Amplify Your Impact
Yvonne Dooley, Col. Ed.

Successful Marketing Strategies for Scholarly Communications

Agnes Gambill West, Sophia Mosbe, and Julie Shedd

Introduction

Scholarly communications is rarely visible on the front lines of library and instructional services. In fact, much of the work in scholarly communications takes place behind the scenes and involves a wide-ranging set of capabilities—from institutional repository management to publishing services, copyright expertise, data management, championing open access, and assessment and impact metrics offerings.[1] Marketing these services is as much a balancing act of strategy and resource management as it is an opportunity for broader engagement with faculty departments, graduate schools, research centers, and technology transfer units. Marketing *scholarly communications* is essential because it informs, educates, and engages research communities about services, technical infrastructure, and resources that can positively reinforce a scholar's identity and impact. Without it, scholars may not reap the cascade of additional advantages that would be difficult, if not impossible, for individual researchers to achieve on their own. Some of those advantages might include expanding research networks, measuring influence, finding collaborators, carving out interdisciplinary niches, educating the public, defining research agendas, and integrating ideas deeply into the broader ecosystem of knowledge.

This article discusses four successful marketing strategies that scholarly communications professionals can use to amplify the impact of their scholarly communications programs. What does successful mean in this context? We mean offering services that are heavily utilized by the university community and that have consistent demand year over year. We also mean successfully—and *creatively*—communicating our expertise to key stakeholders and decision-makers in environments that may be lukewarm to our efforts while delivering outcomes that meaningfully impact the research community in terms of increased access and dissemination of scholarly research. These four marketing strategies have three things in common: They are practical, relational, and strategic—which makes them applicable to any type or size of academic university regardless of geography. We hope this article is useful to professionals working in scholarly communications, offices of research and innovation, technology transfer units, and library administration who need to understand how the practice discipline of scholarly communications addresses the unmet needs of researchers and how it maps to various stakeholders within the university.

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Context

The strategies discussed here evolved from case studies at Mississippi State University, Santa Clara University, and Appalachian State University. Using the Carnegie Classification of Institutions of Higher Education,[2] which uses a specific methodology to classify the level of research activity occurring within a university, Mississippi State University has R1 status, Appalachian State University jumped from R3 to R2 status in 2025, and Santa Clara University has R3 status. The student populations at these three universities give a general picture of the

size of these institutions: As of February 2026, Santa Clara University has approximately 9,700 students, whereas Appalachian State University and Mississippi State University are almost double this size, with approximately 21,700 and 23,500 students, respectively. Collectively, these universities represent a diverse geographical presence within the United States. Santa Clara University is situated on the West Coast, just outside of San Jose—a major global tech hub in the heart of Silicon Valley—and is known for uniting technological innovation with a commitment to social justice informed by the Jesuit educational tradition. Mississippi State University is located in the East South Central part of the United States and is a public land-grant research university with notable programs in agricultural science, engineering, and veterinary medicine. Appalachian State University is located in the rural Appalachian mountain region on the East Coast of the United States and is noted for its leadership in sustainability, environmental studies, and Appalachian culture. This context is provided to show that the following four marketing strategies are broadly applicable to a wide range of populations and research environments.

Successful Marketing Strategies for Scholarly Communications

The four marketing strategies we share here focus on (1) repairing relationships and identifying gatekeepers, (2) correcting myths and misconceptions, (3) developing indispensable services, and (4) finding partners with shared interests.

Repair Relationships and Identify Gatekeepers

Library professionals working in academic environments recognize the significant impact of positive relationships with faculty and departments. Unfortunately, it is not uncommon for tension created by a predecessor in a scholarly communications role to be transferred to the successor, particularly in the absence of existing stable relationships with campus groups. This dynamic results in librarians inheriting departmental mistrust and encountering obstacles in forming connections, as they must rebuild relations rather than maintain them. Relationships may deteriorate as a result of past negative incidents or due to neglect stemming from staffing and resource constraints. For example, academic libraries experienced significant losses of senior librarians through mass retirements during the COVID-19 pandemic, and the subsequent reduction in outreach was evident across campus as remaining staff worked to maintain operations.

To rebuild damaged and neglected relationships, librarians must first identify key *gatekeepers*. Within organizational contexts, gatekeepers are individuals who possess formal or informal influence over access to information, networks, or decision-making processes.[3] Their roles often position them as intermediaries who can either facilitate or hinder communication and collaboration between groups, making their engagement particularly important in relationship-building efforts. Gatekeepers may include department staff and managers, teaching or research faculty, department heads, and deans. Reestablishing relationships requires a strategic approach, and gatekeepers should be regarded as potential allies rather than barriers to connections. In situations where prior incidents have resulted in stakeholder wariness toward the library, gatekeepers can be a powerful asset in communicating service improvements.

