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Chapter 1: Essential Marketing Tools

This first chapter covers a list of tools which are essential for marketing almost all libraries. Later chapters deal with more specialist issues and areas, and expand upon some of the themes covered here, but the idea of this section of the book is to cover the fundamental tools and techniques that every library needs in its marketing toolkit.

Case study contributions are of a particularly 'how-to' bent in this chapter. David Lee King gives seven top tips for the library website, Aaron Tay details the importance of a library presence on mobile devices, and Rebecca Jones gives advice on getting feedback from users.

The Library website

Despite the emergence of web 2.0 applications and social media activities (which we shall get onto later) the library's main website is still an absolutely essential marketing tool for several reasons. Most obviously, library website use is up exponentially for most libraries in the last few years. Patrons and potential patrons will be Googling your library, so what they find online will make a huge difference as to whether they then visit your premises in person. There is information Search Engine Optimisation in Chapter 8 'Marketing on a budget? If only...'.

Physical footfall is simply no longer fit for purpose as a measure of a library's success, because so much can be done online – every book renewal or reservation made using the internet is a visit to the library building saved. Often the media – and perhaps those holding the purse-strings for libraries – will take a reduction in footfall as proof that a library is no longer being used as much, making it a soft target for cuts. It's vital that in marketing libraries, to both internal and external stakeholders, that we emphasise the compound

number of visits – physical and online combined. The Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy conducted their own survey (CIPFA, 2010) about library use in the UK during the preceding five years. Physical attendance was found to be down by around 4%; online activity was up by a massive 49% across the country in the last year alone. As discussed above, this would more than account for the drop in foot-fall – in fact, one could interpret the statistics as representing an overall increase in the use of libraries. The compound figure of physical visits and library website visits is up from 404 million 2007/08 to 438 million in 2008/09 – an increase of 34 million. So in other words: people are using the library websites more and more, and to waste that marketing opportunity would be a real shame.

Online, everything happens very quickly. People will scan the main sections of a page rather than read in depth, and make a decision within *three seconds* as to whether they want to stay on that page or move on. If they do decide to stay, they pay most attention to the content in the top part of the screen – this must contain some really arresting words or images that tempt them to investigate further, therefore. A huge, static logo is not desirable here, and nor is lots of complicated text about the library – that's effectively dead space and so not maximising your visitors' attention. In actual fact, keeping things simple and striking in this part of the site can serve as an example to the rest of it, too – as Alison Circle (featured in the 'Strategic Marketing' chapter) says: 'In today's world people can only absorb simple, clear messages. Don't tell them everything. They don't care.'

The first case study is simple and to the point: David Lee King, Digital Branch Manager for Topeka & Shawnee County Public Library, describes the seven essential elements for a great library website. David is a leading figure in libraries online, he has published his own book

about web-design, *Designing the Digital Experience* (King, 2008), and his library's website is a fantastic example of how it *should* be done: have a look for yourself at www.tscpl.org.

Case Study 1: The Seven Essential Elements to an Awesome Library Website | David Lee King

When I started creating this list, I figured I would list out things like 'Library catalog' or 'locations and hours.' And I did, in fact, list out the catalog first. Then it dawned on me: the catalog itself isn't an essential part - the catalog *leads* to the essential stuff a library has… the actual resources.

With that type of thinking in mind, here are the essential elements to a library website:

1. Customers want something to read, watch, and listen to when they visit the library. Obviously libraries need a library catalog. But that doesn't satisfy the immediate need of our customers, does it? They came to read. So why not meet that need? Create a new books blog with book reviews, or even news of the library (if it's interesting). Our customers are in to media in many formats, so why not meet that need too? Create a podcast, and make some fun how-to videos that can be viewed at the website. Why not have a storytime or two for the kids, while you're at it?

2. Customers have questions, and come to the library for answers. We can provide that too, through comments on blog posts, an 'ask a librarian' email/IM/Text messaging service, and even by providing a phone number on the website.

3. Customers need to know the normal stuff, too. So provide basic information like how to get a library card, hours, locations, and a map of the building.

4. Websites need actual staff! A website meeting the needs listed above, needs actual staff to do the actual work. It's a library, after all. Someone has to answer questions and write blog posts. You need facilities staff too - someone has to build new tools and services and pages.

