The Role of Marketing in Revitalizing Library Services in Rural Communities

By: Patricia D. Taylor

Introduction

When Stanley Campbell became the library director of Poseyville Carnegie Public Library in rural Indiana, the community library was a well-kept secret. Few in the community knew of its existence. Neighbors living on the same street as the library thought it was an abandoned building (Campbell, 2001). Despite being a lifetime resident of the county, Campbell says that until 1996, even he was not aware the library existed.

Built in 1905 by donations from Andrew Carnegie, the Poseyville Library had a rich history. But by the late 1990s, attendance had stagnated. The library was open 21 hours a week, and average attendance was about 75—in a good month. Attendance had stagnated for good reasons, too. Virtually no changes had been made to the original structure except "for some paint, a back door and steps[,] and an indoor toilet" (Campbell, 2001, p. 21).

Campbell had no line item in the budget for a publicity or advertising campaign.

The library board simply saw no need for public relations efforts. Campbell was told to "be content with sending an occasional press release" (Campbell, 2001, p. 21). Fortunately, Campbell disagreed with the board's strategy.

What Campbell did next in his library was brilliantly simple. He "brought in computer games for Saturday activities, started a chess club on Thursday evenings, and a Pokemon card-trading club on Tuesday evenings" (Campbell, 2001, p. 22). He added some popular video and audio materials to the collection. He took pictures of anything and everything going on in the library that might be of public interest. Additionally, he established good rapport with local journalists by asking their advice on good public relations stories. The community began to take notice.

As a result, Campbell watched the library blossom into a vivacious community center where people meet for movies, chess tournaments, children and young adult programming, and adult computer literacy classes. By 2000, attendance hovered at about 1,000 per month. The community's renewed interest in the library gave impetus to renovating the building and extending library hours to 40 per week.

Campbell made a point of identifying what the community valued in its library, and then he worked toward changing the community's perception of the library and its resources. The community no longer viewed the library as an abandoned building. They saw the library as a place where things were happening. As a result of that perceptual change, Campbell got the support he needed from the community and local government to move the library forward. "You must get noticed by those you serve before you are able to serve them. It is the only way many small libraries are going to hope for survival in the twenty-first century" (Campbell, 2001, p. 22).

Marketers say that perception is reality. Marketing has a significant impact on how the library is perceived by local government and the movers and shakers of our communities. Marketing raises community awareness of the value of library services and the need for continued support. Marketing can be done even on a shoestring budget. That's the beauty of marketing. In the huge repository of resources for librarians, marketing may be the most decisive agent in revitalizing and sustaining the rural public library.

So, one might ask, "What exactly is marketing if it is so important, and how should one go about it?" In this article, I will attempt to define marketing--particularly as it relates to library services—to examine the unique opportunities and challenges to implementing marketing strategies in the small or rural library setting, and to provide a guide to marketing resources and best practices for librarians working in a rural public library.

Definition of Marketing

What is marketing? Marketing is a process that creates value. The American Marketing Association (AMA) defines marketing as "an organizational function and set of processes for creating, communicating, and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders" (AMA, 2007, ¶ 1). In the library setting, the individuals or customers are both regular library patrons and those who are potential library users. "Stakeholders are composed of two groups, those within the library such as the staff, the library director, etc. Other stakeholders are the sponsoring body who provides the major source of funding such as government" (Wood, 1988, p. 20).

To illustrate the idea of the marketing process, let's use cooking as an analogy. Cooking is an umbrella term that might include activities such as planning the meal, shopping for the food, choosing the appropriate methods of food preparation (e.g. mix, fry, bake, poach, steam, etc.), and using the appropriate tools (e.g. pot, mixing bowl, saucepan, blender, etc.). How one prepares the food depends entirely on the type of food and the desired outcome. In the same way, marketing includes activities such as community analysis, market research, planning, promoting, and evaluating. The marketing program depends entirely on the desired outcome. Not unlike

good cooking, when marketing is done right, everyone walks away satisfied from the healthy exchange.

For marketing to be successful, the exchange of goods or services must satisfy both the needs of the individual and the needs of the organization and its stakeholders. Grunenwald (1984) describes what those needs are:

> Marketing represents an attempt to match needs. In the case of libraries, the needs of the public are matched with the needs of a local library. In general, the needs of the public with regard to the library can be categorized as professional, educational, and recreational. On the other hand, the needs of the library are to be viable, responsive, and cost-effective (p. 22).