As with any damaged relationship, immediate repair should not be expected. Consistent presence and availability can gradually foster receptivity among gatekeepers and the broader community. One strategy for demonstrating commitment to restoring and building relationships early in the process is to ensure that library resources are updated and accessible. This may include updating, creating, or archiving library guides; reevaluating accessible language on digital repository agreements; or creating resources that clearly communicate where and what kind of research support is available to faculty and students. This process also sheds light on areas of relationship friction that require improvement.

As noted previously, sustained professional engagement is essential. Securing opportunities to speak at department meetings or arranging individual appointments with gatekeepers is advisable. Emphasis should be placed less on memorization of names and more on clear and direct communication and conveying that you want to rebuild partnerships. If securing meeting times proves challenging, consider attending events that are being held by faculty departments or specialized institutes. This strategy requires additional capacity because you will need to stay aware of events happening on your campus and maintain flexibility in your schedule to accommodate attendance. Rebuilding relationships is inherently challenging. However, attending events hosted by groups you want to reconnect with and engaging in professional dialogue with attendees demonstrates commitment to relationship repair.

Correct Myths and Misconceptions

When scholarly communications teams are formed with a mix of new and veteran librarians, there is a learning curve for navigating the minefield of local challenges that may be deeply ingrained in the university community. Some of those local challenges stem from circumstances external to the library and outside of the library's control, such as budget constraints that limit a library's ability to purchase resources. On the other hand, there may be negative feelings toward the library due to the tense politics surrounding a library's decision to spend money on technology and space renovations rather than book and journal subscriptions, which might lead to the misconception that libraries do not care about faculty research. In these difficult situations where strong opinions and preconceived misconceptions seem to impede working relationships and stultify communication with the faculty body, how do scholarly communications professionals successfully advertise and provide services?

One strategy is to use every interaction with campus stakeholders as an opportunity to project warmth, competence, and camaraderie. By pursuing human connections that leave long-lasting positive impressions, these micro-interactions will eventually break down barriers and address myths and misconceptions about scholarly communication services and, more broadly, the library's role in the university community. Some examples of positive micro-interactions include meeting stakeholders in person whenever possible, looking at a faculty member's research and teaching expertise to find common ground that you can connect to on a personal level, and being curious about their research agenda. For example, what do their bibliometrics look like? What do you find interesting about their work? What potential impacts might their work have on your own work? What makes it difficult or easy to communicate with people within and outside the field? Discussing your own published research with the faculty, students, and the administration also builds common ground and is a helpful way to illustrate your expertise in scholarly communications as a research practice and to demonstrate your professional competence.

Another strategy to address myths and misconceptions about the value of scholarly communications services is to come to every interaction armed with data and resources. Topics to discuss with stakeholders might include the following: How many items does the institutional repository hold, and where does its traffic originate? What legal or legislative challenges are currently influencing the scholarly publishing landscape? How do new federal agency mandates influence data sharing? How long can PDFs stay intact and usable on a CD-ROM? This is information that stakeholders are unlikely to know but will be glad to learn. Communicating this information in a way that is accessible is also important, so it's helpful to create and share a glossary that defines scholarly communications concepts to ensure there is shared understanding during conversations with stakeholders.

Taking the initiative to spark conversations with faculty members is another underutilized strategy for marketing scholarly communications services, especially in environments where there are negative misconceptions about library services. Some suggestions include the following: Monitor databases for new faculty publications, then reach out to congratulate faculty authors with a personalized message; watch departmental websites for new faculty hires and take the time to introduce yourself; and if a faculty member has taken advantage of a read-and-publish agreement, send an email to express gratitude while also copying their department heads and the relevant subject specialist librarian. These small, seemingly insignificant gestures of recognition and appreciation make a tremendous difference in communicating the library's interest in supporting faculty research and the desire for scholarly communications professionals to make a personal impact to advance the profile and reputation of a scholar.

Develop Indispensable Services

Another way to capture the attention of the university community is to develop scholarly communications services that are indispensable. How do we define 'indispensable' here? We're talking about services that present tremendous value to researchers, are not offered anywhere else, and are delivered with exceptional customer service. Before this goal can be achieved, the scholarly communications professional must have a strong understanding of the specific needs of researchers at the university, which can be accomplished through conducting a needs assessment, gathering survey data, or soliciting individual feedback from faculty members. Finding out how scholars would like their research to be communicated and disseminated and whether they understand the benefits of open access is important information to gather.

Creating an indispensable service starts with identifying and building a community of individuals with similar needs and frustrations so that scholarly communications professionals can design a unique solution. In-depth conversations with faculty members may reveal deeper needs and, more importantly, the reason behind those needs. One frustration might be that faculty members generally want to share their scholarly work and be cited more frequently, yet family obligations and work schedules may prevent them from doing so. Moreover, the data-entry process for institutional repository deposit may be too slow, meticulous, and time-consuming. Alternatively, some faculty members might lack the technical skills to navigate a new platform or the patience to manually upload their scholarship. Learning this type of information typically requires meaningful follow-up with faculty members; therefore, it's important to remember that online workshops, news announcements, and other digital advertisements may only retrieve a superficial layer of information that does not fully surface the extent of community needs.