5. Libraries need goals, and websites are no different. Preferably, website and social media goals are weaved throughout the library's strategic plan. You need to set some goals for usage, growth, and engagement, and then try to measure and meet those goals.

6. An awesome library website reaches beyond its webbish boundaries. A library does this by establishing outposts on social media sites. For example, a library can create a Facebook page, and also add a Facebook 'Like' button to its website blog posts.

7. An awesome library website needs to reach into peoples' pockets and purses … via a mobile website. If your customers really value your library and its services, they will put you on their speed dial, add you to their Facebook friends list, and ReTweet the events you're holding next week. Create a mobile-friendly website, and your customers can do these things while at home, while standing in a long grocery store

line, or during a quick break at work.

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Mobile Website

Closely related to the library website is the mobile site, as David indicates in his seventh point, above. This is a bull whose horns we really need to grasp sooner rather than later as an industry – our patrons will increasingly expect library websites and catalogues which they can access from their phones, tablets, and other mobile devices. If there is one over-riding principle to mobile library websites, it is that responsive design is a must. Responsive design in this context means that when a patron accesses your regular library website or catalogue from their mobile device, it will appear in its mobile-ready form because it 'knows' it is being accessed via mobile. This is as opposed to a: the regular desktop site appearing on the mobile device, or b: patrons having to use a separate URL to access a mobile version.

An additional option is mobile applications, known as apps, which are extremely popular. People use apps for everything from reading newspapers, to watching videos, to planning their schedules. Users download an app and install it on their phone, as opposed to accessing a version of a normal website which is tailored for mobile use. If a library is to develop an app, it needs to be more than just the mobile site with a few bells and whistles – it needs purpose, function and utility. Jumping onto the app band-wagon is only worth it if the technology is fulfilling an existing need, rather than creating its own, self-fulfilling need...

The University of Singapore's Aaron Tay provides an expert's view on web 2.0 in the 'Marketing with new technologies' chapter later on, but for this part of the book I asked him

to describe the fundamentals of making a great mobile-ready library website. You can also read Aaron's comparison of 40 mobile websites online. (Tay, 2011).

Case Study 2: Mobile options for library websites | Aaron Tay

Engaging with users using mobile technology is a broad topic, including use of SMS reference, QR codes, mobile databases, tablet use etc. But the basis of every mobile strategy for libraries would still be the mobile library website (including the mobile library catalogue). There are two aspects to this: firstly deciding what services to offer, secondly making them usable.

Most library mobile sites are surprisingly similar, offering a mobile library catalogue, opening hours, location maps, news, links to social media accounts etc. However while such services are expected, usage doesn't seem to be high - at least compared to desktop use.

The experience of University of Amsterdam is typical: they found that the 'killer app' was in fact the ability to view the number of workstations / PCs available and not traditional web services like the library catalogue (Koster, 2010). Boopsie, which is popular with libraries for creating both mobile websites and native apps, announced that non catalogue services were more popular than the catalogue (PRWeb, 2010).

Given such results for the basic mobile site, I would suggest libraries look for low cost options. Together with Tiffini Travis, I wrote about low-cost options used by libraries to create mobile sites including Wordpress and LibGuides (Tay & Travis, 2011). Other popular options include LibraryAnywhere and Boopsie which provide the ability to create native apps for a variety of smartphones as well as the ability to

'mobilize' the catalogue, which is useful if the library catalogue you are using doesn't already offer a mobile option.

We also offer a couple of mobile heuristics to test with when creating your mobile site. One which is really obvious is that users should be auto-redirected to the mobile version when they visit the library site using a mobile device [i.e. responsive design] though we have found that this doesn't always happen.

For academic libraries, there is an option to work with the University and to include library functions into a unified university mobile site (either mobile web or native app). There has being quite a lot of debate over whether to offer only a mobile web version or to offer native apps, the pros and cons of both are pretty well known but one advantage of a mobile web version is that it can be easily included in an overall university mobile offering whether the University offers a overall mobile web or native app. For example at the National University of Singapore, we have a mobile app of our courseware that is pretty popular as it includes the ability to watch webcasts of lectures, download lecture documents, sync course timetables with the phone's calendar and so on. We have also benefited by including our mobile catalogue (mobile web version) into the app which is paying dividends as this has become our top referrer [the link by which most users arrive at the catalogue].