Marketing involves defining a target audience, anticipating their needs, and planning specific strategies that will make them value particular library services, so that they will want to "consume" and support them. The "exchange" part of the marketing process consists of continued taxpayer support in exchange for the valued products or services.

> Marketing is also ongoing and dynamic because customer needs and library products change. Marketing orientation has shifted over the last several decades from being product centered to being more customer centered. This is a fundamental paradigm shift. Jill Stover is a writer for Web Junction, a resource-sharing Web site for librarians. Stover (2006) says this about today's new marketplace:
>
> Marketing is changing...a lot. It is no longer a means of pushing products on customers. Customers demand products and services customized to their exact needs and don't tolerate being "sold to." Progressive companies understand that customers are more informed and empowered than ever before and that effective marketing planning must consider customers at every stage in order to create useful products that fulfill their needs (¶ 3).

The customer is king. This marketing mantra is true not only in the way of good customer service, but also in the way customer feedback is used in the decision making process. Customer focus is about responding to customer's needs "in the most appropriate format and through the most convenient delivery mechanism" (Tenny, 1993, p.3). To gain the support of the communities we serve, libraries must actively solicit individual and community input as they develop services and programs.

Why Marketing? This Is a Library, not a Business

Over the past several decades, marketing principles have become an integral part of our daily lives, both personally and professionally. Most of us aren't aware of these influences when we buy a car, a soft drink, or a prescription medication. In the library profession, we are influenced by the marketing efforts of book vendors, Internet providers, and database conglomerations. Marketing principles have been effectively applied to a diverse set of situations including the nonprofit organization (Kotler & Andreason, 1987). "There is now extensive, international literature on library marketing" (Shontz, Parker, & Parker, 2004, p. 64).

For better or worse, librarians are part of the marketing continuum in the communities they serve. Simultaneously, we are both the ones being influenced by marketing and the ones who are in a position to influence. Stover says that "consciously or not, all librarians engage in marketing activities all the time.... if you are planning or implementing services, constructing Web pages, conducting needs assessments, promoting events[,] or interacting with patrons, you're marketing" (Stover, 2006, ¶ 1). It is reasonable to say that as librarians understand marketing concepts and use those techniques wisely, it will be to each respective organization's advantage, and the whole community will reap the reward.

The Four Ps of Marketing

The four Ps of customer-centered marketing are product, price, place and promotion (Wood, 1988). This is also called the marketing mix. The library's products include not only the books and materials that circulate but also information services, friendly professionals, comfort, and life-enhancing programs (Kansas State Library [KSL], 2002). The library offers access to information and also includes services such as children's programming, book clubs, reader's advisory, and reference services (Lang, 2002, ¶ 4).

The price is what it actually costs to bring the product or service to the customer. "There is simply no profit-oriented business that does not know exactly what costs are involved in producing a product; such information is critical in order to establish a price tag for each item" (Weingand, 1995b, ¶ 4). Pricing takes on a slightly different dynamic in a nonprofit organization such as a library because that information is rarely considered and money allocations are generally fixed. In the library marketing mix, price is what the community must pay to keep the library functioning at a particular level (Wood, 1998).

Place concerns where the product is offered. For libraries, place is obviously a building, but it also includes other points of access to library services including a bookmobile, the library's website, and accessibility for handicap patrons. "Placement can refer to internal organization and display of collections as well as the safety and comfort of users" (Dimick, 1995, ¶ 21).

Promotion is the aspect of marketing which is most familiar to librarians. Promoting refers to getting the target audience to notice what the library has to offer them. Newspaper advertisements, flyers, mail-outs, and radio and TV commercials are part of promotion. "The image that we project is also an issue to be considered" (Lang, 2002, ¶ 10) in our promotion efforts. Library staff should be friendly and sociable. "We need to be identifiable. We know that in a small and rural library there is not much chance of people not being able to identify us, but we can still use those things like name tags and logo clothing to designate us as the person to look to for assistance" (Lang, 2002, ¶ 10).

All marketing programs have the 4Ps in mind even if they are not explicitly stated. "At its core[,] marketing is about getting the right product or service to the right customers at the right place and the right price... rather than avoid marketing, librarians should embrace it as a means of better identifying and fulfilling patrons' needs" (Stover, 2006, ¶ 1).

