

## STEPS TO TAKE: MARKETING THE RURAL LIBRARY

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### INTRODUCTION

Libraries, like many other non-profit organizations, have generally not been able to bring scientific management practices to bear upon the library-specific problems that they face. The attempts to implement managerial programs have been spotty and faltering. Traditionally, library management has been concerned with problems of organization, budget management, personnel management, and architectural design. The concentration of library managers upon these items has left techniques in areas like marketing largely unutilized.

### MARKETING AND LIBRARIES

It has only been recently that marketing professionals have begun to devote much effort to devising ways in which marketing techniques could be applied to non-profit situations. In fact, this attention has only come in the last fifteen or so years<sup>1</sup>. There is little wonder, then, that libraries have not been able to develop and implement marketing programs that are comprehensive, coordinated, and effective. While colleges and hospitals have

had significant success in this area, libraries have only recently discovered marketing as a tool<sup>2</sup>.

There is considerable agreement among marketing professionals that marketing techniques can be effectively employed in non-profit settings like libraries<sup>3</sup>. The problem that arises when one starts to implement a marketing program in a library, however, is that there is little understanding about what marketing really is. Some librarians probably feel that marketing is little more than public relations. Others might suggest that it includes advertising and the development of special programs. Still others might point out that the selection of appropriate library materials is the central component of marketing. The critical factor here is that all of these things are components of marketing but none of them represents marketing as a whole. They are bits and pieces of a much larger concept - the marketing program.

MARKETING REPRESENTS AN ATTEMPT TO MATCH NEEDS. In the case of libraries, the needs of the public are matched with the needs of a local library. In general, the needs of the public with regard to the library can be categorized as professional, educational, and recreational. On the other hand, the needs of the library are to be viable, responsive, and cost-effective. The attempt to develop and execute a plan by which the needs of the individual library patron are met within the constraints of a particular library is called a marketing program. Exhibit One show a model for developing a marketing program.

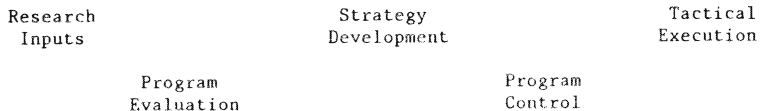


EXHIBIT ONE  
The Marketing Program

The first step in the development of any action plan for marketing involves a thorough analysis of the situation. At this level, the library marketer must collect and analyze the research inputs that will be required for the successful planning and implementation of the library marketing program. These inputs include information concerning the needs and preferences of library patrons and the resources available to the library.

Beginning the development of a marketing program with research helps the librarian to avoid a "guessing game" approach to his or her marketing activity. Corporate marketers have come to realize the need for research as evidenced by the fact that a majority of them do some type of product research other than Research and Development as well as sales and market research<sup>4</sup>. There are several reasons for this but the primary one appears to be that businesses have come to understand that there is a need to make factual decisions about their marketing plans rather than using some type of intuitive approach.

Librarians must do this as well. There are too many distracting elements in the community for any individual to have a clear understanding of more than just a part of it. Further, the library itself, even a relatively small one, often maintains an amazingly diverse collection that is so complex that no one has a comprehensive knowledge of it. Research is an organized attempt to identify what really exists in both the community as well as the library. This of course will lead in the subsequent steps of the marketing program to the establishment of realistic plans based upon accurate information about the particular situation of the library.

Often the largest problem for the neophyte researcher is knowing where to start the research<sup>5</sup>. Dependent upon whether the research is to be focused

upon a particular problem or whether it is general market research, two types of approaches may be used. These are shown in Exhibit Two.

Particular  
Problem

Informal  
Observation

Formulate  
Research  
Plan

General Research

Formal  
Observation

Data  
Analysis

#### EXHIBIT TWO

#### Types of Market Research Approaches

In this diagram, it is evident that there are differences in the ways in which market research is conducted. If a librarian has a specific type of research problem (e.g. why is the children's collection underutilized or why don't people come to the library at night), the process begins with informal observation of the general tendencies of the library patron or non-patron. Following this, a mechanism for measuring the behavior observed is developed and a formal observation is made in which a measurement instrument is used.

