
Marketing the college library

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Strategic management, planning, marketing, and public relations will play essential parts in the future of libraries.

College libraries face dwindling funds, rising costs of materials, and staff shortages. They can improve their situation by promoting themselves with the same marketing and advertising techniques used by successful businesses. Through these techniques, college libraries can gain a larger portion of the college budget.

Libraries must include, as part of their public relations activities, effective marketing of their product. The college library, like a business, must compete for each dollar it receives. Libraries are often seen as a nice place to have on campus, but of little value to the money-making business of the college. Administrators may be reluctant to put money into something that will produce no revenue. An effective library marketing plan will ensure visibility and illustrate the library's value to the college. The library can then become a selling point for the college in promoting itself to potential students, contributors, and the community. Administrators may boast of library resources available at their college, but few understand just what is available and how these resources are valuable for research.

Successful people in the business world do not accept low sales or threats from the competition. They go after the business, whether it be by better marketing of their product or other means. Libraries must make potential users aware of their resources and aware that they are available. Community members within the area often do not know that they may use the library. College personnel

and students may not make full use of library resources due to a lack of knowledge of what is available. When knowledge of library resources is increased, library usage will increase. When the library and its resources are perceived as indispensable, any cut will be strongly protested by library users. An educated, informed public will not easily allow services and resources to be cut. The public will support what it sees as a necessary, vital resource.

Making college administrators aware of the needs of the consumers of library services and aware of standards for college libraries can result in increased budget allocations for the library. This goal should be part of an effective marketing plan.

In *Libraries in the 90s: What the Leaders Expect*, Donald E. Riggs and Gordon A. Sabine report that most of the library administrators they questioned felt that keeping everyone well informed was the best method to get their budgets approved. Mary Vasilakis suggested that librarians consider what value their services have to the organization as a whole. She says that librarians must be continuously selling their product. Vasilakis keeps her administrators continually informed, tells them what works well, and makes sure they know what is going on.¹

¹Donald E. Riggs and Gordon A. Sabine, *Libraries in the 90s: What the Leaders Expect* (Phoenix: Oryx Press, 1988), 50.

Teamwork is necessary to provide library services and market them effectively. Developing leadership abilities is extremely important to the library administrator. Administrators must allow their staffs to grow professionally and even to make mistakes—they are part of the learning process. Listening to staff and to those served by the library is another important leadership technique. Library administrators must establish credibility among college colleagues. Communication and trust are extremely important. Delegation is another necessary aspect of leadership. No administrator, regardless of how efficient that person may be, can accomplish the work of the library alone.

The library's public relations program must be put on a sustained, developing, professional basis and not an ad hoc one. Ann Heidbreder Eastman says that librarians must make a conscientious effort to find out exactly what would contribute to people's lives, their well-being, their needs, and then tell the outside world about it, where they could find it, and create interest to get the consumer into the library. Eastman believes that this ongoing type of program would create an atmosphere where budgets and fundraising activities would be supported (Riggs and Sabine, 136).

Elizabeth Martinez Smith states strongly that her reputation helps her get her budget approved. She gained the confidence of her administration, her staff and her community by being convincing in promoting the role of libraries. Smith assumed she would be successful. Smith argues that studies of self-fulfilling prophecies have something to say to

librarians: "If we aren't our best advocates, I don't know who else is going to do it for us" (Riggs and Sabine, 49). Librarians must give serious thought to this idea. If they do not believe in themselves and the services they provide, how are they to convince their administrators to believe in them?

Barbara B. Moran argues that those libraries which use strategic planning will fare better than those that wait passively to see what the future holds. With strategic planning, a library can develop "systematic and market-oriented plans to meet an uncertain future," identify the areas in which it has a competitive advantage, and concentrate its resources there.²

When future library services are being planned, it is necessary to consider the marketing and positioning of those services to ensure a favorable response by patrons. A library may have the best possible resources and staff but not provide the atmosphere or planning required to encourage patrons to use these services.

The college library faces many challenges, maintaining services and resources with reduced budgets and rising costs is only one. Effective marketing and promotion of our "product" will enable college libraries to obtain necessary funding. ■■

²Barbara B. Moran, "Strategic planning in higher education" *College & Research Libraries News* 46 (June 1985): 288-290.

Call for sci/tech abstracts

The Forum for Science and Technology Research Task Force, a committee of the ACRL Science and Technology section, requests abstracts of recent research or research in progress relevant to science and technology librarianship. The committee will select individuals to present reports of their research at the 1991 American Library Association annual conference in Atlanta.

The research should focus on timely, relevant, and significant aspects of science and technology librarianship. The proposal should not exceed one page, which will include the researcher's name, institution, phone number, and an abstract not to exceed 250 words. Participants will be chosen at the ALA Midwinter Conference in January 1991.

All proposals should be sent to: Susan Stewart, Life & Health/Physical Sciences Librarian, University of Nevada, Reno, NV 89557; (702) 784-6616; fax, (702) 784-1751.

Visiting Research Fellowships

Visiting Research Fellowships of from one to 3 and 6 to 12 months' duration will be available for tenure at the American Antiquarian Society during the period June 1, 1991, to May 31, 1992. All awards are for research and writing in American history and culture through the year 1876, in which field the Society holds preeminent collections offering broad research opportunities. The National Endowment for the Humanities-funded long-term awards are intended for scholars beyond the doctorate, including senior scholars. Among the short-term fellowship categories offered are several special ones that support scholars working in American literary studies, the history of the book in American culture, the American 18th century, and those at work on doctoral dissertations.

Applications may be made jointly for short-term fellowships at both AAS and the Newberry Library. The application deadline is January 15, 1991. For detailed information, contact: Director of Research and Publication, American Antiquarian Society, 185 Salisbury Street, Worcester, MA 01609-1634; (508) 752-5813.