2014

Marketing Academic Libraries: Marketing in Communication With Our Users

Matthew Ismail

Central Michigan University, ismailmd@cmich.edu

Follow this and additional works at: <https://docs.lib.purdue.edu/atg>

Part of the [Library and Information Science Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

Ismail, Matthew (2014) "Marketing Academic Libraries: Marketing in Communication With Our Users," *Against the Grain*: Vol. 26: Iss. 1, Article 36.

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.7771/2380-176X.6679>

This document has been made available through Purdue e-Pubs, a service of the Purdue University Libraries. Please contact epubs@purdue.edu for additional information.

to keep going. Then you shift from one to the other. It's very difficult and doesn't always go as you would like. Many customers are understanding, but others are less so. In the early days, prior to any of the kinds of systems we've been talking about, we would send sets of microfiche to libraries once a month. These would be read by libraries to find out what books were available at what price. It was a snapshot of our database. Later, some people weren't happy about getting rid of microfiche, and so we continued to mail it to a few libraries for a couple of years into the online era. But we had to change, and it wasn't always pretty during those transition periods. Most librarians understood the need, but not every librarian you interact with over the course of these transitions is a happy camper. Obviously the smoother something goes the better the conversations are. As long as libraries know we are working

Andrew K. Pace is Executive Director for Networked Library Services at OCLC, where he is directing projects to move library management and discovery services to the network level. He was formerly Head of Information Technology at **North Carolina State University Libraries**. Pace is a Past President of the **Library and Information Technology Association (LITA)**, a division of the **American Library Association**, and serves on the **NISO Information Standards Quarterly** editorial board. 🐼

hard to address any problems that arise, we have the room to do what we need to do.

And sometimes what we need to do, instead of the usual incremental changes, is to start again, with a system that's been entirely rewritten. With any system, past a certain point, incremental change isn't the best approach. You have too many grafts, too many workarounds. Having gone through this several times, I think that's always been the right decision in the end, although not everyone among the customers would necessarily have agreed at the outset.

SF: Any closing comments?

AP: This is an exciting time of cooperation between libraries, service providers, and dotcoms! The general ecosystem of library service providers and Web providers is changing rapidly and has been important in getting us out of the walled garden era of the early 1990s.

BN: To me, looking back, the whole period since the early 1990s has seemed like a sprint. There hasn't been a single day where I've been able to think, "OK, finally done." You are always moving, always weighing, always making choices, always trying to listen — and to find the right questions. 🐼

Marketing Academic Libraries — Marketing is Communication With Our Users

Column Editor: **Matthew Ismail** (Director of Collection Development, Central Michigan University, Park Library, 204B, Mount Pleasant, MI 48859; Phone: 989-774-2143) <ismailmd@cmich.edu>

What is marketing and how do we apply it to academic libraries?

If you're anything like me, these two questions don't exactly play to your strengths.

I say "if you're anything like me" because I suspect my background is pretty typical for academic librarians. BA and MA in Middle Eastern History. A couple more MAs dealing with European History. After grad school I've worked twenty years either as a reference or a collection development librarian. I published a book in 2011 called *Wallis Budge: Magic and Mummies in London and Cairo* concerning the legendary Victorian Egyptologist **Sir E. A. Wallis Budge**...

You get the picture. Lots of reading and writing in the humanities and social sciences. Lots of building collections and helping students and faculty with their research. No work experience outside the academic world. No marketing experience — like most librarians.

The idea for this column was suggested to me by **Katina Strauch** at the recent **Charleston Conference** because we both agreed that academic librarians can no longer assume that our users know what resources and services our libraries can offer them (besides study space!). Indeed, even as early as 2005 OCLC found that 90% of students reported starting their research with either Google (68%), Yahoo (15%), or MSN Search (5%). Only 2% of students said they began their research on the library Web-page (OCLC 2005). When I was in college in the early 1980s, the library was the default

source of information for coursework. The fact that students now mostly think of Google when they have information needs suggests that librarians have some work to do.

So, back to the basic question: What is marketing, anyway, and how does this differ from the activities of the *Mad Men* of advertising?

Marketing refers to the process of preparing your product for the marketplace. It involves understanding who your potential customers are and what they want to get from your product or service. Colors, logo, and other design elements help to align the image of your product with the interests of your target audience. It is marketing that defines your brand and attracts the market share you want.

Advertising is the process of making your product and service known to the marketplace. It is essentially spreading the word about what your company has to offer. While marketing is the way in which you convince potential buyers that you have the right product for them, advertising is how you communicate to them the existence of that product. (Lovering 2013)

So, marketing is a larger process than the advertisements you place and the pamphlets you distribute. Yet, even some business folks may not know a lot about marketing:

Let's face it, to the average business person, marketing equals promotion.

Marketing is what you say and how you say it when

you want to explain how awesome your product is and why people should buy it.

Marketing is an ad. Marketing is a brochure. Marketing is a press release. And more recently, Marketing is a Facebook page or a Twitter account. (Brenner 2012)

This confusion between marketing and promotion is pretty typical in libraries. Library brochure at Circulation Desk? Check. Library homepage with a news and announcements section? Check. Distribute bookmarks to freshmen at orientation? Check. Facebook page with announcements about the library's upcoming workshops and activities? Check. We've got marketing.