The other major area in mobile for academic libraries is the handling of mobile databases. At this stage is really unclear if users really want to access journal articles and ebooks on mobile phones, surveys having been mixed; some have users saying

they seldom do so, but indicate they might be interested if mobile sites are offered. Libraries generally rely on the vendors to provide mobile options for databases and increasingly they have began doing so, including mobile versions for EBSCOhost, JSTOR, Cambridge Journal online, Web of Science, Scopus etc. Most currently offer mobile web versions but some, like EBSCO and Elsevier, offer native apps. Authentication methods for native apps are currently non-standardised, so it might be a good idea for libraries to maintain a guide or page on such resources.

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Word of Mouth

The power and importance of word-of-mouth marketing (or WOMM) are beyond dispute. WOMM is simply one or more people telling others about a product, service, institution or brand. In effect, it is the process of letting others market on your behalf, in this case by telling their friends and acquaintances about how good your library is. A certain amount of WOMM will happen without any intervention from the library: people talk to each other about good and bad experiences all the time. The aim here is to harness this as a marketing tool, and exert some kind of influence on the content of the messages going out, how they're disseminated, and who hears them.

There are countless statistics taken from research on the subject – for example that 67% of all consumer decisions are primarily influenced by word of mouth (Court, et al. 2010). Customers identify word of mouth as the most reliable source for ideas and information on products and services; people prefer to use something if it's been recommended to them by

someone they trust – it really is that simple. Recommending services or brands to wide audiences has never been easier than in this age of social media. So how can libraries use all this to their advantage?

Cultivate Champions

WOMM has become something of a buzz-phrase in recent times, and you could be forgiven for thinking that getting person A to tell person B about your library will be the answer to all your marketing wishes. There is, of course, a lot more to it than that. For a start, you need the *right* person A if person B is to be truly influenced – they need to be told how great the library is by *someone like them*, or by someone they respect, or both. It is said that 10% of people influence the other 90%, so it's important to cultivate a library 'champion' who falls within that vital 10% to spread the word.

A technologically savvy 30 year old who uses the library as a source of information about emerging trends and as a networking space, attributes completely different value to the library than, for example, an old age pensioner who enjoys the chance to read books about gardening in a peaceful environment. Neither would be a particularly effective advocate for the library when talking to one another, but both could be extremely effective when talking to people like themselves.

You can find influencers either by asking patrons (or figures within your local authority / University / business) direct, or by trying to recruit them (online or in person) via incentives. Incentives don't have to be financial or voucher-based (although that certainly works if you can afford it); the feelings of being part of something at the frontline, of being able to positively influence the library, of being empowered to take some responsibility – these are

all incentives too. Dowd et al. put it perfectly in *Bite-Sized Marketing* (2010, p11) when they say: 'Give your influencers a VIP pass for first access to information and content. People who are involved in the process make enthusiastic influencers.' Think how much more passionate you are about your own projects than those other people ask you to work on... It may be worth handing over an entire campaign to the influencers, and let them try and promote the aspects of the library via Word of Mouth in the best way they see fit.

Susan Moore, who provides a case study in Chapter 6 'Internal marketing' gives this advice in recruiting library champions:

> Attend any functions you can and make sure you speak to them (but don't bore them, an anecdote about a satisfied customer works very well). Just be as friendly to them as possible, ask them about themselves and remember their first names.

> Ask them outright if they will help you get the word out about the Library. Most people *think* they know what libraries do and are always astonished when they do discover what resources are there for them.

Whomever you choose, they need to have an excellent (and persuasive) communication style, and ready access to a network of potential patrons who would benefit from using the library if only they knew what services it could provide. And you need as many of them as you have demographics to which you would like to appeal.

Choose the messages

Once you have identified your influencers you need to work out the message they're spreading. Whether these are entirely dictated by the library, or instigated solely by the

influencer (or a mixture of both), the ideas you wish to communicate need to be clear and easy to grasp. Hopefully the service you wish to promote will be so fabulous it will be immediately apparent what the benefits are! To generate a buzz, it can't just be talking about the same old things in the same old way. It either needs to be a new service or resource, or a new and exciting way of communicating the value of an existing one.

