and understand the client-focused attitudes required. Some libraries insist that all staff undertake customer service training.

While the physical place of the library has been galvanized by cyberspace, most people accept that there is a long way to go before library space truly reflects user needs. Libraries remain difficult to use; the layout does not conform with user expectations or working habits; many facilities are tired and out of date; and a major issue identified is that with reductions in staffing, there is frequently no person, let alone an expert who can provide quality advice, to be seen. The findings of service marketers and of neuromarketers is that the place is very important and it should be

colourful, attractive, well-signposted, logically laid out, supplied with up to date equipment including laptops and e-book readers for loan as well as fixed computers, top-class printers for converting the virtual to the real, comfortable furniture and opening hours which meet client needs. Many libraries have undertaken significant refurbishment projects – more is required.

There are many examples of excellent marketing by libraries, which can be followed by others. The British Library has moved from *The World's Knowledge* to *Explore the World's Knowledge* in its messaging[xxv]. Their website provides videos, blogs and other social media for commenting on exhibitions. One can sign up for its e-newsletter. A key figure is assisting in their "branding" and marketing. The Mayor of London is launching the business boot camps series of events. A client survey was made available on the website for the exhibition, Growing Knowledge. It can be comparatively easy to learn about people's views and to stay in touch with your customers, learning who they are and what they want. Videos on this site provided excellent information for those unable to attend the exhibition.

The New York Public Library's message is right on the Google search engine - *Welcome to the New York Public Library*. Its present website (May 2011) has a screen right upfront with a very simple message – *Keep Libraries Open!*, accompanied by other messages - *Find the Future, Fund the Future, Write Your Elected Officials, Donate, Act Now or Else.* The website itself has several positioning statements – *Discover, Connect, Get Inspired. Inspiring Lifelong Learning, Advancing Knowledge, Strengthening our Communities* (Perhaps too many messages?). An IPad App *The Boundless Library* is also available and there are messages in Spanish, Chinese and Russian - and an invitation invites all to *AskNYPL.*

Most library websites need considerable development and revamping. They are not created by those close to the clients and they do not have the client foremost in their design. The website is truly the portal - the front door by which many enter the Library. Too much jargon is used. Pathways and navigation are unclear. More work is required to ensure clients find what they need. Search interfaces likewise need redevelopment. The newer overlays are not much better than the OPACs they replace.

Conclusion

In a rapidly changing world, available information and communications technology enables libraries to provide services and to market them in ways that have never been better. The future is bright. Time is not however on our side. Former readers are becoming or have already become writers, viewers, creators, listeners and networkers. There are many alternative service providers. The tragedy is that many library clients do not know what services are provided for their use. Effective marketing is the key to future survival followed by excellence in service delivery and library experiences which meet user expectations and requirements. There are many marketing examples and tips out there to follow. Strong leadership is required and a changed view of the role of the librarian. To return to those "re" words, revitalization, repositioning, refurbishment and rejuvenation are required. Sarah Anne Murphy has drawn attention to repositioning librarians as information consultants[xxvi]. There is talk of embedded librarians and roving librarians. Many librarians are sidelined, unseen,

hiding in their offices. It is time to come out and to engage with clients, wherever they might be. Messages are needed: *Cultivate your mind; There's a world of information out there; You''ll find amazing things at your library; Find the best route to information; Get connected, be connected, stay connected; Make us your first information stop; Don't just Google; Find facts fast; Get success and solutions at your library.* Above all, do not be afraid to lead libraries to a never better future, even if it is part of an ongoing continuum. Lead from behind, lead from up front, lead from the middle of the pack - and follow the leader.

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