In the general research project (e.g. what is the age profile of the community or what is the impact of location on walk-in visitation), the informal observation is not necessary. The librarian may simply establish the way in which he or she will collect the data required and then proceed to its collection. Both of the research methods end with an analysis of the information obtained. The output of this activity will fuel the decision-making process when strategies are developed.

Information collection and analysis is the critical first step in the development of an effective marketing program. Librarians can utilize scientific research methodologies to assure that this first step is a solid one.

The second step in the development of a marketing program is to establish a marketing strategy for the library. Essentially, a marketing strategy is a statement of what it is that the library wants to do. This step is somewhat more involved than simply stating a goal or objective, however, because a strategy is predicated upon a realistic evaluation of the situation and a considered judgment about the resources that will be available to support the attempt to carry out the strategy.

Strategy development includes three important components: picking a target group or groups, establishing marketing goals relevant in the group or groups, and selecting a theme or image that is appropriate for the particular marketing project. Some examples of strategies that incorporate all three of these elements may be seen in the following listing:

1. Increase visitation per capita among small business professionals using the theme "The Public Library - A Friend To Small Business."
2. Increase awareness of library pre-school programs among mothers of young children using a "head-start" theme.
3. Increase library user rates among late teens looking for career opportunities with the theme "You Can Get There From The Library."

All of these examples contain a clear statement of the group of individuals to whom the particular marketing campaign will be geared. Not only that, there is a concise statement of the specific library goal that is to be accomplished (increase visitation, increase awareness, and increase user rates). The theme or image statement in each of the strategies, as we will see later when we speak about tactical execution, provides a mechanism for continuity.

All marketing strategies are not alike. Some are aggressive, some conservative. Some are comprehensive in nature and others are more limited in scope. Marketing strategies can be dichotomized categorically on two different variables: first, whether the library will serve the same patrons as it traditionally has or whether it will serve a new public, and second, whether the library utilizes the same resources or new material. Exhibit Three shows four types of strategies based upon these factors.

Library Markets

Library  
Resources

Same Markets

New Markets

Same  
Resources

Increased User Rates

Expanded Coverage

New  
Resources

Community Development

Library Diversification

EXHIBIT THREE  
TYPES OF LIBRARY  
MARKETING STRATEGIES

If a librarian is faced with a situation that involves limited resource availability which results in an extremely constrained acquisition program, he or she may want to consider strategies focused upon increasing user rates or those which concentrate upon increased coverage. In the former strategies, promotional methods and special programs will become the tactical actions employed while in the latter, direct mailings and personal visitations may be the primary methods used.

If funds are available to expand library holdings, two types of strategies are appropriate. Community development strategies concentrate the efforts of library marketing activities upon those individuals who are already served by the library but may not be aware of new materials. Library diversification is a strategy within which the library tries to draw new library patrons with the acquisition of new types of materials.

Developing a realistic plan that includes the specific actions that must be taken in order to accomplish stated library objectives is part of tactical execution, the third step in the marketing program. In this step the librarian must choose the appropriate promotional methods as well as consider those things which must be done within the walls of the library facility to support the theme or image statement developed in the library strategy.

It is important during this phase of the marketing program that the librarian keep in mind two critical factors. First, the librarian must recall that a particular group was selected as a target group. This group not only has a particular set of needs and wants with regard to library services and materials, but also will be affected by various promotion methods in a particular way. This means that the librarian must be able to select the



most effective marketing methods within a market segment as well as to determine the things that the group expects from the library in terms of materials and services.

The second thing that must be remembered during this step is that the theme of the marketing program must remain consistent throughout the campaign. This consistency is required in order to generate in the minds of the individuals in a given segment a clear and distinct image about the library. A fuzzy perception in the mind of a potential patron will almost surely inhibit action with regard to library usage. Repetitive reinforcement of the theme should lead to successful image portrayal for the library.

