

CHAPTER 1

Seven key concepts for marketing libraries

This brief chapter outlines seven key concepts for marketing libraries, which underpin all the more practical ideas and techniques that follow. Keeping these concepts in mind can help bridge the gap from where much library marketing is now, and where it needs to be for the industry to be able to flourish.

The seven concepts

1 Everyone is trying to get from A to B. We have to show them how we'll help get them there quickly and more successfully.

Everyone's on a journey to where they want to go – these days they don't have a lot of time to sit down to consider an offer from a marketer. They're running from A to B, head down. As a marketer you're going to find it difficult to stop them, turn them around to pay attention to your idea, listen to it and then understand what it means for them. Your best bet is to target messages at them which truly help them get to where they're already going and make it absolutely clear how the library helps them to do that. You cannot assume that users will understand what you are talking about and will immediately translate that into what it means for progressing their journey faster with it than without it. That's your job as a marketer, which of course means that you must truly understand the users and their journeys.

Terry Kendrick

To understand how to market libraries, it's essential to understand the mindset and circumstances of the people we're trying to market them to. This is true across all sectors. We all know that in today's age we're bombarded with information, images, messages, advertising, promotion: our daily lives are sound-tracked by the white noise of people or things trying to get our

attention. As a result we run with our heads down, as Terry Kendrick says in the quote above, just trying to get where we want to go, while ignoring the information overload.

We can't expect people to break off from their A to B journey to come and chat to us about whatever product it is we're selling. We live in an age of targeted advertising and hyper-personalization – people are less inclined to investigate something on the off chance that it's useful, because they're used to bespoke suggestions and information coming direct to them. Plus, they're really keen just to get to B.

For libraries, this means we have to run alongside these people, allowing them to continue their journey without slowing down, and make it absolutely explicit how we can help them do whatever it is they're already doing, but better. 'Better' might mean quicker, more efficiently, more comprehensively, more cheaply, or many other things – the onus is on us as library marketers to deduce what each person's 'better' constitutes, and quickly and successfully explain to them how the library can help. It's not enough to be just *another* way of accomplishing something – in order to respond to what Stephen Abram (2011a) describes as the 'asynchronous and asymmetrical threats' libraries face, we have to offer a *better* way of accomplishing something.

2 Market the service, not the product; market the benefits, not the features

Increasingly, libraries are moving towards marketing services rather than products – and thank goodness for that. Books are available from myriad sources; specialized help in finding the right one is not. Just marketing the 'warehouse full of books' side of libraries is to massively undersell what we do and how we do it, and is to fail to offer something more convincing than the alternatives to which we lose users every day.

Telling people about content puts the onus on them to think about how they can integrate that content into their lives; many people simply don't have time to analyse what we're offering in that way. We should be showing them explicitly how we can help them so they need no imagination to understand it – and that comes from marketing services. Law Librarian Sara Batts (2011) once said that the difference between community and collaboration is that community is and collaboration does. So to paraphrase Sara, content *is*, services *do*. 'Doing' is more useful to people than 'being', so

when you have a very short time in which to appeal to people with limited attention span, market to them what you can do.

Related to this, and perhaps even more critical, is marketing benefits, not features. I really can't stress this enough – every librarian with an interest in marketing will tell you the same thing, and I've heard it said umpteen times at conferences, but libraries are, for whatever reason, hugely focused on processes. The rest of the world is focused on results. When marketing a service we should concentrate on *what people aspire to*, not the tools which will get them there. A classic example is databases: we often say things like 'we subscribe to 30 databases which you can access via the library catalogue'. We market the features; what people want to know about is the benefits. As library consultant Mary Ellen Bates says (2011), the way to market databases is to say 'we provide you with information *Google cannot find*'. This, after all, is where their value to the user lies – this is why they need the library, so they don't have to pay to subscribe to these databases for themselves. They don't care about the how. They care about the result: the information they need, unavailable elsewhere.