The Marketing Process

Every member of the organization has a role in the marketing process, but a few key players must be committed to the planning process. These key people are usually the library board of trustees and the library manager. In some cases, the key person is a solo librarian who is already wearing many hats. The idea of adding something else to the list of responsibilities can be daunting, but need not be. Marketing does take time, but it is time well spent in getting a realistic picture of where you are and where you want to be. Market planning can be a real timesaver over the long haul.

Many excellent resources are available to library trustees and staff who are marketing neophytes. The Ohio Library Foundation (OLF) provides a self-paced Web tutorial that emphasizes the marketing process in public libraries. The six self-paced modules emphasize the marketing process in public libraries. Modules are enhanced with Ohio library photos, promotion examples, Web links, exercises, and quizzes. This self-paced marketing course is an excellent resource both in content and in cost. There is no travel time involved, the resource is free, and it's only a click away.

In current library literature, there are several ways to describe marketing and the marketing process. It can be a bit confusing at first, but in every marketing model there are similar ingredients. The following steps are based on the OLF (2006b) model:

1. The Marketing Audit—Who are you, what is your mission?
2. Marketing Research—Who are your customers and what do they want?
3. Create products and/or services that customers will value

4. Develop a plan of action (the marketing plan) with promotional strategies to market selected products to targeted users with appropriate methods
5. Keep on track by establishing measurable goals and evaluating how well you've done
6. Start over! Remember that marketing is ongoing and dynamic

Step One: The Marketing Audit

A marketing audit is a "systematic self-examination and assessment of the library's activities, including needs and capabilities, and the marketing mix—the 4Ps of product, price, place, and promotion" (Ohio Library Foundation, 2006a). The 4Ps "provide a useful framework for analyzing the effectiveness of the services of the library (Dimick, 1995, ¶ 1). A successful audit identifies areas of strength and, conversely, areas of weakness. One should begin this self-examination by looking at the library's mission statement. What is the library's self-defined purpose or role in the community? Who are you, and what is your mission?

The marketing audit has at least two components—an analysis of strengths and weaknesses (internal audit) and an assessment of the library's environment (external audit). The internal scan should include every service, every area of the collection, and every area of the library's facility. Other areas to evaluate are staff skills and motivation, budget, technology, and local support. The marketing audit also includes the 4Ps of marketing.

The external analysis focuses on the community or external environment in which the library operates. This part of the audit is sometimes referred to as a community analysis. The external analysis appraises community demographics, geography, economics, culture, technology, and/or social patterns (Weingand, 1995a). Additionally, the external analysis evaluates the surrounding political atmosphere of the community and identifies any local competition. The OLF's marketing tutorial has a helpful marketing audit template.

According to Wood (1988):

> Since no person or organization can excel at everything, it makes sense to take advantage of the organization's areas of strength. When efforts are concentrated on potential opportunities where exactly those strengths are called for, the organization has an excellent chance of achieving its purpose (p. 19).

The marketing audit helps libraries identify those strengths and fully utilize them.

Step Two: Marketing Research

The main purpose of marketing research is to know the customer and what they perceive to be valuable. "If librarians know what different people value—why they use the library—services can be devised to meet their needs and promotions designed that will get their attention" (Dimick, 1995, p. 9). "Marketing research specifies the information required to address these issues, designs the method for collecting information, manages and implements the data collection process, analyzes the results, and communicates the findings and their implications" (American Marketing Association, 2007, ¶ 2).

The researcher begins with a question or hypothesis, and then forms a method of collecting and analyzing data. It might be a question about which night of the week would be best to stay open late. Research methods can be formal or informal. Some methodologies focus on quantity and may utilize library record logs for obtaining and analyzing data about user habits. Other methodologies might focus on qualifying customer's preferences through the use of questionnaires or surveys.

There are two types of sources for research information. Secondary sources include "information that has already been collected by other organizations" (Weingand, 1995a, p. 303). Examples of secondary sources are the Census Bureau, the Local Chamber of Commerce, the National Center for Education Statistics, and the United States Department of Agriculture. Some examples of primary sources are customer surveys, focus groups, and interviews. Primary information (talking to or surveying users) is the preferred source of information for market research. Customer surveys are the most popular type of research method. Telephone surveys and web surveys are another variation of the customer survey. Sample library surveys can be found at the Montana State Library Services Standards Web site.

