

# Introduction

## *Technologies Supporting Library Marketing and Outreach*

Public libraries naturally want to take any reasonable measures to ensure that their collections, programs, and services are well used by the members of the community. These institutions are highly valued and attract many visitors due to general awareness, even in the absence of proactive outreach efforts. Residents and visitors are aware of public libraries as a long-standing part of the fabric of local government services, but they may not necessarily know about the libraries' vast array of information and entertainment resources, programs, or other services.

Libraries attract physical and virtual visitors simply by providing high-quality content and services and relying on a basic level of general awareness. But many public libraries want to go beyond this passive approach, creating outreach and marketing strategies that aim to expand their reach into their communities and to strengthen the impact of their collections and services. Not only do public libraries strive to continually increase the number of persons served, but it's also important to build goodwill and support to help ensure strong funding for ongoing operations and needed expansions.

Library marketing strategies can rely on a variety of activities to help increase interest in and use of the library. Many libraries employ in-house marketing experts or take advantage of the services of specialized consultants. Either approach benefits from technology products that can perform analytics, automate sophisticated messaging channels, or carry out other tasks to support marketing and outreach strategies.

In recent years, a variety of products have been developed to support library outreach and marketing efforts. Careful use of statistics and analytics will describe current levels of use and identify areas of potential improvement. Such analysis would reveal important patterns, such as demographic segments using services at lower levels than expected, strengths and weaknesses of library collections across both print and digital formats, and the response to events,

### Vocabulary Note

This report refers to the individuals who make use of the library as *patrons*. Alternative terms include *customers*, *clients*, or *users*. The terminology used on library websites, in articles, and in blog posts is inconsistent. Each term carries some negative connotations. Here, *patron* will be used for individuals who make use of library services and resources, with *customers* used to refer to those who take advantage of commercial products and services.

programs, exhibits, or special facilities such as maker-spaces. Analytics not only inform marketing strategies but also measure their impact. The tools, technologies, and personnel resources invested in marketing campaigns should have measurable strategic results.

Public libraries make use of analytical tools to inform operational strategies. It is essential to know areas of strength and weakness to allocate personnel resources and to invest capital resources. One important factor may involve focusing outreach or marketing activities on areas identified as underutilized.

Another area of significance relates to public interest in or perceptions of the library itself. Because libraries are funded mostly through taxes, ongoing budgets rely on politicians, administrators, and voters understanding the essential services they provide to the community. Analytics inform decision makers or stakeholders about how well the library performs its work and provide details about specific segments of the community that benefit from materials and services offered through the library.

Tapping into patron data in support of personalized services or marketing campaigns raises privacy concerns. This report will discuss privacy in the library context and examine each product's approach to the collection, use, and sharing of patron data. As libraries consider any technical solution related to patron

data, they must ensure that it conforms to their privacy policies and those of their parent organizations.

This issue of *Library Technology Reports* provides an overview of the technology products currently available to support library outreach and marketing strategies. In response to public libraries' interest in proactive marketing of their programs, services, and collections, a variety of new products have been

introduced. Each takes a different approach in providing libraries with sophisticated tools to support marketing campaigns or other initiatives to strengthen engagement with their communities. Many involve harvesting data and producing analytics and visualizations that aim to provide insight into the strategic performance of the library and the effectiveness of its marketing efforts.