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# Making the Most of Library Collections, While Multitasking: A Review of Best Practices for Marketing and Promoting Library Collections

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As library users' demand for information continues to evolve, libraries must not only keep up with the demand, but stay relevant and interesting in the process. Some libraries may point a finger at **Google** and the Internet, but library professionals have to be realistic. Often what libraries fail to acknowledge is that in the 21st century they are not only competing for users attention, but they are often competing with multi-million dollar businesses. Businesses that most likely spend money, time and resources marketing and promoting their information to potential library users. Why shouldn't libraries expect to do the same? Or better yet, why would libraries believe that users would feel compelled to read or review a poorly marketed book or other library resource?



In 2013 article, *Marketing Libraries is like Marketing Mayonnaise* author **Ned Potter** made an excellent observation when it comes to marketing and libraries:

People will often run a small marketing campaign — perhaps some posters, some leaflets, some emails — and are disappointed when the return on investment isn't what they hoped. We told people all about our new service, so why didn't more of them show up? But think about how much it takes to make you, as a consumer, take any actual *action*. Think about last time marketing “worked” on you — was it a one-off promotion? Did you see an advert for a car, then get your coat on and go out and buy a car? Almost certainly not — most marketing works over a long period of time. (**Potter** 2013)

Now to be fair, academic libraries are not known to have endless funding and resources to market and promote library materials, in fact in a number of instances, the opposite is occurring and resources are dwindling. Even more unfortunate library professionals are having to do more more tasks with less people. However that does not mean libraries cannot take advantage of the resources and the people they still have available to them and make the most of their collections.

The aim of this article will answer two questions: What are the current trends for marketing library collections? How should libraries begin to market library collections? Though the idea of marketing may cause some librarians to have a mild panic attack or freeze in fear, no worries — it can be done!

Based on a review of literature published in the last five years, regarding the current trends or practices of marketing library collections, the literature typically falls into two categories marketing popular collections, such as leisure

reading collections (graphic novels, fictional series, contemporary non-fiction), gaming collections, and popular cinematic collections, or the marketing and promotion of curriculum or subject based materials.

## Trends for Popular Collections

With more and more academic libraries there is interest to acquire resources that not only support evolving and cutting-edge course curriculums, but also support the emotional and personal needs of library users.

**Displays** — Displays are often a simple and inexpensive way to highlight current collections. Library collection displays can take two forms, a physical display, with the use of a display case or specific library space or a digital display using either the library's website or digital display unit. Most libraries are familiar with traditional library displays, but if the library is hesitant to build a display, start with book jackets like the cover art of a graphic novel collection. If the library isn't into saving book jackets be sure to get high quality scans of the covers prior to disposing of them. By doing so, there is a visual catalog book jacket art while saving space at the same time. When the library is ready to create a display the covers can be resized and printed to fit the particular display case or area. Placement is key when creating a physical display include book jackets with interesting imagery, pops of color or is visually striking layouts. The same principles can be used when creating digital displays. If the library is lucky enough to have a digital display. Rather than using it to just promote campus and library events for activities, use it to highlight new books or library collections. On the display be sure to highlight cover art, the call number of the book and the location the book can be found. Display each title for at least ten seconds so that library users have time to see what is available.

**Pop-Up Libraries** — Pop-up libraries are fairly new trend and are based off of the concept of a pop-up. “A pop-up is established when businesses, governments, universities, community groups, individuals or brands temporarily activate places and spaces for promotion, trials or the sharing of resources. The key element for pop-ups is discovery. Ultimately, they help communities discover new ways to engage, interact and progress” (**Davis** et al. 2015). Though the 2015 article, *Exploring pop-up libraries in practice* primarily focuses on pop-up libraries in public spaces and public libraries, the best practices discussed in this article can easily be applied to academic libraries. The benefits of pop-up

libraries are varied and can be high impact at minimum or no cost to the library. These benefits include: increase awareness of library services and exposure to non-users, potential for increased literacy, potential for establishing and strengthening campus partnerships, promotion of a positive image and challenging stereotypes of the library and extending the life of older library collections (**Davis** et al. 2015).

For an academic institution, a pop-up library can be accomplished by gathering relevant subject materials such as new textbooks or subject based materials, and having a subject librarian go to the department creating a mobile display. If the librarian happens to come across users interested in checking out the materials, they can potentially complete checkouts on a mobile device or do manual checkouts and have the items entered into the system upon returning to the library. Keep in mind, some planning is necessary in order to make sure that the pop-up library is successful. Librarians should reach out to their departments in advance of completing the event, in order to identify specific dates and times that work best for the department but also allow for the greatest visibility.

The other benefit of pop-up libraries, is that it “is a simple and cost-effective way to lift the profile and enhance promotion of the library in the community. When pop-up libraries appear in unexpected spaces, it lets people see libraries in a different light. The unexpected nature plus the wow factor that can be achieved with creative design means the pop-up library is an effective way to reach non-traditional library users” (**Davis** et al. 2015).