"Beginning the development of a marketing program with research helps the librarian to avoid a guessing game approach" (Grunenwald, 1984, p. 23). Corporate marketers rely heavily on market research because they understand that marketing decisions need to be based on factual and reliable information rather than just an intuitive approach.

Deciding who does the market research can be a challenge in the rural library. Some methodologies, such as focus groups, require training. Also, one has to understand how to set up a research study. There are books and Web sites available to learn how to do this, or you may have someone on staff with expertise in the area of marketing. In some cases you may want to hire someone. This research will be your factual basis for developing the products and services.

Step Three: Create Products and Services that Customers Will Value

The library must strive to know its community well so that the products and services offered continue to be relevant. The philosophy of true customer-centered marketing is that the "organization must be willing to adapt its offering to the customer and not vice versa" (Kotler & Andreason, 1987, p 56).

Erin Krake, a librarian from Roslyn Public Library in Washington state, further illustrates this idea. Krake's rural community, like many others, is experiencing an influx of new residents. This new population is very diverse. "On the one hand," says Krake, "there are wealthy people purchasing half million dollar lots...along with the urbane professionals who sell and market to them. On the other hand, there are blue-collar construction workers who...struggle to raise families. Many of them speak Spanish as their primary language" (Krake, 2006, p.26).

To find out what people in the community wanted, the Roslyn library distributed questionnaires to get feedback about services, hours of operation, and the renovation project they were undertaking. What Krake (2006) discovered was that people moving in from the larger metropolitan areas had certain expectations of the library. Among those expectations were "wireless Internet, a large collection of audio books on CD, interlibrary reciprocity, and an online catalog" (p.27). Some of those things were not available. The public also commented on good things they found at the library, but had not expected. "They found best sellers without waiting lists, lenient rules, like the absence of overdue fees, and highly personalized service" (p. 27). They built upon those qualities the public identified as valuable, but they also used the data to anticipate what the new people moving in wanted and planned accordingly.

A successful marketing program determines "what services customers want, how valuable those services are to customers, and what customers' priorities are. Every other part of marketing may be done correctly, but if you end up providing the wrong services, there is no reason to expect your customers will stay with you" (Tenny, 1993, p 17).

Kiosks where patrons could check out their own books would not make sense, for instance, in a library with a small collection due to an inadequate budget (Krake, 2006). Spending money on an eye-catching, informative Web site, when most of the customer base has no Internet access also illustrates this idea.

Step Four: The Marketing Plan

The attempt to "develop and execute a plan by which the needs of the individual library patron are met within the constraints of a particular library is called a marketing program" (Grunenwald, 1984, p.22). A successful marketing program does not start with selling the library to the community, collecting resources, programming, or even excellent customer service. It starts with evaluation and planning. The market plan requires library management to set priorities based on the marketing audit and research phase; thus, resources are directed towards those activities that really matter to the community.

The Kansas State Library (KSL) published *Marketing the Small Library*, which has helpful information about setting priorities and planning. All planning consists of these four basic questions: where are we now, where do we want to go, how do we get there, and how will we evaluate our success? (KSL, 2002, p. 4).

A realistic market plan includes the specific actions that will be taken in order to accomplish the stated objectives. The plan should include promotional strategies to market selected products to targeted users with appropriate methods. The marketing plan will emphasize a library's priorities, but it may also reveal what is not a priority:

> Small public libraries certainly choose not to be research facilities but even something so obvious should be given some thought. How is the library staff going to serve community residents who are pursuing research on specific topics? If the library has an active and visible interlibrary loan program and the library staff have good electronic searching skills, then the library is probably offering a reasonable level of service for its size. If not, these areas need to be strengthened (KSL, 2002, p. 8).

"Marketing strategies can be dichotomized categorically on two different variables," says Grunenwald (1984). "First, whether the library will serve the same patrons as it traditionally has or whether it will serve a new public, and second[,] whether the library utilizes the same resources or new material" (p. 26). Sometimes this means the library should look for new roles—not necessarily additional ones (Vavrek, 2006).