Ideally the message should result in an action. It's not just about WOMM informing people how great the library website is, it's about delivering the positive review and then asking them: 'Go to page X where there's a list of programmes they're running over the summer – sign up to one and you'll see how good they are.' Or: 'Get to the library next week while campaign Y is running and tell me what you think of it; they're bound to have something which ties in with your interests.'

Make the right tools available

The aim is to make generating a buzz around your service as easy as possible. There should be no barrier between someone wanting to tell their friends how good the library is, and being able to do so.

'ShareThis' style buttons for online content are essential – people should only ever be one click away from spreading the word via their social network of choice. Content should be available via a number of different media to suit different types of people: printed leaflets to hand-out, free gifts to distribute, videos on YouTube to watch, a dedicated page of the website. The same story, told in different ways.

User Feedback

Another absolutely essential tool in the marketing toolkit is feedback from users. Good feedback really is worth going the extra mile for, because it means that next time you change an existing service or introduce a new one, you're doing so in the *knowledge* that it's what people need, rather than the *hope* that it will be useful. This is a tricky area, however: feedback obtained through traditional channels is very rarely the unfiltered truth. On the one hand people may just tell you want to hear, out of a (misguided) sense of kindness because they think this will help you with your survey; on the other hand the people who do speak from the heart don't necessarily know what they *actually* want. It's always worth keeping in mind the famous quote from Henry T. Ford: 'If I'd asked people what they wanted, they would have said a faster horse…'

As a general rule of thumb, regardless of whether you obtain your feedback via surveys, interviews or Focus Groups, always take the opportunity to ask the respondents for their email address and whether they would mind being contacted in future for further feedback sessions. A database of willing participants is a very useful thing to have, and it's also worth bearing in mind that data protection laws may mean that even if you have lots of your patrons' email addresses already, you may not be able to use them to solicit feedback on the library, or indeed market to them in any way, without their express permission.

Useful feedback can be obtained in various ways once the various issues and pitfalls have been taken into consideration, and we'll look at three of them here - because good feedback is worth the investment.

Surveys

People are so fatigued by being surveyed these days, it takes something a little different to get meaningful feedback with this method. To create a long and traditional survey is to make the decision that you're prioritising good quality feedback over number of responses – that might be exactly what you need, of course, but it is often a law of diminishing returns as more and more potential targets develop *ennui* about the whole process over time.

To entice a high amount of respondents you may need to do something shorter and snappier. Here are some tips:

- Only ever ask questions which will give you *actionable* results. In other words, don't ask people what they think about the look of the building if you have neither plans nor budget to change this if they all hate it. Save space by cutting out everything you can't practically respond to in the near future.

- Rather than one massive annual survey which everyone dreads and which takes months to process and analyse afterwards, why not try a monthly 'Two-minute poll' which addresses just one or two key issues each time?

- Traditionally, incentives go to survey respondents. However at the London School of Economics, they offer incentives to the member of staff who can generate the most responses to a poll – this competitive element always guarantees a good rate of response.

- For larger surveys, offer a potential reward that respondents actually *want*. A 10 pound / dollar book token is exactly that: a token gesture. If you're going to offer an incentive at all, it has to be something that will persuade people to take part in the survey *who otherwise wouldn't bother*. An informal poll among librarians of my acquaintance suggests a prize-draw for an iPod significantly boosts responses – an

iPod Nano is really very cheap to purchase as a prize if as a result you get a larger body of data about your library with which to inform key strategic decisions.

- If the survey is online, try and keep the number of screens / pages to an absolute minimum. You don't need a welcome screen, an explanation screen, then different screens introducing each section. Ideally, the link you give your users to access the survey should contain all the questions, right there and then.

- An obvious one this, but really go out of your way to design the questions in such a way that the answers are most useful for the library. For example, asking people about how they use the library for their information needs will generate some useful data on what people currently do; asking them simply about their information needs without mentioning the library in the question might generate all sorts of possibilities for new services in the future. We should be able to interpret people's needs as to how they apply to the library, rather than relying on them to already know.