Developing indispensable services to address the unmet needs of the research community requires going above and beyond the status quo and building momentum by generating a level of excitement about the benefits of a particular service. One example might include creating digital research profiles on an institutional repository platform, along with offering to upload all scholarly content on a faculty member's curriculum vitae. Making this service as simple as possible is a critical recommendation: The only requirement involved here would be for faculty members to send their résumés to the scholarly communications office—a simple step that would involve very little effort or time. Taking the burden of digitizing a research agenda off a faculty member's plate should be a relief, and many faculty members will be pleased with their new digital presence, which allows them to more easily share their scholarship with the world. There are also mutual benefits for the scholarly communications office. For example, each curriculum vitae received from faculty members translates into a potential parabolic increase in ingested content for an institutional repository, which increases the research profile of the university.

Communicating success stories is also a strategy to build momentum for indispensable services. For example, offer workshops for faculty that illustrate real-world examples of institutional repository research profiles and the ways that an online presence can generate research metrics, such as views, downloads, and citations; demonstrate the ease of sharing links to an institutional repository research profile with tenure and promotion committees, prospective publishers, and grant funding agencies; and explain that Google Scholar has the ability to scrape institutional repositories for scholarly content and disseminates research beyond the scope of an university's internal scholarly network.

Ultimately, creating indispensable services resolves the unmet needs of researchers and offers high-value solutions that have the power to build meaningful relationships across the university. As scholars at Harvard Business School note, "Exceptionally great experiences stand out, create memories for years, increase loyalty, and lead to a massive multiplier effect when one customer shares the details with others in today's super-connected consumer world."[4]

It's worth mentioning that offering these types of indispensable services comes with challenges, including the dedication of more staff time, for example, to support increased institutional repository processing and data entry. To mitigate the additional strain on workloads, scholarly communication offices might investigate whether there are artificial intelligence (AI) tools or new functionality offered by third-party-hosted institutional repository platforms that can autogenerate this data and summarize scholar profiles more efficiently.

Find Partners with Shared Interests

Another successful marketing strategy that scholarly communications professionals should consider is finding partners, sponsors, and advocates who share similar interests and goals. Building strong professional relationships with these individuals over time can give your own marketing efforts a multiplier effect. With this network of support, there are opportunities to reach new audiences, pool resources, and leverage the reputation and credibility of other well-established, well-respected groups. This partnership strategy is crucial for scholarly communications offices that might be overextended or have smaller teams.

Some examples of potential partners include the office of research and innovation, the center for teaching and learning, the university research council, the university intellectual property council, the honors college, the graduate school, research centers, specialized institutes, and laboratories. While some of these groups have personnel and budgetary support, others may be less resourced. Regardless, within each of these networks are other relationships and networks that can spread the word about the value of scholarly communications events and services. Understanding and building these networks is critical, and that requires establishing trust.

One way to develop trust is by engaging in successful, co-branded, mutually advantageous collaborations. For example, consider co-sponsoring a scholarly book publishing program with the office of research and innovation to reach science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) departments, which might be typically less active in scholarly communications activities or may need more information on data sharing or federal funding agency mandates. Alternatively, consider co-hosting a writing retreat with the writing center and the center for teaching and learning to support faculty writing groups that might be decentralized across campus, underresourced, and in need of support for navigating scholarly publishing and open-access licensing.

Other potential partners and advocates that might be overlooked yet have the potential to serve as fantastic champions of scholarly communications services include administrative assistants, business managers, the information technology services team, the office of research and innovation, the graduate school, and other staff members on campus. Consider hosting informal lunch gatherings with these individuals to nurture professional connections, understand where joint efforts can be mutually beneficial, and develop insight into the unique internal workings of the university. For example, meeting regularly with the office of sponsored programs might shed insight into the opaque nature of grant management processes. Staff members also often have more routine interactions with faculty because they are the first point of contact for many of the day-to-day operations within the university. These individuals therefore have more opportunities to provide positive referrals and validate the credibility and value of the scholarly communications office.[5]

Conclusion

In our experience, marketing scholarly communications is practical, relational, and strategic. It's also an activity that requires research, promotion, partnerships, and those timeless elements of being human—connection, understanding, and personal interaction—especially in a world where AI seems to permeate many aspects of life. Whether starting your own scholarly communications program or reviving a stagnant one, we recommend offering repair for any negative relationships and identifying the gatekeepers who might be holding you back, correcting myths and misconceptions that might be confusing your audience or derailing your professional relationship-building efforts, developing indispensable services with excellent customer service, and finding partners with shared interests who can champion your efforts.

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