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Antje Mays

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Column Editor: **Antje Mays** (Director of Collections, University of Kentucky Libraries) <antjemays@uky.edu>

Column Editor's Note: *Library and information professionals have much to offer the world-at-large, yet are often under-recognized beyond the sphere of librarianship. Looking beyond traditional library advocacy, this article looks to the business playbook for building connections with the broader community and thereby enhancing the profession's exposure. — **AM***

Library and Information Professionals: Engaging Within

Library and information professionals have a strong tradition of engagement in the profession. Yet for all the active engagement, librarians' activities traditionally keep within the profession. Engagement activities typically include service on library consortia, friends groups, library professional associations and service organizations, library conferences, and scholarly production in the field. While engaging in professional circles advances knowledge in the library and information profession, staying too enclosed within the bounds of our own field potentially insulates library professions from the world-at-large. This potential insulation risks curtailing our sphere of influence.

Commoditization, Competition, and Libraries

Communities appear commoditized in their bids to attract businesses as drivers of economic growth, as they tout tax incentives (**Bartik**, 2017; **Walsh**, 2018) and the quality of their cultural amenities among attraction factors (**Johnson**, 2014). Yet businesses are reluctant to commit to locations with weaker levels of skill and education. Businesses focused primarily on labor costs relocate successively to ever-lower-cost regions, as exemplified in a study of business relocation patterns over time (**Lacy & Stone**, 2007). Businesses prioritizing locations' skills and advantages in transportation and technologies seek out ecosystems of high skill levels and established infrastructures (**Bruno & Evans**, 2018; **Francis**, 2018), as exemplified by the recent **Amazon** HQ2 selections of two well-appointed communities near Washington, D.C. and New York City (**O'Connell**, et al, 2018).

Similarly, universities compete for students' and parents' attentions through rankings, amenities, and lifestyles (**Bowl**, 2018; **Carlson**, 2014; **Gottschall & Saltmarsh**, 2017; **Heffernan & Heffernan**, 2018; **Natale & Doran**, 2012; **Winter & Thompson-Whiteside**, 2017). Libraries are scrutinized on competitive factors such as size, budgetary rigor, and parent universities' rankings ("Greenwood Public," 2015; "Grosse Point". 2014; **Jackson**, 2015; **Porzberg**, 2015).

Roads to Distinction: Looking to Other Industries for Inspiration

The business world offers library professionals another perspective on service: business professors and strategists **Kim** and **Mauborgne** (2015) exhort business leaders to look beyond the confines of their own industries for inspiration to grow their businesses and market reach. In a climate of saturated and increasingly crowded markets, the rise of commoditization makes products and services increasingly difficult to differentiate. Shrinking demand for maturing products and services precipitates shrinking returns. Successful businesses refrain from competitor benchmarking and zero-sum competition in these increasingly overcrowded markets. Instead, successful companies seek out new problems to solve: they look beyond their industries' limitations in their quest for opportunities to create value innovations for unaddressed needs. Doing so creates new industries or niches and makes competi-

tion irrelevant. Among many companies across diverse industries, the authors cite **Ford's** 1908 Model T which revolutionized the horse-and-buggy era's personal transportation by offering standardized automobiles at prices many could afford. Soon after, **General Motors** expanded market opportunities by satisfying car buyers' psychological needs for distinction by offering varied styles and price ranges. **Starbucks** disrupted commoditized coffee by bringing Italian-style roasting, brewing, and community-bolstering coffeehouse ambiance to the United States. Similarly, South Carolina planter and botanist **Eliza Lucas Pinckney** looked beyond the boundaries of 18th century ladies' educations typically centered on needlework and music. Encouraged by her father, she studied a broad curriculum including mathematics, accounting, history, French, and physical sciences. Botany became a favorite field of study for **Pinckney** and informed her experiments with indigo. Her ultimate success in indigo cultivation spawned the profitable industry of indigo dye, second only to rice exports in pre-Revolutionary South Carolina (**Bellows**, 2005; **Pickett**, 2016).

Corporate Social Responsibility: Business Toolbox for Engagement and Enhanced Reputations

Contrary to the library profession, business has a long tradition of engaging across industries and diverse service activities that build far-ranging connections beyond business transactions and industry events. Corporate social responsibility (CSR) — the combination of ethical business conduct and mindfulness of making a positive contribution to society beyond commerce — has been part of business for over fifty years (**Staheli**, 2018). Business's broader engagements forge bonds between businesses and their surrounding communities: CSR builds emotional capital with the broader community (**Candea & Candea**, 2010), cements ties with individual, local, institutional, and global stakeholders (**Zilberg**, 2010), and enhances long-term sustainable business performance by strengthening employer-employee bonds and employees' sense of belonging in the organization (**D'Aprile & Talò**, 2015).

Through combinations of expertise and charity work, companies' engagements address diverse community needs and thereby generate goodwill. For example, financial professionals volunteer teaching financial literacy and institutions donate to nonprofits with financial literacy programs (**Amin & Heavy**, 2012; **Braud**, 2014; "Citizens Bank," 2014). Company-wide service initiatives include creative fund drives for poverty-relief organizations and corporate food donations to charity (**Fitchew**, 2017). Another bank organizes food drives and provides meals across its ten-state areas ("Fifth Third Bank," 2017). Arts and craft companies design and disseminate creative care-packages (**Tyre**, 2018); a cleaning company's corporate offices take the lead in raising awareness of domestic-violence and fundraising for supporting shelters and services for victims (**Mailloux**, 2010). These businesses are actively engaged in their footprint communities and serve across industry lines.