Acting on the outcomes of surveys is of course essential, and if it's possible to acknowledge the respondents and tell them how their views have impacted the library, that in itself is great marketing. Cambridge University's Andy Priestner (a case study contributor in Chapter 6) has learnt that the personal approach is worth the time it takes: 'I only have to look at the huge range of comments on our annual survey to realise how different each and every student is in terms of their outlook, skills and needs. This is why I took it upon myself to reply to each and every comment personally – hugely time-consuming but judging from the subsequent gratitude and new understandings that were reached, incalculably valuable too.

Where possible we need to create opportunities for personal 1-to-1 interactions through all the mediums and avenues open to us.'

Focus Groups

Focus Groups are a chance to really get detailed information. When run well they can yield huge amounts of useful data, so it's worth providing incentives for respondents. Many advocate giving them all a $5 Starbucks card (or similar) and inviting participants to spend it on coffee and cakes to bring to the focus group meeting itself. For 10 respondents that would mean an outlay of $50, but as Rebecca Jones puts it: '...yes, invest $50 to save $500 on continuing the wrong service!'

Rebecca is a partner with Dysart & Jones Associates (www.dysartjones.com); she works with organizations, including libraries in public, corporate and academic environments. In this next case study she gives an expert view on how to organise a really effective focus group.

Case Study 3: Gaining Feedback from Library Users & Non-Users | Rebecca Jones

> Early in my career a senior manager encouraged me to view feedback as a gift. The individual or group is *feeding* their opinions and reactions to our services or our actions *back* to us, allowing us to see our libraries through their lenses in their contexts. We may not always like the gifts or the feedback we receive, and we are free to do what we wish with gifts or feedback--- either use it or reject it.

> One way to gather feedback from library patrons and non-patrons is to conduct group interviews or focus groups. For the purpose of this case study the terms are used synonymously. This technique, conducted properly, can provide the library with incredible insights to consider and act on.

So, how does a library properly conduct a focus group? First, by clarifying the purpose. This seems obvious, but too often it is this at this initial step that focus groups start to go off track. The library must be very clear on *what* it wants to know to then determine *who* needs to be involved in the group and *how* the group must be conducted.

What is it that library wants to know? Focus groups are a technique for gathering qualitative input regarding a service offering (from a specific program to open hours to facilities, etc.), future plans or, really, any library data, concept, activity or issue. What does the library want to know at the end of the focus group that it doesn't know now? Does the library have quantitative data from a survey that it needs to better understand? Is the library developing its strategic plan, and wants to understand how its services and facilities are perceived by the community or, in the academic environment, by students or faculty?

Specific example: a public library developing a five-year strategic plan had conducted a web survey to inform its strategies for future services. Based on the data collected and the environmental scan, they drafted three scenarios for potential services. They determined the purpose of focus groups was to:

- Test these scenarios and gain the participants' honest reactions
- Gather ideas and insights for refining or altering these scenarios, and for developing effective marketing programs for the services

Who needs to participate in the focus group? The purpose of the group defines the characteristics of the ideal participants. In the example cited above, the participants

needed to represent the various groups in the community served by the library. This included a range of ages, occupations and preferences or behaviours, which meant patrons and non-patrons. Libraries are usually quite good at recruiting patrons as participants for focus groups, but find it much more challenging to recruit non-patrons. This doesn't need to be the case. Every library employee has family members or friends who aren't library patrons; in fact, every patron knows people who don't use the library. Recruiting people, both users and non-users, requires a clear, compelling invitation and, quite honestly, food – either at the focus group or after, perhaps in the form of a gift certificate. Invite patrons to attend and to bring a friend who doesn't use the library; be clear in the invitation that there will be food and refreshments for all those attending and, for those who bring a friend who is not a library patron, an additional $5.00 gift certificate for a popular coffee shop for both the patron and their friend. We've conducted focus groups in busy corporations using this approach, and the focus groups have been full.

Another specific example: we recently conducted group interviews for a public library of youth in a community to:

- identify the types of services of interest to them, and

- phrases that may be meaningful to youth in marketing the services.