Step Five: Keep the Marketing Program on Track

By establishing measurable goals and objectives, a marketing program stays on track. Library staff should be constantly reevaluating programs to make choices about whether to keep a service, improve a service, offer a new service, or eliminate a service altogether. There may be good reasons to eliminate a program, but library staff should be able to say why it was eliminated based on some objective measurement (KSL, 2002, p. 21). The

reason might be that the service is not needed badly enough to justify the costs or that the service is outdated and should no longer be a priority (KSL, 2002, p. 21). Sometimes a service just needs tweaking to find a better way to make it accessible to patrons or to make the public aware of what's offered (Shontz, Parker, & Parker, 2004).

Marketing is a good management tool, too. Without a clear marketing plan, library managers can be swept away by the demand and urgency of immediate situations. "The rationale for incorporating formal planning into the marketing process lies in the need for making decisions within an organized frame that has been developed logically over a period of time with input from stakeholders...In addition to being a powerful managerial tool in the event of impending crisis, this blending of planning and other managerial functions can be a strong deterrent to the evolution of a crisis. When advance thought and analysis is routine, problems are less likely to grow to crisis proportions" (Weingand, 1995a, p. 297-298).

Step Six: Start Over

The marketing program must be embedded in the organization's way of doing things (Tenny et al., 1993). The marketing process is not necessarily linear. The planning process has to be flexible enough "to recognize and take advantage of the many opportunities for partnerships and synchronicity that exist, even in a small town" (Krake, 2006, p. 27). Marketing is the underlying compass that defines who we are and why we do what we do.

The marketing process compliments core values of the librarian profession. For me, the realization of these parallels between marketing the marketing process and Ranganathan's Laws of Library Science was a significant moment. Siess (2003) took the familiar laws and substituted the word library *resources* for *books* and *customer* for *reader*:

Library Resources Are For Use

Every Customer His or Her Library Resources

Every Library Resource Its Customer

Save The Time Of The Customer

A Library Is A Growing Organism

Now you have the "beginnings of a basic library marketing plan" (p. 35).

Unique Opportunities and Challenges

Small libraries may not have the financial and human resources of a major urban library, but they do have some marketing advantages. The library serves various segments of the community. One advantage of marketing in a rural library is that the community is smaller and, in most cases, the physical dynamics are easier to analyze. The resident librarian who actively participates in the community will meet other residents , thus building relationships, which comes more naturally in a small community. Area leaders know each other and see each other regularly at local events. If the library director attends local meetings and organization functions, others will come to perceive the director as a community leader. Daily business is conducted more informally in small towns, so getting an audience with a local official, businessperson, or journalist might be easier (KSL, 2002).

Obstacles to marketing in the rural library include lack of time, too few staff, and lack of knowledge or training in marketing techniques. The other disadvantage is financial limitations. Most public libraries do not have a line item budget for marketing or public relations. "To redirect slender funds and limited time to marketing is very hard to do. It takes time and training to develop the longer view that knowing the community very well leads to visibly better service and effective marketing of excellent library services leads to better library support" (KSL, 2002, p. 3).

Not all marketing strategies need to cost a lot of money. Sometimes minor changes can give the library higher visibility and appeal. One such example is the Ness City Public Library in rural Kansas. Staff:

> rearranged the main lobby by moving the circulation desk back and creating an open area where copy machines, catalog stations[,] and Internet stations could be easily seen. They added art displays, shelves[,] and knickknacks to add character. The community had a powerful reaction to a nearly cost-free rearrangement (KSL, 2002, p. 26).

There are many excellent resources for learning how to use the marketing process in a library setting, but I discovered that these resources tended to be written with larger libraries in mind. One of the biggest obstacles to marking is the "disadvantage of an underdeveloped field" (KSL, 2002, p. 2). Most rural librarians do not have special training in librarianship, much less marketing, and very little is written on marketing that specifically addresses rural libraries.

Research indicates that marketing is a concept still misunderstood among librarians. Marketing misperceptions are due in part to the lack of training most library managers have in the role of marketing. In a 2004 survey of New Jersey librarians' attitudes about marketing, Shontz reported that the great majority of respondents (95.3%) had no formal training in

marketing. Librarians who had some formal training in business tended to have a more favorable attitude towards marketing than others (Shontz, Parker, & Parker, 2004, p. 74).

One misperception is that marketing is tantamount to public relations or promotion of the library. Marketing is more than just putting ads in the newspaper. A distinction needs to be made between marketing and public relations. Public relations involves making the library and its programs and services visible to the community through various media, but public relations and advertisement are only a part of the whole marketing program.