Marketing benefits rather than features doesn't cost a dime. It doesn't take any skill or imagination. It's just the approach – the way promotional materials are worded – that needs to change. If you run a course called 'Developing Information Literacy' you might get a few attendees; if you run a course called 'Finding high-quality credible information online, quickly and easily' you'll get a lot more. The first title is the feature, the second the benefit.

3 Market what THEY value, but continue to do what WE value

Perhaps one of the reasons information professionals can be suspicious of marketing per se is the idea that it will lead to libraries which are so focused on all the new-fangled cafés, e-book readers and free Wi-Fi, that they lose sight of their core mission to deliver the printed word. However, in actuality, we as a library industry can continue to do what we value, but we can put our promotional efforts into marketing what users and potential users value. The latter does not have to negate or contradict the former.

The Special Libraries Association in the USA ran a very important investigation, the Alignment Project, in order to '... generate a sharper focus on the perceived value of the profession' (SLA, 2011). Key to the project was looking at the differences between how we as library professionals perceived the value of our services, and how those users and customers we served

perceived the value of those same services. A survey asked providers (us) and users (them) what they most valued about information roles, and the results were revealing. 'Providing competitive intelligence' for example, scored more highly among the users – 22% saw that as being most valuable, compared with only 18% of providers. 'Managing the physical library' on the other hand saw a huge discrepancy the other way: 28% of providers saw it as most valuable compared to just 8% of the users. This is insightful information and, as the SLA concluded, it 'supports the need to emphasize more value-driven attributes rather than functional attributes' – but for the purposes of this section the message is this: we should continue to manage the physical library because, clearly, that's fairly essential; but we should focus our promotional efforts on things like competitive intelligence, because that's what the users value. We don't look at the results and instantly decide to close the physical space we call the library; we just adjust how we market our services.

The marathon runner analogy

Here is an analogy which ties together these concepts. In long-distance running events you'll often see refreshment areas, usually consisting of tables filled with cups of water or juice, and people holding them out for the runners to grab as they go past.

At the moment, libraries are manning one of those tables, full of lots of really good juice. What we tend to do is shout out at the runners that we have juice, it's right here, and that it is full of vitamins, and that vitamins are good for you, so why not have one of our drinks? We're competing with the other refreshment tables, and hoping for the best.

Now let's look at where we *need* to be. To market successfully, in this analogy we need a tray of juice that we take out to the runners. We have to run with them (as they go from A to B), tell them we can refresh them (market our services), and emphasize that we can help them run faster and longer (emphasize the benefits rather than explaining all about the vitamins . . .).

4 Market personality

People are fundamental to the marketing process. People do the marketing and it is at people that the marketing is ultimately aimed. More than that, though, libraries should market *their own* people.

People and personality are what separates libraries from the other myriad

ways to find and obtain information these days. We literally add the value. This will become increasingly important as technology becomes more prevalent: the key thing about the new ways in which people access information is not the technology itself but the way we represent *our roles* as information professionals within the context of that technology. We can make sense of new technology for our users and help them integrate it into their daily lives; we know that our value lies in our expertise, but our approach to marketing seldom reflects that. We're still just promoting books and databases most of the time.

So, if we position ourselves as experts in new trends and technologies per se (rather than just, for example, gurus in a certain area such as geolocational apps), then when the technology goes mainstream, people will know to come to us for help and further information. It's not about saying 'Hey, the library is an expert in Foursquare!' – it's about saying 'The *librarians* know about new trends and technologies, come to us and we'll guide you through it!' and then when Foursquare (or anything else) goes mainstream, our users and customers already have us in mind as potential experts.

On the subject of personality, I would add that a personality trait that people generally find unattractive is insulting others to try and make oneself look good. Librarians have a tendency to insult Google as a means of promoting their own expertise or the value of libraries – for me, this is counterproductive and absolutely the wrong way to go about things. People switch off when you denigrate a tool that they use successfully every day, and as a result it's hard to win them round from the very start. People love Google. The 'librarian versus Google' war is not one we're ever likely to win, and it's one in which very few non-librarians are on our side. Even where our arguments are valid, Google is so powerful and all-pervasive that our views are very unlikely to stick in the public consciousness.

