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# Marketing Comes to Reference and User Services

## Nicole Eva and Erin Shea

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**T**he “M” Word... the dreaded Marketing, Promotion, or Communications piece that can come with many of our jobs. Why is it that we loathe it so much? Is it because we feel that as librarians, we should be above this sort of ‘selling’ tactic? Is it because we think libraries are so inherently wonderful that they need no promotion? Is it because we got into librarianship specifically to avoid having to do this sort of thing? For some of us, it’s all of the above. But the fact remains—people don’t know what you have unless you tell them. And telling them—*communicating your benefits* to them—is, in fact, marketing.

### In Erin’s Words:

When done properly, marketing your libraries’ programs and services is a seamless process. Perhaps there are certain promotion avenues that are your bread and butter. At my library, nearly every new or noteworthy program merits a press release, e-blast, and inclusion in our e-newsletter. But the promotional efforts that have been the most successful are the ones that required deeper thinking—a hula hoop contest to debut our new Hoopla service, tabling efforts at the train station to reach commuters, or outreach to local magicians to promote an author’s book about magic and math. I didn’t realize these were marketing efforts; I just wanted people to come to my programs. It wasn’t until I was called out professionally as a “marketer,” that I realized, “Oh hey, I guess that is a lot of what I do.”

### In Nicole’s Words:

When I decided to go back to school after working for 10 years working in the world of advertising, I joked that I chose librarianship because it was as far as I could get from my old job. Imagine my surprise when, as a newly minted MLIS, I found myself on the Public Relations and Promotions committee—and shortly after, asked to co-chair it. Imagine my further surprise when I discovered that this was one of my favorite parts of the job! Marketing—or its dreaded cousin, *promotion*—doesn’t have to be smarmy, dishonest, or whatever other negative adjectives come to mind. When you are promoting something you truly believe in, and want to share with others, that promotion is actually a joy.

I look forward to editing this column with my colleague, Erin Shea, and we extend the invitation to all of you from both public and academic libraries to send us your submissions on this very broad topic. We welcome contributions of all sorts—share your ideas, successes, and even failures from

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## AMPLIFY YOUR IMPACT

your own library promotions and we can all learn from and be inspired by one another. As well, we can discuss some of the broader ideas and philosophies about marketing and all of its implications. Librarians are great at sharing their great ideas, so here's your chance to tell your colleagues how you have been promoting your library, or to reveal important lessons you've learned about marketing libraries along the way.

### In Erin's Words:

I'm also interested to read about how your library organizes promotional efforts. Perhaps there is one staff member who works as a marketing silo, coming up with promotional strategies for a targeted service that needs a publicity boost. Or maybe staff members work together on promoting programs or services based on their keen interests, with one dedicated staff member charged with preventing things from slipping through the cracks. Community engagement and outreach librarians are new titles I've seen popping up on library job banks and listservs. It would be fascinating to see how these types of librarians tell the library's story to the community.

It's no secret that, holistically, librarians find it challenging to market the library as an institution. In a recent editorial in *Library Journal*, Editorial Director Rebecca T. Miller asserts that, "We don't have a mission problem, we have a marketing problem."<sup>1</sup> This is made apparent by the fact that every few months an article pops up in mainstream media predicting doom and gloom for the public library in its current incarnation. Librarians are falling short in how they market the image of a library to people who are not already using it. This is obvious every time I tell a friend that I'm reading a magazine on my iPad that I borrowed from the library and they exclaim, "Wow! I didn't know you could do that." I'm interested to read about ideas on how to market libraries to a population who doesn't see the need for them in the Age of Amazon.

### In Nicole's words:

It is also interesting to see how libraries are reinventing themselves in an effort to reach out to new markets. In public libraries, this might be programs created to attract teens, or seniors; in academic libraries it may be new ways to engage undergraduates, or promote information literacy services to

faculty members. What programs, products, or events does your library have to attract new, previously under-served patrons? How do you get the word out to a population that isn't already listening, and may not be that receptive to your message? What avenues do you use—and how do you make your communication stand out? By the same token, libraries still have a mission to provide free and equal access to information—and this includes books. Is there a risk that our constant "reinvention" could alienate our historically loyal patrons?

Marketing libraries may be a topic that is "hot" in the last few years, but there always seems to be appetite for more. The Library Management Institute has organized a Library Communications Conference (formerly the Association of Library Communications and Outreach Professionals) four years running ([www.kiesermanmedia.com/yahoo\\_site\\_admin/assets/docs/2014\\_LCC\\_Brochure\\_final.220214743.pdf](http://www.kiesermanmedia.com/yahoo_site_admin/assets/docs/2014_LCC_Brochure_final.220214743.pdf)), and many other conferences have sessions or even streams dedicated to marketing/promotion/public relations activities. These sessions seem to be very popular, suggesting that there is a need for more education around library promotional activities. Should there be a greater emphasis on marketing courses in MLIS courses? Or is it common sense enough that "anyone" can do it? (I'm not going to answer that, but leave it up for debate—what a great idea for a future column, anyone . . .?). It also begs the question . . . is library promotion a new "problem," or something that librarians have been struggling with since libraries began? (Hmmm . . . I may have just thought of my new research project!).

Whatever your viewpoint, we invite you to join us in an ongoing discussion of libraries and their promotion—be it in the name of marketing, advertising, outreach, or just good old PR. Public, Private, Academic, Special . . . each of us has our own challenges in promoting ourselves, and our own successes and struggles to share. So please, share with us. Submit your articles to [nicole.eva@uleth.ca](mailto:nicole.eva@uleth.ca) or [eshea@fergusonlibrary.org](mailto:eshea@fergusonlibrary.org); we look forward to seeing them!

### Reference

1. Rebecca T. Editorial Miller, "Library Unlimited: Amazon and the Limits of the Book Brand," *Library Journal* (August 1, 2014), [http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2014/08/opinion/editorial/library-unlimited-amazon-and-the-limits-of-the-book-brand-editorial/#\\_](http://lj.libraryjournal.com/2014/08/opinion/editorial/library-unlimited-amazon-and-the-limits-of-the-book-brand-editorial/#_).