Advocacy 101 for academic librarians

Tips to help your institution prosper

by Terry Kirchner with contributions from the ACRL Professional Enhancement Committee

A dvocacy is the act of pleading for or supporting a change in an existing system which will produce results that are permanent and will benefit future users of the system. An advocate is one who speaks or acts on behalf of another or in support of a cause."[1]

Public libraries have more actively promoted the need for advocacy programs than have academic and research libraries. In reality, however, all librarians must engage in ongoing advocacy to guarantee the long-term survival and prosperity of their individual institutions and the library profession as a whole.

Elsie Freeman Finch noted that any librarian who claims not to have the time to build support for his or her library was committing "political suicide."[2]

The good news is that all of us probably do some form of advocacy for our libraries and the library profession already. But the effectiveness of our advocacy efforts must be questioned.

As editor-in-chief of *Library Journal,* John N. Berry III challenged librarians to rethink their advocacy strategies: "The library advocacy movement has been very effective at enlisting advocates for libraries, from Bill Clinton to Bill Gates. It has failed miserably

to define and promote the crucial role of the librarian in the information future, either through benign neglect or conscious professional self-effacement."[3]

Having "non-librarian" allies who speak up for the importance of libraries is good, but it is not enough. To be successful, advocacy must be a full-time and consciously proactive behavior pattern in the library profession.

To grab our fair share of the financial resources and to establish and maintain credibility in the broader academic community, librarians must learn to effectively market and advertise library services.

Principles of advocacy

Like it or not, libraries are members of the highly competitive service industry. Megabookstores, online book dealers, and other Internet sites are just a few of the competitors that libraries must face everyday. To survive, we must learn how to play by the new rules of the information game.

Providing good service always has been and always will be important, but librarians must learn how to effectively promote systemic change within their operations and within the library profession to allow for the enhancement of service delivery.

About the authors

Terry Kirchner is associate chief of access at the New York Public Library, e-mail: tkirchner@nypl.org. He prepared this article with contributions from the other members of the ACRL Professional Enhancement Committee: Deborah Abston, Gregg T. Atkins, Patrick Dawson, Elinor Folder Foster, Kathryn Kjaer, Joan A. Reyes, Ellen Derey Safley, and Anita Schuneman

Remember to highlight that librarians do more than worry about whether or not books are properly shelved. Stress the role of librarians as providers of information, as instructors who encourage learning, and as global professionals who can quickly and efficiently access resources from around the world.

Elizabeth E. Bingham highlighted these principles of advocacy that capture the need for effective systemic change for enhanced service delivery:

- Know your case; document facts.
- Know the opposing case and its arguments and develop strategies.
- Operate from a sound base of support.
- Know your resources and allies.
- Intervene high enough to get the job done.
- Take a positive approach.
- Demonstrate to the system how it is interfering with or defeating its own goal.
- Use overt power only after using the first seven principles.
- When in power contest, don't pussyfoot.
- Use an advocacy effort to strengthen your group.
- Always be aware of vulnerability.
- Assess risks realistically; identify them; weigh them against gains.
- Don't play the devil's advocate.[4]

Although libraries and librarians are often not in the business of doing business, we should look to see what core practices could help ensure that libraries stay in business. Many of the suggestions provided in this article may sound like common sense to some and completely impractical to others; there are many diverse advocacy paths that librarians can follow.

The purpose of raising these suggestions is to help facilitate creative discussion on easy-to-implement, low-cost, and effective advocacy activities that academic and research li-

brarians can incorporate into their daily routines.

Establish a marketing plan

Marketing plans enable libraries to develop and maintain a core image while segmenting the library user base into narrow target groups. Services and products can then be directed to the target group individuals for whom they have the most relevance.[5,6]

To learn more about marketing plans, audit an undergraduate advertising or marketing course. Auditing a course serves several important roles simultaneously. Not only will you gain useful academic knowledge, but you will gain increased visibility in the academic community: faculty and students will associate with you in broader contexts than just as a librarian.

If you haven't the time or interest in auditing advertising or marketing courses, see if your library could sponsor research projects where students first develop and implement a marketing plan and then follow up with an advertising campaign for your library. Why pay an outside consultant for services that not only serve the educational goals of your academic institution, but could be done for free, as well?

Promote yourself and your library

Break the stereotype of the meek and timid librarian and capitalize on your strengths and knowledge. As a profession, we provide valuable information and services that enable others to enhance their lives, careers, and intellectual pursuits; so make sure that people don't forget about your role in their personal and professional advancement.[7]

Find ways to promote new library services and products: write and distribute a quarterly or biannual newsletter or get a guest spot on the campus or local radio station. Ask the campus or local newspaper to write a feature article about library staff with specific skills or interests. These articles could help attract new library users: students and faculty doing related research or community members involved in similar hobbies or activities.

When giving library orientations and leading training sessions, focus on information literacy and not just bibliographic instruction. Information literacy encompasses biblio-

graphic instruction and allows you to become an expert in relevant areas such as copyright, research misconduct and ethics, or Web document design. By becoming a known expert on campus you promote not only yourself, but also your library and the library profession.

Remember to highlight that librarians do more than worry about whether or not books are properly shelved. Stress the role of librarians as providers of information, as instructors who encourage learning, and as global professionals who can quickly and efficiently access resources from around the world.

In today's day and age, time is money; so alert your students and faculty about how using your services can help them make more effective use of their time.