Notice that the purpose of the group interviews was not to identify specific services, but rather 'types of services of interest.' It's important to keep in mind that group interviews aren't prescriptive or absolute; they are a mechanism for gathering reactions and perspectives, which may change.

The library easily identified teenagers who regularly use the library to invite, but was dubious about getting teens that were non-users to participate. We asked each of these 'patron' teens to bring a friend who doesn't use the library. Their compensation would be pizza, soft drinks, plus two hours community service credits. The result? The group interviews were well attended with equal numbers of patron/non-patron teens.

Focus groups should have 13 – 16 participants. This number of people allows meaningful, effective discussion of the questions. Since a focus group should not be longer than 90 minutes, any more than 16 people limits the amount of participation for each individual. If the focus group is discussing ten questions, that's nine minutes per question with each individual having less than 1 minute to contribute their input.

Many focus group organizers prefer to form each group with individuals sharing common characteristics (i.e. In public libraries: a group for youth; another for adults aged 25-55; another for adults aged 55+; another for parents of pre-schoolers, etc. In corporations, a group for users, and another for non-users, etc. In academic, a group for faculty from a specific department, etc.). While this approach is valid, it can also be extremely effective to mix groups. Often the participants find the discussion interesting as they hear different, possibly divergent, views.

How should the group be conducted? The decision to use an external facilitator depends on whether the library has people on staff capable of conducting the group and maintaining subjectivity. It's critical that the facilitator is capable of managing the discussion, ensuring an equitable, safe exchange of views among the participants. Although an emotional or disrespectful exchange is rare, the facilitator

needs to be skilled in mitigating and managing this when it does occur. The session should begin with the facilitator welcoming the group and clarifying the session's purpose, timing, ground rules and how this information will be used.

Ideally the questions or topics to be discussed are sent to the participants prior to the focus group. Not only does this allow people to think about their responses prior to the group, but conveys to participants that this is a quality process and that their time and contribution is greatly appreciated.

The group doesn't need to be conducted in a room with two-way mirrors, although if such a facility is available and affordable, then it is an excellent option and allows library management to hear the focus group. At a minimum the group needs to be led by a facilitator with someone documenting the group discussion and recording it. The focus group findings are then based on the facilitator and the documenter's notes and observations as well as the recording.

The facilitator and documenter should produce a report of the findings and discuss this, in detail, with the library. A report should also be prepared and distributed to focus group participants. People who have participated in a well-run focus group are usually very interested in the information collected in the group(s) and how this information will be used. The report shouldn't be as detailed as the report prepared for the library but should convey the key points gathered from the groups. This report to the participants is, in addition to the incentive or refreshments provided at the time of the group, a thank you to the participants for gift they've given to the library.

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Asking people

A final (and hugely undervalued) way to get feedback is simply to ask people. I asked Justin Hoenke (who provides a case study in the 'Marketing with New Technologies' chapter) which single tool he'd recommend to help market a library. He replied: 'It's a pretty simple tool that every library can afford. Talk to your patrons. Ask them what they want in their library. You'll be surprised at how many great ideas they have. Once they know you're serious about listening to their requests, that's when you know you've created an engaged library user.'

This approach is so unscientific that most libraries would dismiss it as a legitimate technique, but it can be really useful as part of a wider strategy. When a user comes to the enquiry desk and you've dealt with their query, why not ask them an important question? Such as, what do you think of the new refurbishment, can you find the materials you need easily? What's the one area you'd like us to focus investment in over the next few years – is it the space, or the collections, or the facilities? Or, do you use social media and if so on which platforms would you like to interact with the library? Gathering answers to these sorts of questions can give you a real feel for what your patrons think, and help inform decision making along with the cold hard data recorded via surveys and focus groups.

Another important mechanism for feedback is social monitoring – that is, listening to what your patrons say about your library and related issues on social media sites. We'll look at that in more detail in the 'Marketing with social media' chapter, later on.

Prioritising feedback

Constraints of both time and money mean libraries won't always be able to act on good suggestions they get from patron feedback. If prioritisation is required, a simple but effective way of doing this is to rate each suggestion out of ten for both 'ease of implementation' (with ten being the easiest, one being the hardest) and 'impact' if they were implemented (ten constituting the biggest possible impact, and one the smallest).