By all means *advise* people in the library on how Bing can be a better search engine in some scenarios. Go ahead and promote our search skills, which certainly trump those of an algorithm. Certainly flag up the fact that we have access to sources of information that Google does not. But market what we do well without resorting to abusing everyone's favourite search engine: if we have to mention Google in our promotional activities at all, it should be to market the fact that we can help people use it more successfully.

5 Never ever market something you can't deliver

It is absolutely essential to deliver on what you promise. Part of the marketing process is to tempt people to use your library's services, but marketing continues once they're through the door – and it extends to making sure that people get the service they expect from your promotion. Often during this book I'll be talking about the 'offer': the service or materials whose value to the user you are trying to articulate through marketing. When the marketing works and the user comes to claim the offer, that offer had better be there. A poorly delivered service that doesn't live up to the marketing claims will cause more harm than not having marketed it in the first place.

A promotional campaign should only ever be launched if there are resources in place to ensure that if the promotion works and people come or return to the library, they'll be so impressed they'll want to do so again.

6 Create and market different value propositions for different groups

We'll be talking about this in detail in the Segmentation section of Chapter 2 'Strategic Marketing', but it's worth flagging up here as an absolutely key concept of marketing libraries. One size no longer fits all.

We have expanded our offer from, essentially, just books, to all manner of other things – from children's activities, to cafés, to concerts – because of feedback from our customers. The important thing is to make sure we present different value propositions – different offers – for different groups of people. So we market the books to those who care most about the books, and we market the library as space to those who care about the library as space. Even the most product-oriented library, which still only really offers the printed word, can at least promote different variants of this to different groups of users and potential users.

7 Understand the cost curve, and how it applies to libraries

The term 'cost curve' hails from economics – it's a graph used to calculate the scale on which to produce an item or range of items in order to maximize profit. For libraries, of course, that original definition doesn't apply – instead, the 'cost curve' refers to the value your users get out of using a service you offer versus the cost of the effort they must put into doing so. The value must

exceed the cost, and the fact that it does so must be made explicitly clear by us marketers, in order for the user to want to engage.

This seems really obvious, but think about how often libraries find themselves offering services that fall on the wrong side of the curve. For instance: you can access this database (offering great value to the user who wants the information it contains) but you'll need to log-in and follow these complicated instructions (which costs so much time and hassle it outweighs the value). From the very basics (signing up for a library card at all) to the new-fangled (scanning a QR Code to access unique library content) we must always be aware of how what we're offering is perceived, in terms of not just its value but its 'cost' to the user. The world is so used to libraries being 'free' to the user in monetary terms that this has almost ceased to be a selling point. We must focus on other value, and other cost.

As we shall see in the next chapter, 'Strategic Marketing', libraries are facing competition from all sorts of angles, so we must assess how our offer stands up to this competition. What are the alternatives to the cost of using your library, and is the value better? Something as mundane as literally 'doing nothing' is competition for the library – clearly the value isn't up to much, but the cost is tiny or non-existent, so 'doing nothing' may fall on the right side of the cost curve for many potential users. We have to entice them with a *better* offer.

Anchoring these ideas in marketing theory

This book doesn't contain too much theory or 'marketing speak', because that's been covered well elsewhere and I don't want people to switch off and be prevented from engaging with the real issues. The whole point of the book is to inspire *action*. However, one concept that is worth mentioning is Booms and Bitner's Seven Ps marketing model, because it ties together all of the above, and most of what follows in the book.

You may have heard of 'the four Ps of Marketing' – this refers to Product, Price, Placement and Promotion. Booms and Bitner (1981) sought to expand these specifically for service industries (like ours), and added a further three Ps: Participants (by which they essentially mean people), Process and Physical Evidence. Let's look at each of these and see how they apply to libraries.