Selection of appropriate promotional procedures and techniques is an important part of tactical execution. Libraries have left the potential of active promotional efforts largely untapped. There are several understandable reasons for this. First, many promotional methods are expensive. It is often difficult to convince a governing board or civic group that limited financial resources are better spent on advertising of library services than on providing a new file catalog. Second, librarians generally have not been trained to use the techniques. Although promotion is not particularly difficult as applied to libraries, most librarians have had neither the opportunity nor the inclination to learn about it. Third, librarians feel that promotion will not work. For those who have never used promotion, it is easy to be skeptical about the effectiveness of its various techniques.

The first step in learning how to apply promotional methods is to understand what they are. Promotion means nothing more than to place one's self or one's products in the best possible light in the eye of the public.

In marketing, this definition is refined somewhat so that the public becomes the target market segment and the attempt to place oneself in the best possible light is more aggressive and directed.

Promotion methods are wide-ranging in the way in which they reach the target public. Some are immediate in their impact and others require more time for full effectiveness to be achieved. Some of the methods are more widely observed than others. Exhibit Four shows a number of promotion techniques that a librarian might select.

All promotion methods do some things well and at the same time have disadvantages that must be considered. Additionally, each type of promotion used varies with respect to the creativeness that can be expressed within it. It is important, therefore, to use the promotional method that is appropriate for the particular task for which it is chosen.

The fourth step in the marketing program, program control, is a conscientious effort to keep the marketing program "on-track." Once the objectives of the campaign are established, an appropriate strategy for accomplishing them is selected, and a blend of tactical methods chosen, program control becomes all-important. It is very easy, during the day-to-day operations of a library to forget all of the hard work and determined planning that went on prior to the implementation of the plan. Problems and pressing duties tend to weaken the resolve of a librarian to be outward-looking.

Promotion Method	Advantages	Disadvantages	Creative Features
Newspaper Ads	Coverage, Immediacy	Waste Circulation, Cost, Quality	Traditional Medium
Radio Ads	Immediacy, Personality	Must use often	Intimacy, Adaptability
Direct Mail	Controlled Audience	Cost, Problems in Production	Ability to explain, Special Programs
Sales Presentation	Controlled, Cooperative Audience	Timing for Librarian	Speeches, visitations, demonstrations, civic involvement
Contests	Attracts Segment	Coordination, Publicity, Costs	Particular audience, Creates awareness
Premiums (Give-Aways)	Attracts Segment	Publicity, Costs	Creates awareness Generates traffic
Newsletter	Controlled Audience	Costs, Editorial skill required	Public relations, informative, creates awareness, specific
Library Display	Patron Attraction	Requires librarian time	Highlight new material, support special theme

EXHIBIT FOUR  
Marketing Promotions

Sometimes it is easier to solve a spur-of-the-moment problem in public relations or in patron service with a thrown together solution rather than relying on the marketing decisions previously made.

In order to provide an example of how easily this might happen, let us consider the following example. The library has chosen to increase its influence in the business community by utilizing an in-house computer system as a support device for a computer familiarization program. The librarian has used newsletter contact along with a Chamber of Commerce presentation to promote a seminar-like workshop for business people. Then a local radio station offers "free air" to promote a "Libraries Are For Kids" theme in conjunction with a community project centered upon young children. How should the librarian handle the offer?

Obviously, the librarian must find some way to utilize the free publicity that the radio station is offering. It is not often that this type of windfall is available to the library. But, it is also important not to negate the work that has already been done in trying to attract business people to the library. The librarian must not now confuse the business people about the attempt of the library to reach out to them by permitting undue emphasis on children about which the business segment might become aware. The way to handle the problem is to schedule the air time for children in such a way as to prevent the business segment from hearing it. This is not intended to deceive the business community but rather to minimize the negative effect that children's specialization might have on the business program. The important thing here is that neither segment should be unduly influenced by the promotional effort intended for the other.

