

LIBRARY LEADERSHIP & MANAGEMENT

Why Market?

Reflections of an Academic Library Administrator

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“It is not difficult for an academic library to become complacent because it has no natural information competitors on campus to stimulate marketing initiatives.”¹ This was my thinking as I moved into the world of academic libraries after more than a decade overseeing a public library. Marketing, advocacy, and public relations long ago raised their heads for public libraries as they worked to inform key stakeholders of the library’s value and to ensure that they were providing the services needed by library clients. Naively, I assumed that academic libraries, with a captive audience of students and faculty, would not need to proclaim their value or market their services. After all, students and faculty need to study and research, they need to access information and knowledge that has been published in some form, and that access has traditionally been provided through the library. Of course I was wrong. I was working from memories of academic library use during my years as an undergraduate and graduate student when print resources were still primary. Just as alternative sources for information and entertainment and competing demands on financial resources and clients’ time have significantly impacted public libraries, so have they changed the environment for academic libraries.

Academic libraries, just like their public and special library counterparts, are facing a world where there are significant budget restraints and a myriad number of competing demands for what financial resources are available. Competition from alternative information sources, most of them easily and freely accessible over the internet, is impacting all libraries. Clients of academic libraries, just like those of other libraries, are comfortable with searching for information in a variety of ways and expect to be able to access that information immediately. And, unlike public libraries who are seeing an upsurge in circulation due in part to the economic downturn and in part to their changing service philosophy, academic libraries are continuing to see a significant drop in the statistics they have traditionally gathered and against which they are often still measured.² While there may not be ‘natural information competitors’ on a university campus, the competition is very real, manifested in the form of changing information access and distribution.

Once I was living in the competitive reality of an academic library, the need to market the library seemed abundantly clear. With my experience based in public libraries, however, I needed to ensure that my perception was supported by others in the field. What did the literature say regarding the need for marketing in academic libraries? And was marketing even the appropriate term to use? There is a substantial body of literature on marketing in academic libraries from the last ten years. This literature supports the use of the term *marketing* to

describe the act of determining client needs, shaping services to respond to those needs, and ensuring that there is an awareness of the provision of those needed services. Rajesh Singh, in his article “Does Your Library have an Attitude Problem Towards ‘Marketing’?”, describes marketing as an attitude toward customer satisfaction. Margam Madhusudhan has the same perspective, stating that the focus of marketing is the client and the goal is client satisfaction³. The identification of client or customer needs as the focus of marketing is reiterated by Jeannette Woodward in *Creating the Customer-driven Academic Library*:

“There is really no way for a library to separate marketing from customer service. We can’t attract more customers unless we meet their needs. We can’t meet their needs unless they tell us what they are. It is only when we are actually publicizing needed resources and services that we will attract customers.”⁴

Marketing reflects an active consideration of client needs rather than simply championing the library and what it does.

The number of books and articles written on marketing in academic libraries are testimony to the growing importance of marketing in the academic setting. Much of this literature is in the form of case studies including many excellent examples of how academic libraries have marketed their services and space, particularly to undergraduate students. But what motivated those libraries to focus their energy on marketing? Why did they choose to dedicate time and resources to marketing the library on campus?

Bluntly stated, academic libraries need to market in order to justify the financial and capital resources necessary to support library personnel, collections and spaces.⁵ As purse strings tighten at post-secondary institutions, libraries must defend their budget requests alongside other colleges and administrative units. This concern is as prevalent in my institution as it is in many others. When cuts in funding or positions are considered, the library that is understood, visible, and used by students and faculty stands in much better stead than one that is not.⁶ The importance of being seen as useful is clearly expressed by Stephanie Braunstein in her article “Partner with Outreach as if Your Library’s Life Depends on It”: “Monetary support is given to things that are considered useful and/or pleasurable. Libraries need money to exist, therefore, libraries should make every effort to promote their useful and pleasurable qualities.”⁷ Libraries need to ensure that they are a valuable asset in supporting the institution’s mission, where value is defined by those measures that are important to the institution’s decision-makers.⁸ This is reinforced by Pamela Snelson in her article “Communicating the Value of Academic Libraries”:

