

Amplify Your Impact

Yvonne Dooley, col. ed.

Sharing Stories of the Library Marketing Mix

Yvonne Dooley

Hello *RUSQ* readers! As the new marketing column editor, I wanted to take this time to introduce myself and provide insight into the kinds of submissions we will be looking for to offer our readership. I have been a professional librarian and information specialist for more than 20 years now, with experience in public, academic, and special libraries—including the Library of Congress. I currently serve as the business librarian and copyright specialist at the University of North Texas, and in May I graduated with my master's in business administration. With my recent degree and knowledge in hand, I hope to bring new and exciting work happening in libraries across the nation within the realm of marketing. Often, we think of marketing as only promotion, but there's much more to it than just that.

The 4P's framework, introduced by Professor Jerry McCarthy in 1960, categorizes marketing decisions as a mix of product, price, place, and promotion for a specific target market. Here at *RUSQ*, we would like to feature stories that cover a variety of target markets served by school, public, academic, and special libraries. You might have a new "product" or service you're now offering, or you may be distributing these products or services in new ways or at new "places." Finally, you may have a unique take on "promoting" a product or service that others could benefit from. The "price" piece of the framework may not be as relevant as the others, but it could come into play depending on the circumstances. For example, academic libraries may offer access to their resources to alumni for a small fee. Whatever the case may be, there are many different angles to marketing that authors can take so put your thinking cap on and consider submitting an article. Also, keep the following criteria in mind before submitting your work:

- Submissions should generally be between 1,500 and 3,000 words.
- Content should attract a wide audience of librarians and library workers.
- A formal literature review is NOT required.
- Articles do NOT need to be based on new research, but the column could be good place to report early findings.
- The tone of the article can be less formal.
- Content should advance the practice of reference librarianship, defined broadly.

In this introductory column, I thought I would highlight a few cool examples where I came across interesting marketing efforts at school, public, and college libraries. East coast authors Susan D. Ballard and Sara Kelly Johns recently published *Elevating the School Library: Building Positive Perceptions through Brand Behavior* (ALA Editions, 2023) to educate school librarians on the

concept of brand identity and how it relates to libraries. Essentially, in the same way companies establish a brand identity, libraries do the same. These identities are shaped by the positive and negative interactions customers have using or dealing with a particular library and its workers. As such, a library's connection to the community, policies and procedures, website, and physical spaces can all impact brand identity. These, and similar factors, should be examined to build brand credibility within a library's community.¹

In central Oklahoma, the Pioneer Library System (PLS) not only offers solar benches as a new innovative service, but they also have reimaged what library products, places, and promotion can be. PLS chose an out-of-the-box solution to help address access barriers to customers, as a result of the digital divide, and began meeting patrons where they were through solar benches. Benches were strategically installed in areas distant from the library, with low internet connectivity or high traffic and walkability, in coordination with municipalities in their service area. Each bench has a built-in solar panel, phone charger, and Wi-Fi that connects users to PLS's digital library. They also serve as a miniature billboard, with space for the library to offer targeted messaging and highlight bench features while also serving as "a cozy place to rest in a park." The collaboration between PLS and the municipalities in their three-county service area involves a simple agreement where the city provides the location and a concrete pad and PLS provides everything else. With this greater visibility and reach, PLS is able to meet the digital engagement demands of their users and further their strategic efforts to strengthen and expand Wi-Fi access and ensure customers have the same digital opportunities.²

Finally, Lewis-Clark State College in Lewiston, Idaho, has taken the idea of snacks for students during finals week to a new level. Each year, a committee of students and staff deliberate on which snacks to offer on their snack cart based on potential student demand. High-profile administrators, such as the college president and provost, push the cart around the library handing out snacks on a flexible "mystery" schedule. The cost of the snack cart is shared between various administrative groups across campus, and word of mouth is the primary form of promotion. This collaborative, low-key, high-impact service also helps address food insecurity among student patrons. "Libraries don't have to do this all by themselves," states library director, Johanna B'jork, said.³ Mutual support for the project lets students know the college takes food insecurity seriously and is there to help.

May this first column inspire you to consider how your library uniquely markets reference and user services through its mix of products, pricing, places, and promotion. Happy writing!

References

1. S. D. Ballard and S. K. Johns, "Show Yourself: Building Library Credibility through Brand Identity," *American Libraries* 55, no. 5 (2004): 30–33.
2. K. Sitzman, "Solar Benches: Closing the Digital Divide through Innovation, Engagement, and Learning," *Computers in Libraries* 43, no. 9 (2023): 13–16.
3. J. B'jork, personal communication to the author, July 1, 2024.