But marketing, as some experts know, is an investment quite beyond creating a few brochures. "There is so much stuff going on in a modern university library, and the patron audience changes so often, that personally I have wondered how anyone can claim success without a huge marketing effort," says **Donald Dyal**, Dean of Libraries at **Texas Tech University**. When **Dyal** arrived at **Texas Tech** in 2001, he told me in an email in December of 2013, he created a Department of Communications and Marketing. This department is staffed by a Director, an Assistant Director, a graphic designer, a photographer/videographer, and,

Marketing Academic Libraries from page 68

for a time, a 3D animator. It's this investment that has allowed **Texas Tech** to mount some impressive marketing campaigns which we'll examine in the next column.

Dyal and his staff at **Texas Tech** started their marketing campaign, not by asking which services they wanted to promote, but by studying the channels of campus communication. **Dyal's** team gathered data, for instance, which indicated that "the student newspaper was read regularly by a minority of students. The online newsletter of campus events was read even less," so these could not be their primary venues. The library's homepage might seem like a good marketing option, but according to **Dyal**, **Texas Tech** had data which indicated that "most frequent library users avoid the Web page and go directly to the area they need/desire. At best, marketing on a Web page is passive, and it only informs those few who are probably already in the know because they are already looking for new services."

So, **Dyal** and his staff began by gaining an understanding of the best way to communicate with students. But what do we say when we reach out to them? "Marketing is not about teaching [students] how to do research," says **Dyal**. "It is about making them aware of things they need to know, when they need to know them." This distinction is often difficult for librarians to accept — that marketing is not about instruction in how to access or use library resources, but rather a process of learning who our users are, finding the best channels to reach them, and then conveying to them content that could be helpful to them.

But there's another question: which medium is most useful for communicating with students today? As **Dyal** says, at **Texas Tech** they "observed that with very few exceptions, the best form of marketing is visual — not some notice tacked to a bulletin board or a flyer." And this is very much in line with current marketing practice. As one marketer says:

For a long while I thought about marketing as wordsmithing — putting an abstract idea into a sentence, picking just the right words. But then things started to change — less text please, more graphics — we'd rather see it than read it. This year more than ever, visual content is going mainstream. (Shoor 2012)

In a world of Pinterest and Instagram, Tumblr and Facebook, it is engaging graphics, not blocks of text or talking heads, that will allow us to communicate most effectively with our users.

With an emphasis on visual marketing, then, it makes sense that that about 70 percent of the **Texas Tech Libraries'** marketing is delivered online or digitally. What do they do?

- There are monitors throughout the Library displaying digital posters and videos
- They send HTML digital flyers via email to their 16 Personal Librarians who then share these with students and faculty as appropriate
- A rotator on the home page displays Library news
- Rotating wallpapers highlight services and events on the Library's 250 public computers
- The Library also has contacts across campus who manage digital monitors within their own departments, colleges, or buildings who agree to host their digital posters.

And of course, the Libraries utilize social media extensively.

Texas Tech's marketing efforts paid off with a 2013 **John Cotton Dana Library Public Relations Award**. In the next issue we will see some examples of what they did.

References

Brenner, Michael. 2012. "What is Marketing?" *Forbes.com*. 8 9. <http://www.forbes.com/sites/sap/2012/08/09/what-is-marketing/>.

Lovering, Nancy. 2013. *Houston Chronicle, Small Business*. 12 17. Accessed 12 17, 2013. <http://smallbusiness.chron.com/difference-between-marketing-advertising-25047.html>.

OCLC. 2005. "College Students' Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources." *Perceptions of Libraries*. 11 17. Accessed 12 18, 2013. http://www.oclc.org/content/dam/oclc/reports/pdfs/studentperceptions_part1.pdf.

Shoor, Iris. 2012. *Techcrunch*. 8 12. Accessed 12 13, 2013. <http://techcrunch.com/2012/08/12/visual-marketing-is-here-5-ways-you-can-use-it-to-sell-your-ideas/>. 🐘

Rumors from page 55

asking academic administrators to describe their **vision of the library of the 21st century**. BTW the theme of the **2014 Charleston Conference** is **The Importance of Being Earnest**. The Conference begins **November 5th** (Preconferences and Vendor Showcase) and the Main Conference runs through **November 8th**.

As is our wont, we are planning even more this year! First, a **data curation seminar**

Monday, November 3 and half day on Tuesday the 4th by the **School of Information and Library Science at UNC-Chapel Hill**. We are quite excited about this collaboration! Also, **don't plan to leave Charleston** too fast after the Conference because we are planning a luncheon-infused **Rump Session** on Saturday after the Conference (12-4?) to discuss big issues! More coming soon! In the meantime, let us know any thoughts/suggestions/whatever please! Watch for more information soon at <http://www.katina.info/conference/>.

continued on page 77

ALLEN
PRESS

BUYER'S GUIDE

TO SCIENTIFIC, MEDICAL,
AND SCHOLARLY JOURNALS

Your resource for current subscription rates

The Allen Press *Buyer's Guide to Scientific, Medical, and Scholarly Journals* is an online subscription catalogue of international scientific, medical, and scholarly journals representing societies and publishers. The *Buyer's Guide* contains:

Current subscription prices

Back issue information

Indexing and abstracting information

E-mail addresses and, if available, journal and society website addresses

visit <http://buyersguide.allenpress.com>

To advertise: 800/627-0326

allen★press