1 Product refers to what we offer our users: books, journals, activities,

education, advice, professional expertise, searching, competitive intelligence, somewhere safe to go after school – whatever it may be. Product-oriented organizations are characterized by the fact that they produce a product based on what they think is right for the customer. Market-oriented organizations, on the other hand, base their product on feedback from the customers in terms of their wants and needs. In these changing times, it's hard to survive if you're solely product-oriented, and generally speaking I think libraries are doing their best to morph from product- to market-orientation. As stated in Concept 6 above, part of successful marketing is offering the appropriate product to different groups or segments.

- 2 **Price** traditionally refers to what people pay for the product, but of course in most cases libraries are free to the user. This is great for them, but not always so great for the library: people value things they have to pay for more highly than those they don't, even if the two things are more or less the same. In essence, it is easy to take libraries for granted. For our industry, the price we are asking people to pay is the Opportunity Cost (Concept 7) – we need to deliver a service that is compelling enough for people to spend their valuable time with us, if not their money.
- 3 **Placement** (or just 'place') refers to where and how the product is delivered and promoted. In libraries' case this often means the internet – and often we don't shout loudly enough about the fact that it is indeed we, the libraries, who have placed the products there. When users access electronic resources online, they often have no idea that the library has paid thousands of pounds to subscribe to these on the users' behalf. If possible, brand electronic content or provide a gateway which explicitly states: 'Provided by the Library'.

Place also refers to the location of the library or the service (as opposed to the decor and layout of the library, which is covered in Physical Evidence, below). Clearly in most cases the whereabouts of the library building is quite literally set in stone, and not something a marketer can hope to influence. However, we can take the service *to* the user in a lot of cases – whether that is by using Skype to develop a fuller relationship with a client in the special libraries environment, or setting up an outpost of the university library in the student's union building (for which all you need is a laptop and a sign that says 'Library'). Remember Concept 1 above – everyone is on their path from A to B. The services we provide

need to be on that path, even if the library itself is not.

- 4 **Promotion** is the way in which we communicate what it is we do for our users and potential users. Once you get past Chapter 2, this book is *full* of promotion. Branding, visual identity, social media, the website, the way the books are displayed: it's all promotion. The best promotion is a two-way conversation rather than a one-way broadcast, which is partly why Web 2.0 tools are such a great opportunity for libraries.
- 5 **Participants** refers to the people, and addresses the main flaw in the original 'Four Ps' model. The people are both the users and the staff – customers often associate a product or service very strongly with the person who provided it. That is partly why Concept 4 is so important – marketing personality is essential.
- 6 **Process** refers to actually giving the service, and the way in which users experience it. Phoning the library up and being put on hold is a process with negative connotations; being able to return books at your local branch even if you took them out from the main branch is a process with positive connotations. Perhaps the most important message about process, however, as mentioned in Concepts 2 and 3 above, is that we care a LOT about it but users don't always need it described to them. They care about how well processes work, not what they involve at a library level. The reason this message features so heavily in this chapter is that marketing benefits rather than features is perhaps the single most effective change a library can make in its promotion, in terms of the time and expense of doing so (minimal) versus the impact it can have (huge).
- 7 **Physical Evidence** refers to the environment in which the product is delivered – in our case, the library building itself. This is covered in detail in Chapter 4 because it is so important in what we do. As Rafiq and Ahmed (1995) state, 'The physical environment itself (i.e. the buildings, decor, furnishings, layout, etc.) is instrumental in customers' assessment of the quality and level of service they can expect . . .'

For further reading on marketing theory, have a look at this chapter's associated web page: www.librarymarketingtoolkit.com/p/7-key-concepts.html. With the seven key concepts in mind, backed up by the theory of the Seven Ps, we'll begin to get more practical by looking at the strategic marketing cycle.