**Social Media** — Social media is a cost-effective way to promoting library collections. It can be relatively easy to create a social media account to highlight specific library materials. The down side and often downfall for many academic libraries who pursue social media is that it can be time intensive and someone must be tech savvy enough to understand the ins-and-outs of the various social media platforms. However the following are examples where social media was effective at promoting a library collection. At the **University of Southern Indiana**, library staff use social media to promote reading the library's collection. Every Tuesday [they] post #booksyou didnt know we had, which features new books that may be interesting to students, faculty, and staff on [their] campus (**Clark, Hostetler, and Loehrlein** 2014).

## Trends Curriculum Based Materials

**Collection Development Policies** — When it comes to marketing library collections, revamping or revising collection

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development policies may not be what most librarians think of when they think of promotion, but actually this is a great way to foster and strengthen relationships with faculty. By including a collection development policy, in marketing efforts “not only does it raise the visibility of the library, promotes use of the library collection, and better serves library patrons, but it also sends a clear message to campus administrators and other relevant stakeholders regarding the enduring value and worth of the library. Libraries cannot assume this value is understood and accepted anymore; they must prove it” (Fought, Gahn, and Mills 2014). For instance, when reviewing collection development policies or reviewing collections as a whole, data is often an essential factor in decision-making. When speaking with administrators or potential stakeholders it is important that data is shared with them and more importantly that data presented in a narrative would be of interest or compelling to the potential stakeholder. Collection development policies should align themselves not just with the needs of the department but with the vision, mission and goals of their institution (Fought, Gahn, and Mills 2014). After realigning collection development policies be sure not to just keep these changes in house, make efforts to share the revised policies with campus administration as well as department stakeholders. As it was discussed, “it is critical for libraries to engage in marketing to justify the financial support they receive and defend budget requests alongside other academic units. When cuts in funding or positions are considered, the library that is understood, visible, and used by students and faculty stands in much better stead than one that is not. Libraries cannot assume that their worth is understood and accepted and therefore must demonstrate their value whenever the opportunity arises” (Fought, Gahn, and Mills 2014).

**eBooks** — With eBooks now becoming the norm, with increased use of e-readers and mobile devices many academic libraries are opting to purchase eBooks rather than print books. “E-books have a key role in the future of academic libraries, and approaches to the marketing and promotion of eBooks, and the associated services that academic libraries provide may offer insights into the approach being adopted by academic libraries to establish and promote their role in a digital age” (Vasileiou and Rowley 2011).

When promoting eBooks focus on using electronic methods to promote the use of the collection such as email blasts, posts on social media accounts, or announcements on the library website. Library users who utilize eBooks are typically going to be more tech-savvy users and more apt to use online methods to get information. Another less common way to promote eBooks is contact the library’s eBook vendor. Determine if it would be possible to set up a Webinar or live session on

how to use a particular eBook platform. Often vendors can cater a presentation to interested groups such as graduate students or faculty.

### **Implementing the Tools for Success: How to Market Library Collections**

Given these various approaches for marketing and promoting library collections what should library professionals be expected to do? And how can they do it most efficiently? The formula for effective and efficient marketing is simple: strategic planning + campus engagement + consistency.

**Strategic Planning** — Since most professionals function in a world where time is limited make sure that you make the most of your time when it comes to planning. Effective planning can make the physical labor of putting together the particular event, display or promotion, less daunting. Enlist the help of others, create a committee or small group to help. It can be other librarians or other staff members. If it is a team of one, enlist the help of student workers. Make sure you take the time to have a meeting. When meeting, make sure the meeting is purposeful, by the end of the meeting the following questions should be answered:

- 1) What is collection to be marketed?
- 2) What primary marketing event or trend will be used?
- 3) What steps will be taken to accomplish the particular marketing event or trend?
- 4) Who will be completing each step?

After answering these questions, the process of marketing the collection should be all the more easier. To handle the continued planning of the marketing event or trend, the committee or group should come up with deadlines and check-in points to stay on tasks. To cut back on face-to-face meeting some tasks can be completed or followed up via email.

**Campus Engagement** — So now that your library has taken the time to essentially create a marketing plan, what is the next step? Become engaged with the campus and department faculty and staff. Take some time to get out of the library. This can be as simple as stopping by a department, attending a departmental meeting or campus-wide event, or grabbing a cup of coffee with department faculty or staff. However the library professional interacts with them, communicate upcoming plans that may be tied to a collection, this could discussing a collection development policy, or the purchase of new library materials for collection, or determining if there would be a possibility of creating a partnership in marketing a collection.

When library professionals engage with department faculty and staff don’t think that just attending a campus-wide meeting will be enough, or that a cup of coffee is a time for gossip or small talk. With campus engagement it’s not just about visibility, the moments that you meet with departments should be strategic and focus on highlighting library collections. If the library professional is not used to engaging with others on that level be sure to have talking points prepared.

**Try, Try Again: The Power of Consistency** — Besides time being a challenging factor for why marketing library collections is unsuccessful the other challenge to marketing library collections is being consistent. As was mentioned earlier in the article many libraries assume because a few emails and posters are circulated library users will notice their collection. Unfortunately it will not be that easy. It will take time for marketing efforts to pay off. When assessing the effectiveness of the marketing approach of a library collection the library should give itself anywhere from one to six months to determine if an approach was successful, unlike a library workshop the library will have to review circulation statistics to determine the successfulness.

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