Plotting the results on a simple quadrant quickly shows which ideas should be prioritised – those closest to the top right-hand corner are the best combination of easy to implement and high-impact.

Here's an example with four ideas. Idea #1 is high impact but difficult to achieve, and Idea #2 is easy to do but with relatively small gains; both may be worth pursuing depending on resources. Idea #4 certainly isn't worth bothering with, but Idea #3 is the clear winner, combining great impact with relative ease of implementation:
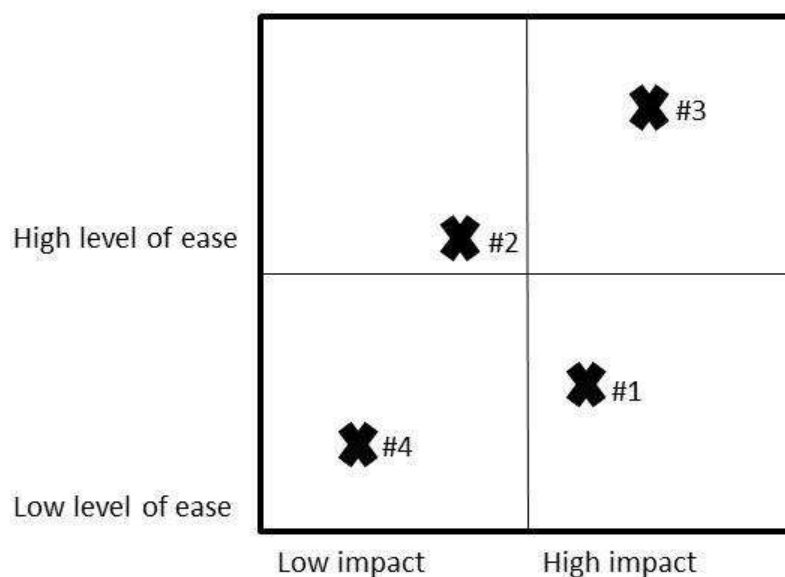
The Elevator Pitch

An 'elevator pitch' is a promotional speech, around 30 seconds long, which you should have ready to deliver any time you meet a library stakeholder or potential library stakeholder. The name derives from the idea that should you find yourself in an elevator (or lift) with the boss / client of your dreams, you should be ready to pitch a tightly focused list of reasons why they should employ / hire you by the time you reach the ground floor; it is more often associated with marketing oneself than one's institution. However I believe it can be hugely valuable for marketing libraries rather than merely individuals, and moreover I believe that *not* having a good pitch prepared can actually cause harm rather than just represent a wasted opportunity. Think of the last time you asked someone about their business or profession and they failed to give a good account of themselves: you probably left the conversation with less inclination to investigate that business in future.

So, a library elevator pitch needs to briefly but compellingly lay out the value of the library in question. It will be useful when talking to important people like academics (in university libraries) members of local Government or council (public libraries) or business partners (special libraries) but it will also be useful when talking to *anyone* – converting several individuals into library patrons over a long period of time is a valuable exercise.

Here are some essential tips for preparing yours:

- Make it short. Even though this is a pre-prepared speech it is something you are going to be slotting into normal conversation; as such it can't be much more than 30 seconds long including pauses, erms and ums.

- Rather than building from the ground up with contextual information, go straight in with the most important piece of information about your library (which should be tailored to the audience you're talking to).

- No jargon, no acronyms: speak their language. Think in terms of benefits to them.

- Give them enough information to make them curious, rather than telling them everything all at once – the idea is to inspire them into wanting to prolong the conversation, and then you can tell them everything else...

It's also worth pointing out that you can turn the whole elevator pitch concept on its head, and use an equivalent opportunity to find out all about the person you're talking to. Rather than trying to sell the library at this first meeting, you can use it get information about how the library can best serve them in future, and build from there. Rebecca Jones calls it the 'Elevator Listen':

A chance encounter with a decision-maker is a fantastic opportunity to hear about **them** — what are they working on? Where are they headed today? Have they ever heard of the information centre? You don't have to stick a microphone in their face & pepper them with questions, but showing interest in people — finding out about their work — is the basis for all good relationships. Then at the next conversation, you can start to align the library's services with their role, their experiences, etc. Position the information services with their work in a meaningful way — a way that has meaning for them because it fits with what they are doing.