“To be successful, librarians need to explore the value of the library from the perspective of different types of administrators to gain a comprehensive understanding of the library’s value to the many constituencies on campus.... We need to...determine what the...administration values about libraries, and values in the ways that affect funding.”⁹

Conversations with some faculty in my own institution support this. While many faculty recognize the value of extensive research collections (increasingly available electronically and therefore from their offices on or off campus), they are questioning the necessity of libraries as

physical spaces. There is a lot of real estate taken up by libraries on university campuses. If those spaces are to remain as library spaces, we need to promote their 'useful and pleasurable qualities.' Academic libraries are more than glorified study halls, but highlighting the value of library space for creating connections and a sense of community,¹⁰ inspiring creativity, and acting as a catalyst for group learning is vital.

This focus on value is prevalent in the literature on academic library marketing. If value to university administrators is research capability and student success, then the long term goal of marketing is to convince faculty that students can perform research at a higher level than now expected of them and that librarians are indispensable in achieving that goal.¹¹ According to Brian Mathews in *Marketing Today's Academic Library*, "the big picture idea is that we get to help students be successful. Remember it is all about them."¹² The library and its services must present value over and above the actual costs, although cost in this case does not necessarily imply cash value but might be in terms of time or energy.¹³ When librarians understand what is valued by the university administration, they can structure funding requests around services, programs and partnerships that reflect that value.¹⁴ If the value of libraries is seen only in their collections, and for many library clients those collections are all electronic, then questions arise about the need for the library spaces and the librarians involved in instruction and reference. The marketing process will help to ensure that library spaces are designed and used in ways that are valuable and that other library services answer the needs of library clients.

The more I read about the *why* of marketing academic libraries, the more interested I became in the concept of relationship marketing and how that concept impacts the manner in which libraries market. Relationship marketing is the act of establishing, maintaining, and enhancing contacts with clients.¹⁵ Numerous authors discussed the importance of ensuring that libraries are satisfying a need; not simply marketing what they are already doing, but finding out what clients need and demonstrating ways that the library can support those needs.

The theme of relationships links well with the concept of value – relationships are valued and valuable, valued services are those that are needed and develop or are realised through relationships. Throughout her book *Cruise to Success: How to Steer Your Way Through the Murky Waters of Marketing Your Library*, Loreen Phillips brings up the idea of relationship-building. "Like a relationship or partnership...marketing is a way to sustain interest, offer reminders and introduce new life and ideas."¹⁶ Later she states:

"Only by marketing and reminding can we forge a relationship based not on need but on partnership and reliance. If we remind the campus community of our stance then they will remember the consistent and accurate service that is readily available beyond the momentary need."¹⁷

Words like engagement, communication, connections, and collaboration are sprinkled throughout the literature.¹⁸ While many of the authors focused on building these relationships with students, there was also a realization that faculty are critical to a library's marketing success.¹⁹ Not only are faculty communicating directly with students, but faculty are library clients as well. In addition, faculty and administration determine funding formulae and

distribution within the university. Building strong relationships with faculty and administration is essential.

The importance of relationships for academic libraries and for marketing is said best by Ulla de Stricker:

“Let me just jump in and say it now: Marketing isn’t our issue. Relationships are. Marketing is misunderstood or misplaced if it isn’t seen as a natural consequence of everything else we do – the systematic efforts we make to understand our organizations’ inner workings; the probes we mount to ferret out our clients’ and non-clients’ challenges and deliverables; the ongoing conversations we have with stakeholders. In other words, if relationships are done right, marketing takes care of itself.”²⁰

We need to change our orientation from products and services to clients and their needs; we need to start with the clients, rather than seeing them as the end point.²¹ From a marketing perspective, making an effort to connect with our clients encourages them to develop a relationship with us, increasing the likelihood of them making use of our services and resources.²²

Furthermore, if successful marketing is really about focusing on relationships, then great marketing for academic libraries is making use of those relationships to ensure that we are focusing on client needs that are valuable. It is not enough for people to develop a relationship with the library and librarians; we need to use those relationships to determine clients’ needs and how the library might satisfy those needs. To establish and develop a relationship with students we need to have conversations – ask the students about their needs, seek their input when developing instructional programs.²³ As Brian Mathews says, we need to stop pretending we know what students want and instead attempt to understand their needs and preferences. Instead of just paying lip services to a user-centred model, “libraries must become user-sensitive organizations.”²⁴