Values of service instill confidence among these companies' employees and franchisees, while also strengthening bonds between businesses and their communities (**Mailloux**, 2010; **Staheli**, 2018). Although such service activities and community engagements do not directly tie into doing business, the business leaders, employees, and professionals engaging in service shine as positive ambassadors for their companies and industries.

Lessons in Soft Advocacy and Strategic Partnering

Although libraries are not commercial enterprises, the business world offers viable blueprints for showcasing the library profession's value through diversified engagements across communities and industries. The above examples of business service in the community share librarianship's inclination toward serving community needs and strengthening society. Thus, it is certainly appropriate for library and information professionals to glean ideas from other industries.

Library research director **Linda Hofshire** calls for reliable ways to measure the fostering of innovation and creativity, maker spaces, library facilities' use by non-library groups, tracking library programs and program attendance by topic, and library outreach efforts to individuals and organizations (**Lance**, 2018). Her observations reflect the complex needs for skill development in communities (**Horrigan**, 2016; 2015) and in libraries seeking to innovate (**Rosa**, 2018). The need is widespread: 45% of global employers (**Manpower Group**, 2018a) and 46% of U.S. employers (**Manpower Group**, 2018b) are unable to find workers with the needed skills. Skill shortages span collaboration, communication, conceptual thinking, creativity, agility, problem-solving, learning mindset (**Longmore** et al, 2018; **Manpower Group**, 2018a, 2018b; **van Laar** et al, 2017), and technical skills (**Bevins** et al, 2012).

As **Kim** and **Mauborgne** (2015) point out, these pervasive skill gaps present a tangible example of opportunities for developing new solutions to an unmet need. The reflective and hands-on learning methods needed to develop these skills (**Longmore** et al, 2018) echo libraries' maker spaces and hands-on learning. As communities need to develop their own talent pools through school/business collaborations (**Bevin** et al, 2012), libraries are trusted community connectors with expertise across literacy and learning, job readiness support, technology, small business research support through data and information resources, and place-based cultural enhancement (**Urban Libraries Council**, 2007). Libraries are also natural partners in engaging entire communities, fostering regional collaboration, and leveraging unique local assets for place-based economic development efforts (**Johnson** et al, 2015).

Connecting Across Industries, Business-Style

Opportunities abound for library professionals to contribute expertise across industry boundaries: financial professionals volunteer to teach financial literacy to help fill critical knowledge gaps. Similarly, library professionals bring much-needed expertise to sense-making in an era of proliferating unvetted information and profound change. Background research, evaluation of source material, interpretation and vetting of findings assure fact-based footing for project launches —— even more when enhanced by subject expertise. Bibliographer skills support creating reading lists for projects or curating gift collections for readers in need. Data gathering, analysis, and visualization skills strengthen community projects in education, economics, social services, and business development, while metadata and cataloging expertise ensures description and encoding conducive to project information's consistent findability. Software and programming skills support project outputs such as websites, databases, or multimedia productions, or research outputs such as white papers. Writing, graphic and web design skills support creation of promotional materials. Teaching and research expertise supports training fellow volunteers, teaching service recipients, while management and fundraising skills enhance service projects at many levels.

Serving across industries in local communities adds visibility to librarians' valuable skills. As business employees and leaders mingle across industries and confidently contribute expertise and effort to pressing societal needs, so too should library professionals' many skillsets be shared with confidence.

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Additional Considerations:

- Are you moving to a new system?
  ◦ Check with your new vendor to see what support is offered; check with your old vendor to see what can be exported and transferred to the new system
  ◦ Ask for references or post on a list serv for contacts, contact others who have successfully loaded EDI into the new system.
  ◦ See if you can transfer your existing records into the new system and use the same established match point (each ILS can have a different location for the match point, consult your ILS and vendor as to the match point in the ILS).
- What detail do you want to load?
  ◦ Speak with the vendors to see what information will load via EDI.
- Do you have enough time?
  ◦ Establishing the EDI link can take time, speak with the vendor about the time requirements to establish and test the EDI loading.
- Are you experiencing issues in loading EDI?
  ◦ Capture screen shots and send these to the vendor. Often, they can help troubleshoot the setup or where something may be amiss.

Get Involved

Everyone can make a difference and have input and insight into updating current standards and designing new standards to meet the ever-evolving changes in the library industry. Consider serving as a member on a national or international standards committee. Check out organizational websites like **NISO** and **EDItEUR** (to name a few) to learn more. Membership is not required to attend webinars, join a mailing list or read the latest news and events, but don't hesitate to consider joining an interest group when it covers a topic of interest or expertise. Collaborating with colleagues and vendors on these committees is both valuable and imperative to shape the future of standards in the library industry.

Final Thoughts

Clear communication is key in ensuring the success of EDI. Schedule telephone conferences, online meetings, or in person visits with the vendor. Exchange detail and screenshots to demonstrate and note the progress and process. Pull in representatives from each team, library and vendors, to work together to establish the need, determine the best match point, and test the connection and load until successful (and perhaps once or twice after a successful load to ensure all aspects are covered and captured).

Each partner has the expertise in each system. Librarians know the library workflow and needs; the ILS vendor knows what can and cannot be automatically loaded into their system; the book and serials vendors know what information can be extracted and sent (or received) in their systems. Working together, across the library/vendor divide, ensures the success of establishing EDI in each library.

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