Many librarians equate marketing with selling or with advertising. "Marketing is one of those business terms that seem[s] far removed from our everyday work. We don't manufacture widgets[,] and we aren't pushing our wares to make a profit" (Stover, 2006, ¶ 1). This myopic view equates marketing with "selling or promoting the library, not realizing that library marketing refers to a total organizational effort to attract and serve library users" (Shontz, Parker, & Parker, 2004, p. 66).

Best Practices for the Small/Rural Public Library

"There is no single technique that will work equally well in all library contexts," says Shontz. "For example, an informative Web page has become an essential marketing tool for many libraries. However, a Web page may have little value for a library in a low-income community where few patrons have Internet access (Shontz, Parker, & Parker, 2004, p. 78).

"All marketing strategies are not alike. Some are aggressive, some conservative. Some are comprehensive in nature and others are more limited in scope" (Grunewald, 1984, p. 26). Because no two communities are alike, each library will have a unique marketing mix; therefore, one must discover what marketing strategies or tools work best for that particular community. But that's not to say that there are no successful marketing models for rural libraries.

It's important to remember than many rural libraries have a single employee—the solo librarian. For marketing to be practical it must also be simple. Some of the best strategies are very simple, almost common sense.

The Visible Librarian and the Importance of Building Influence

Librarians do not have to be extroverted or charismatic to be successful at building influence. A wide variety of personal styles and personality types have contributed and been successful with these principles (KSL, 2002, p.10). The key to building influence is personal contact. The librarian needs to meet people in the community face to face, both formally and informally.

That means getting away from the library facility to go out to the community.

Getting out of the library can be a challenge for some librarians, especially in a small library. If you are the solo librarian, then who will man the desk while you are away? The library board needs to understand how important it is for the librarian to be out in the community building influence. They might be willing to make provision for a volunteer or a paid substitute to meet this need (KSL, 2002).

Another key to building influence "lies in your ability to shape the perceptions of others," says Hartzell (as cited in KSL, 2004, p. 19). Community leaders often do not see the library as being vitally involved in economic development, but this perception is easy to change. If the library representative persistently attends community meetings, even as an observer, his or her presence will help change that perception. "The librarian who functions as a community leader is likely to be perceived as one" (KSL, 2002, p.14). The public library has to participate and support economic development. The library's role in supporting the economic development of the community will give it an edge when competing for limited funding (Vavrek, 2006).

Marketing to the Target Audience

"No library can coast on the assumption that its services are vital to its city or institutions. Libraries are vital only if the community perceives them as vital" (Stuhlman, 2003, p.10). Marketing involves defining target groups, which may be current library users or a group of non-users. However, too many librarians work hard "to develop programs and services but neglect the work it would take to make the target audience aware of the value of these programs and services" (KSL, 2002, p.19).

Vavrek's 1995 study of library users indicated that "about half of the population of a typical rural community, utilizes the public library in some fashion" (¶ 13). Non-library users were "not familiar with any of the library's services with the exception of books, magazines, and newspapers. Perhaps it is not surprising that half of the American public does not use the public library because of a perceived lack of time and that there is no need" (Vavrek, 1995, ¶ 15). Rural libraries must make a commitment to reach out in their communities. Sometimes that commitment manifests itself in very creative thinking. Whitman County Library in Washington state marketed audio books to farmers who spend long days plowing, harvesting, and riding around in grain trucks (Kappus, 2006).

While library outreach to the nonuser is critical, libraries exist because of regular customers. Most companies today have realized the importance of customer loyalty. Whereas traditional marketing is about getting new customers, relationship marketing has a duel purpose—getting and keeping customers. The goal is developing more efficient ways to respond to customers (Besant & Sharp, 2000). Relationship marketing is "a mutual interest between company and customer...it is the demonstration of a deep and abiding regard for the customer and this is displayed in the product and services sold" (Besant & Sharp, 2000, p. 18).

Carefully cultivated relationships with regular users and nonusers to whom the library has made clear the vital role it plays in the community are key to meeting the library's long-term and short-term needs (Besant & Sharp, 2000; KSL, 2002; Holt, 1995).

Marketing in the Political Environment

One of the weaknesses in our traditional efforts to market library services is "failure to establish a need or even the perception of need for library products in the minds of those who control political processes" (Hamon, 1995, ¶ 10). One should never assume "that local officials understand what the public library is doing. Many are not library users and they may have outdated perceptions of library services (KSL, 2002, p. 11).