In order to further develop relationships, librarians and library staff need to be visible and engaged, both inside the library and across campus. If neither students nor faculty encounter actual staff members when they come into the library, they will inevitably view the library as a sort of warehouse.²⁵ As circulation of hard copy material drops along with in-person reference questions, the need for numerous front-line staff – be they librarians, reference assistants, or circulation staff – lessens. Online reference can be conducted in workrooms and librarians’ offices; management of electronic resources and the portals for accessing them does not require ongoing in-person interaction with library clients. To counter this move to the ‘back room’, library employees need to see every interaction – in-person or online – as an opportunity to further develop relationships; positive interactions result in the reduction of barriers and an increased opportunity for the library to discover what services are needed.²⁶

“Libraries are perfectly positioned to be brokers on campus; we connect people not only with resources and scholarly materials, but also to each other. Libraries bring people together for academic, cultural, creative, and social causes; no one

else on campus so completely fulfills that role. And so it is vital that we try to be visible on campus, not just as salesmen pitching our products, but as participants.”²⁷

The online environment of virtual reference services and distance students increases the challenge of developing and sustaining relationships. As Dan Gall states, “It is difficult enough for librarians to be appreciated by people in person. It is even more difficult for librarians working with remote users.”²⁸ However, Andy Burkhardt in “Social Media: A Guide for College and University Libraries” talks about the value of social media for learning about and understanding library clients. According to Burkhardt, social media is about learning, sharing, and conversation – all key elements for relationships.²⁹

Marketing academic libraries is of ever-increasing importance as libraries, like all units on campus, are impacted by tight budgets and requirements for accountability. Libraries are also significantly affected by technological changes and the impact of technology on the discovery of and access to information. Increasingly, questions are raised about the need for a physical university library – do students use books in research anymore? Is a library needed to broker agreements with database vendors? Now, more than ever, we need to market the academic library. In order for marketing to work it needs to focus on the needs of the library clients -- what students, faculty, and administration want, need, and value. If libraries are about connecting people, as many of the authors I read state, then a focus on relationship marketing is eminently suitable for academic libraries. Connecting people, however, can be done in many different ways – in the library space or in the classroom or virtually. Libraries must understand the needs of the campus community and determine the role of the library in helping to build and strengthen those connections. Brian Mathews takes this idea of connecting one step further, into creating learning encounters:

“The future of libraries...is about providing, encouraging, and staging new types of learning encounters. Instead of using marketing to try to persuade students to use our services, the library becomes the natural setting for academic activities – an environment where scholarship happens.”³⁰

Perhaps in order to successfully market academic libraries we need to start with a new, broader look at the library’s role in the campus community. We need to market the academic library as the campus community’s hub – a hub for learning, for research, for exploration, for collaboration; a place for learning encounters, for inspiration, and for communication.

Through conversations with faculty and students, through developing relationships and partnerships with colleges and units across campus, academic libraries can discover ways they can support the research and learning enterprise of their institutions. In my institution, conversations have resulted in opportunities for students to ‘de-stress’ during the exam period. We have heard from faculty that they would welcome the opportunity to come together and discuss research and learning with people from outside of their department and/or college – the library can play an important role in making that happen. Conversations also help the library see how the shifting information environment is changing the needs of library clients – now more than ever, clients are requesting help in managing information. The library can be a significant

resource in the areas of copyright, open access, authors' rights, and data organization. By building and strengthening relationships with our clients, academic libraries can remain valued members of their institutions not simply as warehouses for print resources and portals to electronic resources, but as partners in learning and research.

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² Denise M. Davis, *The Condition of U.S. Libraries: Trends, 1999-2009* (Office for Research & Statistics, American Library Association, 2009), 19, 38, www.ala.org/ala/research/initiatives/Condition_of_Libraries_1999.20.pdf (accessed April 18, 2011).

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⁴ Jeannette Woodward, *Creating the Customer-driven Academic Library* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2009), 134.