There are a number of things that can be designed into a marketing program that enhance the continuity of the marketing effort:

1. Assign a marketing manager
2. Get everyone to think marketing
3. Share ideas and experiences
4. Keep written records
5. Determine why things happen

Keeping the library marketing program "on track" and evaluating the effectiveness of activities during the progress of the program is the function called program control. All too often programs slip away from the original plan because library personnel find it easier or more convenient to perform other functions and assume other responsibilities. This usually spells out the beginnings of failure to achieve library marketing program goals and leaves library personnel with the belief that library marketing does not work.

Program evaluation, the fifth step of the marketing program, is very easily overlooked in all marketing applications. It is a step that takes precious time, requires critical thinking, and involves personal assessment. Program evaluation is the attempt to assess the success or failure of marketing activity in a formal way. This evaluation becomes important information for future campaigns.

Library managers often become so embroiled in day-to-day operating problems in other areas that taking the time to evaluate successes or failures plays second fiddle to other more pressing responsibilities. This represents a rather short-sighted view, however. The planning for the next marketing

campaign starts with the assessment of the last marketing campaign. It is only through on-going evaluation that librarians will become familiar with the marketing techniques that are effective in their particular location. The evaluation of whether or not goals of the marketing program are achieved and the reasons for success or failure become important research inputs for future marketing activities of the library.

Program evaluation is done at several levels of library marketing activity. These levels may be identified as follows:

1. Overall Marketing Effort
2. Annual Evaluation
3. Program Evaluation

The goals and objectives in each of the levels of marketing activity vary. Consequently, the way in which accomplishment of those goals is evaluated must vary as well.

There are several authors who suggest ways in which the marketing program can be evaluated<sup>6</sup>. These authors use measures like market share, market penetration, market efficiency, and market response in their program evaluation procedures. The important thing to remember is that the librarian should design an evaluation technique that accurately reflects the accomplishments of his or her specific situation. There should not be blind reliance upon standardized marketing measurement.

#### SUMMARY

This paper has had as its goal the familiarization of librarians with various marketing techniques and methods. To accomplish this, the author has utilized a framework involving the development of a marketing program. It must be recognized by everyone that all marketing programs are different

as are all marketing settings. The application of these methods in varying situations will provide varying results. In the long-run, however, these suggestions should provide the librarian with an initial vocabulary with which he or she may continue to develop marketing skills. For some it may be the initial contact with the marketing area. While it is not by any means definitive in nature nor comprehensive in scope, it should provide some indication of how marketing can be used in the library setting.

#### NOTES

- (1) Philip Kotler and Sidney J. Levy, "Broadening the Concept of Marketing," Journal of Marketing, Volume 33, Number 1, January, 1969, pp. 10-15.
- (2) Philip Kotler, "Strategies for Introducing Marketing into Nonprofit Organizations," Journal of Marketing, Volume 43, Number 1, January, 1979, pp. 37-44.
- (3) The following authors state that marketing techniques may be used in non-profit situations: E. Jerome McCarthy, Basic Marketing: A Managerial Approach, (Homewood, Illinois; Richard D. Irwin, Inc., 1981), 7th ed., p. 7; Joel R. Evans and Barry Berman, Marketing, (New York, New York; Macmillan Publishing Company, Inc., 1982), pp. 624-31; and Ben M. Enis, Marketing Principals, (Santa Monica, California; Goodyear Publishing Company, Inc., 1980), 3rd ed., p. 61.
- (4) Louis E. Boone and David L. Kurtz, Foundations of Marketing, (Hinsdale, Illinois; The Dryden Press, 1977) p. 55.
- (5) Frederick A. Russ and Charles A. Kirkpatrick, Marketing, (Boston; Massachusetts; Little, Brown and Company, 1982), p. 84.
- (6) David L. Lurtz and Louis E. Boone, Marketing, (Hinsdale, Illinois; The Dryden Press, 1981), p. 596.