Signs and Displays

There is a lot of emphasis in these pages on new ways to market the library. However this doesn't mean the old ways don't have value, and a well put together display of books can still increase circulation. At David Lee King's library they took an innovative approach to boosting the circulation of oft-overlooked titles: they created a display of wrapped books, whose covers had been obscured and replaced with a few hand-written keywords. Customers responded well to the invitation to take a chance... (Read more at: www.tscpl.org/books-movies-music/innovative-book-display-puts-covers-under-wraps.) There are plenty of opportunities for public libraries (and, to an extent, Further and Higher Education libraries) to tie in displays with culture or events attracting coverage in the national or local news.

Signage is a huge part of marketing which is all too often overlooked. Clear and friendly signs make an enormous difference to the user experience, and a lack of clear and friendly signs can make the user feel angry or stupid. Libraries are in the slightly awkward position of having to communicate a lot of information that is prohibitive in some way – 'please don't use your mobile here', 'please don't return books here' and so on. This is sometimes unavoidable but the negative effects can be mitigated by a: being friendly and conversational about it, b: putting in some positive signs that tell people when they *can* do things and most importantly c: making it clear where the customer can go to fulfil their needs. No 'out-of-order' sign should *ever* go up without a note at the bottom telling the customer where the nearest equivalent self-issue machine / toilet / photocopier is. If you're trying to encourage self-issue, then a sign at the desk saying it is not for borrowing or

returning books must be accompanied by clear directions to the nearest machines that facilitate this.

And finally don't forget the rule about the font Comic Sans on signs and displays: it should only be used for addressing children, and even then only sparingly…

Friendly Staff

It may seem odd to have friendly staff on this list, but they are absolutely essential to marketing. As we shall later discuss in detail during the chapter on 'The library brand', marketing is not just about getting people in through the door – it continues once they're inside the library (virtually or physically). Their impressions of the building, the services on offer, the resources, and the staff, are all hugely influential on how often they'll come back.

We all know that a good impression is much easier to undo than a bad one; people only need to have one negative experience of an institution for that to dominate their entire perception of it. In sport there is a cliché which footballers in particular like to trot out with great regularity: you are only as good as your last game. What they mean is that their reputation is influenced hugely by the most recent thing they've done (even though by rights it should be the sum of all their achievements and failings) – so if someone reaches the final of a tournament and then chokes (in other words, doesn't perform due to the pressure and loses) they will be known as a 'choker' rather than as a 'silver medallist'.

To an extent this is analogous to librarianship. The reputation of each library is only as good as its last customer interaction. This is of course a huge over-simplification, but the fact is that if you serve every customer superbly and there will gradually be a net gain in the reputation of your institution; serve one rudely or lazily and there may well be an instant

reputation plummet. Word of mouth is so important, and research has shown that the majority of people are more likely to pass on bad experiences than good ones.

Reputation is the general esteem in which something or someone is held. This general esteem is easy to perceive as a fixed constant, a largely solid and static 'thing' which is sometimes influenced by particularly significant events. The reality for something like a library is that reputation is a constantly updating, evolving and shifting entity, held in the collective (and individual) consciousness of both the library's users and even people who've never set foot on its premises. This is explored in detail in Chapter 3.

Elizabeth Esteve-Coll (1985) put it this way, back in the eighties: 'The library is not an abstraction. It has an identity, an identity created by the staff contact with the users.' That remains true today. So while this isn't a book about staff management and I wouldn't presume to tell you how to ensure your staff are friendly, it's worth remembering that everything else in this volume will count for nought if, when the target audience finally make it onto your premises, they are treated rudely.

Plus you'll need good printed materials, a strong brand, a good marketing strategy, and some social media presences...

These are covered in detail elsewhere in the book – Chapter 2 is on marketing strategy, Chapter 3 is on branding, Chapter 4 is all about marketing with social media and chapter 8 covers marketing on a budget, including designing high quality printed materials on a shoe-string.

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Further reading and relevant links are available on this chapter's web page:

www.librarymarketingtoolkit.com/p/essential-marketing-tools.html