⁵ Helen H. Spalding and Jian Wang, "The Challenges and Opportunities of Marketing Academic Libraries in the USA: Experiences of US Academic Libraries with Global Application," *Library Management* 27, 6/7 (2006): 495, doi: 10.1108/01435120610702477 (accessed December 1, 2010).

⁶ Dan Gall, "Librarian Like a Rock Star: Using Your Personal Brand to Promote Your Services and Reach Distant Users," *Journal of Library Administration* 50, 5 (2010): 629, doi: 10.1080/01930826.2010.488928 (accessed January 28, 2011).

⁷ Stephanie Braunstein, "Partner with Outreach as if Your Library's Life Depends on it...It Quite Possibly Does," *Louisiana Libraries* 70, 4 (Spring 2008): 40, Library Lit & Inf Full Text, WilsonWeb (accessed February 4, 2011).

⁸ Spalding and Wang, "The Challenge and Opportunities of Marketing Academic Libraries," 496; Woodward, *Creating the Customer-driven Academic Library*, 175.

⁹ Pamela Snelson, "Communicating the Value of Academic Libraries," *College and Research Libraries News* 67, 8 (September 2006): 491, Library Lit & Inf Full Text, WilsonWeb (accessed February 8, 2011).

¹⁰ Brian Mathews, *Marketing Today's Academic Library: A Bold New Approach to Communicating with Students* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2009): 84, 159-160.

¹¹ Van P. Viator et al, "Beats and Bongs: Making the Library the Cultural Center of Academe," *Louisiana Libraries* 70, 4 (Spring 2008): 51-52, Library Lit & Inf Full Text, WilsonWeb (accessed February 4, 2011).

¹² Mathews, *Marketing Today's Academic Library*, 145.

¹³ Eileen Elliot de Sáez, *Marketing Concepts for Libraries and Information Services* (London: Facet Publishing, 2002), 57, 67.

¹⁴ Snelson, "Communicating the Value of Academic Libraries," 491.

¹⁵ Elliot de Sáez, *Marketing Concepts for Libraries and Information Services*, 157.

¹⁶ Loreen S. Phillips, *Cruise to Success: How to Steer Your Way Through the Murky Waters of Marketing Your Library* (Oxford, England: Chandos Publishing, 2009): 57-58.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 74.

¹⁸ Mathews, *Marketing Today's Academic Library*, 35; Emily Love, "A Simple Step: Integrating Library Reference and Instruction into Previously Established Academic Programs for Minority Students," *The Reference Librarian* 50, 1 (2009): 11, doi: 10.1080/02763870802546357 (accessed February 4, 2011); Amy Fry, "Lessons of Good Customer Service," *Library Journal* 134, 14 (September 1, 2009): 33; Phillips, *Cruise to Success*, 16; Daisy Benson and Selene Colburn, "Party Photo Phenomenon: Students Collaborate to Promote Reference Services," *College and Research Libraries News* 69, 4 (April 2008): 209, Library Lit & Inf Full Text, WilsonWeb (accessed February 4, 2011).

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²⁰ Quoted in Gall, "Librarian Like a Rock Star," 632.

²¹ Joseph Muema Kavulya, "Marketing of Library Services: A Case Study of Selected University Libraries in Kenya," *Library Management* 25, 3 (2004): 125, doi: 10.1108/01435120410522334 (accessed December 1, 2010).

²² Fry, "Lessons of Good Customer Service," 33.

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²⁴ Mathews, *Marketing Today's Academic Library*, 2.

²⁵ Woodward, *Creating the Customer-driven Academic Library*, 37.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 35; Eleonora Dubicki, "Business Students Chart a New Course for Promoting the University Library," *College and Undergraduate Libraries* 16, 2 (2009): 175-176, doi: 10.1080/10691310902958459 (accessed January 28, 2011).

²⁷ Mathews, *Marketing Today's Academic Library*, 84.

²⁸ Gall, "Librarian Like a Rock Star," 629.

²⁹ Andy Burkhardt, "Social Media: A Guide for College and University Libraries," *College & Research Libraries News* 71, 1 (January 2010): 12, Library Lit & Inf Full Text, WilsonWeb (accessed February 4, 2011).

³⁰ *Ibid.*, 162.

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