According to Hamon (1995), understanding the perception of the audience—in this case the governing authorities—is essential to advocacy. Hamon explains that every society is made up of many different segments or groups of people and these groups are divided by increasingly specialized languages. We need to put ourselves in the other's shoes and speak in terms others will understand.

To maneuver in the political environment, the library must learn to speak in terms that our audience understands. The means to overcome the "language barrier" that often exists in the political realm is to translate library services (the product) into well-defined terms and then show how that product impacts their lives. "In short, rather than trying to convince those who control resources in the political process to change their own world views to encompass our products, we must instead try to demonstrate how our products will benefit or improve the worlds those decision makers already understand" (Hamon, 1995, ¶ 23).

Our arguments for funding need to emphasize the economical and/or educational reasons why library services are valuable. Using a library's summer reading program as an example, Hamon (1995) illustrates this point:

> Many small rural libraries have effective publicity connected with their summer reading program and most communities consider it a pleasant service to have available for children. It is often sufficiently colorful and photogenic to attract the local media. This is good public relations. Marketing the critical importance of this program would include finding ways to make more serious points: The development of language skills is critically important to the development of young children. If they are frequently involved with reading and verbal exchanges and encouraged to express feelings, imagination and ideas, they will develop the language skills they will need when they start school (¶ 10).

Whether the target audience consists of rural county board members, city officials, or corporate vice presidents, the process is much the same. It is necessary to become familiar with current and longstanding concerns in the audience's area of expertise and to learn how to express within that culture (Hamon, 1995). "Librarians can learn about officials and what they care about by attending meetings of local government. These meetings are open to the public and they are an opportunity to gather very valuable information" (p. 11).

Marketing to Community Business Leaders

Support from community business leaders is essential to making the library indispensable. Block (2001) says that libraries are virtually invisible to community movers and shakers. Our error is in waiting for them to come to us. "If we want the influential people in our service areas to regard us as full partners in community building, we need to know their information needs before they do and get the resources into their hands that will facilitate their decision-making before they realize they need it" (Block, 2001, p. 48).

Publicize the types of information available to local agencies. Many are not aware of the wealth of information available through the library and its connection to other county, state, and national resources (Heasley, 1992). Building these relationships and networks is time consuming, and librarians do have limits to their time and financial resources, but if we don't do some marketing we will continue to be invisible. We have to put our marketing time into reaching those in our communities who make things happen (Block, 2001).

Customer Service

Good customer service is a tenet of marketing and librarianship. However, to gain the support of the communities we serve, libraries must go beyond excellent customer service. "Librarians have a tendency to think that the community will reward excellent library service. The truth is that excellence in library service is only half of the equation for a successful library. The library must be perceived by the community as being essential to the quality of life in the community (KSL, 2002, p.19).

Consumers have come to expect customized services. In the same way a business wants to keep its customers, libraries should strive to keep their customers—the patrons pay the bills through taxes or other types of support (Stuhlman, 2003). "With advanced permission, libraries large and small can notify regular patrons about forthcoming publications, can place automatic reserves for regular customers, prepare a specialized index of magazine articles from which business users can electronically order full text, and mail invitations to segments of the citizenry who are most likely to want to attend special programs" (Holt, 1995, p. 209).

Advertising and Promotion

Does your community know "that librarians continue to be an outstanding source of information in a changing world?" (OLF, 2006c). Rural libraries tend not to spend much time marketing or advertising their diverse services. Vavrek (1995) notes that this may be due in some part to the community's lack of mass communications (such as radio, newspaper, etc.). Other means of advertising in rural communities include local newsletters, brochures, and mailers that are distributed in grocery stores, churches, etc.

The Kansas State Library (2002) recommends the librarian ask these questions before advertising: who needs to know about this, why will they care about it, and what is the best way to tell them about it (p.23). With those questions in mind, the rural librarian determines what means are used to promote the product, program, or service. Some methods may be more traditional (e.g., local media or self-publishing); one might also write regular columns in the local newspaper highlighting the value of library services. Make services visible to community, speak at events, or network with others in the community focused on the same target group. Other successful promotion tools used by rural librarians include direct mail, e-mail, ad campaigns, school presentations, and in-library displays. Have you ever had a young parent come in to borrow a book and discover the brochure about toddler programming? Use teachable moments to introduce customers to other library services they might enjoy.