Network
In addition to developing and maintaining cordial relationships with the departmental chairpersons and the college/university administrators, establish close ties with the departmental and administrative support staffs. Not only will you expand your network of friends, you will also have access to informal networks that can enable you to more easily get your message heard by the appropriate high-level faculty or administrator.

In addition, support staff can provide you with important feedback and information that will help you to more proactively and effectively develop plans and strategies that match the broader institutional and departmental agendas. Are there ways that you can incorporate "cutting-edge" technologies into your conversations and documents so that administrators and department chairs get excited about working with the library?

Expand your horizons
Earlier I mentioned that auditing a course was one way of gaining new knowledge and increasing your visibility on campus. Other professional activities that librarians could actively pursue include teaching courses that relate to your second master's degree or your Ph.D., serving as a guest lecturer on a library-related topic such as digital technologies, getting yourself appointed to campus-wide committees, or serving on the faculty senate.

"The quality of the library service is judged by the user's perception of an individual member of staff. For that individual user the particular member of staff who deals with his/her enquiry does not merely represent the library— he or she _is_ the library."[8]

On a more social level, attend campus sporting events, concerts, lectures, and other cultural events. If students, staff, faculty, and administrators see you supporting events that they sponsor or participate in, there is a better chance that they in turn will become allies for you and your library.

Promote a "user friendly" environment
Just as advocacy must become a central element in a library's everyday existence, so too must a proactive service philosophy. Your efforts at developing a marketing plan, promoting yourself and your library, networking, and expanding your horizons will not help you accomplish your overall goal of developing and maintaining meaningful, systemic change if you do not have any clientele to serve.

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Ensure that everyone working for the library understands how important his or her role is in upholding the service philosophy, and make sure that they are properly trained to fulfill their role!

Keep tabs on the changing needs of students, faculty, and staff by establishing library services review committees to keep feedback and communication channels open. This activity feeds directly into the marketing plan, which should be an ever-evolving document that reflects shifts in user demographics and needs.

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educational purposes are generally untested and unknown. While this article is limited to consideration of the use of DVD in a set top situation, that limitation may be unrealistic, particularly as more experience is gained with using it.

Libraries and media centers may find, at least until the middle or end of the next decade, that they have a variety of formats available, some of which may be computer-based (with VHS continuing to play an important role for many programs), while DVD will be used to provide interactivity, multiple views, and higher resolution for those programs that need those qualities. It may well be that the increased capabilities of technology could lead to a situation where there is no standard format. The definition of a video may also evolve from that of a linear program viewed through a player with very limited manipulative capabilities to a much broader definition embracing multimodal and multimedia concepts.

Given the rapid pace of technology, predicting the future of video in libraries is speculative at best. There has been nothing to indicate that, at least for the next five years or possibly longer, DVD will make the VHS format obsolete. Library and media professionals can continue to purchase materials in the VHS format without fear. In the long term, video will become a primarily digital medium; almost surely DVD in some form will play a part in this transition.

Notes

1. One of the primary reasons for developing DVD was to allow home video users to take advantage of the independent surround- and low-frequency effects [LFE] channels available in theatrical sound formats.

2. There are also "hybrid" disks that can be used in both computers and players as well as a projected DVD-audio format. A version will probably be developed that is fully compatible with the new high definition (HDTV) standard. The format is still evolving.

3. Additional technical information about DVD can be found at DVD Frequently Answered Questions at http://www.videodiscovery.com/vdyweb/dvd/dvdfaq.html.

4. That interactivity does not necessarily come easily, see Philip De Lancie and "Shadoan Reborn," *E Media Professional* 12 (January 1999): 51.

5. For some indication of the potential of DVD using a full-featured player see: Robert A. Starrett, "Pioneer DVD-V7200 Industrial DVD-Video Player," *E Media Professional* 12 (March 1999): 33. ■

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Stay involved

Remember that libraries do not exist in an isolated world, so follow important legislative, political, economic, and cultural movements to see how they might affect you and your library.

ALA and your state and local library associations can serve as important sources of information and assistance on advocacy issues. Don't hesitate to contact them. ALA's ALAWON serves as an excellent resource for legislative concerns and as a source for advocacy training.

To contact ALAWON, go to http://www.ala.org/washoff/alawon.

Advocacy is not just an action; it is a skill that people learn over time. Practice your advocacy techniques: learn what advocacy methods work best with your personality and within your organization. Make it your business to stay in business: promote yourself and your library!

Notes

1. Elizabeth E. Bingham, "Library Advocacy," *ILA Bulletin* 58 (fall 1995): 86.

2. Else Freeman Finch, "Archival Advocacy: Reflections on Myths and Realities," *Archival Issues* 20 (1995): 115–127.

3. John N. Berry, III, "It's Time to Advocate Librarians," *Library Journal* (Sept. 1, 1996): 106.

4. Bingham, "Library Advocacy," 86.

5. Jane L. Crocker, "Marketing, Public Relations and the Academic Library," *New Jersey Libraries* (summer 1994): 6–9.

6. Rae Helton and Stuart Esrock, S. "Positioning and Marketing Academic Libraries to Students," *Marketing Library Services: MLS* 12 (Apr./May 1998): 3–5.

7. Douglas M. Ferrier, "Social Contact in the Academy: An Indirect Route to Collegiality," *The Librarian in the University: Essays on Membership in the Academic Community* (Metuchen, NJ: Scarecrow Press, 1990), 147–152.

8. Elizabeth Esteve-Coll, "Marketing and the Academic Library," *Marketing Strategies for the Academic Library* (Cambridge, England: Library Association, Colleges of Further and Higher Education Group, 1985): 3. ■