Advocacy

Around the country, many rural public libraries are an endangered species. The reader will not find libraries named on the World Conservation Union's Red List for endangered species, but in a similar way "libraries usually don't attract attention until they are in trouble" (Campbell, 2001). One recent example comes from Jackson County, Oregon, where 15 rural public libraries were forced to close due to a loss of funding (May, 2007). Like the spotted owl of the Pacific Northwest, libraries in Jackson County became a threatened species when funding priorities changed on Capitol Hill. Library closings of this magnitude do not occur everyday, but the incident should remind us that library services in any community should not be taken for granted. One should never assume that others understand what the library does or what it takes to do it. Advocacy is about persuading funders and other decision-makers to give you the support you need.

Community Fundraising as a Marketing Tool

As librarians, we must realize that the libraries where we work are really not "our" libraries. "They belong to the communities that built them and support them, and in the end they will be the libraries that those communities want them to be" (Hanks, 1992, p. 69). One way to foster the idea of community ownership is to use fundraising as a marketing tool:

> Community fundraising as a marketing tool is slightly different from community fundraising that is intended to raise a large amount of money for a major project.... In this kind of fundraising, the people are asked to give something that closely matches their own interests. They are asked to give at a modest level that does not cause them discomfort...financial gain is not the only agenda. During this process, community residents are learning about the library and learning how it can connect with their own lives (KSL, 2002, p.55).

Community fundraising may take the form of a memorial fund program in which the public can select from a variety of items to donate to the library in memory of a loved one; organizations or individuals giving materials on causes they care about or equipment related to their own mission statements or target audiences (KSL, 2002, p. 55); or individuals giving the best books or videos representing their personal interest (e.g., a hobby, local history, or a social cause they support).

Sometimes the simplest ideas are the most effective. A friends group in rural Humboldt County, California, demonstrated how simple ideas can be effective fundraisers:

> It all started in June 1997 after dwindling revenues again forced the Humboldt County Board of Supervisors to reduce the county library budget. In a letter to our 600 members in the Friends newsletter that month, county librarian Judy Klapproth stated, "If every one of the ... library card holders gave us $5.00, we could avoid any cuts for this year." This statement rang a bell with the Friends' Board of Directors, which quickly decided to use it as the basis of a fund-raising campaign. Our "Hi $5" slogan was the brainchild of one of the Friends, a retired professor of business at Humboldt State University. By early July, a campaign committee of board members and other Friends had been formed. A campaign logo was designed and donation forms were created (Hillman & Stein, 1998, ¶ 3).

The fundraisers generated a lot of interest from the media. The effort raised almost $45,000 for the library system between June 1997 and July 1998.

Point-of-Sale Promotions

Point-of-Sale promotions are a way for small libraries to highlight parts of their collection or a program with displays strategically placed near a service point (e.g., circulation or reference desk). Think of all those impulse buys we make in the grocery store because we saw the item while we were waiting to check out. We could say that POS displays encourage impulse borrowing. POS promotions can include book display, information sheets, or bibliographies on current topics. This is a way to point out parts of our collection that patrons had never realized existed.

Puss-in-Boots Formula for Success

Puss-in-Boots is a classic children's tale about how a poor miller's son with nothing to his name but a lovable cat is transformed into a nobleman through the cat's ability to influence the way others perceive his master. Mary Haney, director of the Hennessey Public Library in Oklahoma, loves this children's classic. She "uses it to describe the transformation of her library from a struggling and stagnant throwback into the vibrant and growing community service organization it is today" (Anderson, 2004, ¶5). Haney's story is similar to Stanley Campbell's story in rural Indiana. It is a story that can be replicated. "People begin to believe that they have a special library and then they make it special because they believe it's special" (Anderson, 2004). Perception is reality.

Just as the word "revitalize" means to impart new life, a well-thought-out marketing program can breathe life into a rural public library and the community it serves. Marketing has a significant impact on how the library is perceived by local movers and shakers, and raises community awareness of the value of library services and the need for continued support. Through marketing we let the community know that despite changes in our lives,

librarians remain excellent provides of information services. Marketing is more than just another proverbial bandwagon. Marketing is not a frivolous extra, but essential for survival (Tenny et al., 1993. p. 8). For many rural public libraries, developing a marketing program could mean survival of the species. Application of marketing principles is essential to revitalizing and sustaining the rural public library.

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