

Amplify Your Impact

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Placement of the Library at the Heart of GenAI

Marketing Opportunities For Us All

Rose Melonis

A successful marketing campaign begins with strong relationships, a visible presence on campus or in the community, and a strategic approach.

Generative artificial intelligence (abbreviated as “gen AI” or just “AI” in this column) presents librarians with new opportunities to consider, discuss, and adapt. While our core values remain unchanged, our services, support, and access to information are now shaped by the ways our patrons engage with this rapidly evolving technology. The need for digital AI literacy is pressing, alongside the ethical and responsible use of gen AI, and the ability to assess the information it provides. Branding the library as the AI learning destination is leaning into what we already know and do. Libraries are unique; they are patron-centered, most are freely accessible, and they act as a central meeting place for campuses and communities. Libraries house the “heart” of learning, as places of inquiry. Librarians provide ethical, balanced, fair, and accurate information for patrons.

This column explores how libraries can market themselves as AI learning hubs, while exploring different perspectives on what success looks like, and being aware of potential challenges ahead.

Case Study at Creighton University

Creighton University is an R2, Jesuit institution with a central campus in Omaha, Nebraska, and a health sciences campus in Phoenix, Arizona. There are more than 8,000 students enrolled, with roughly an even split between undergraduate and graduate students.

In the spring of 2025, Creighton University Libraries (CUL) began a pilot project via a Google grant that secured access to three new gen AI tools. The tools being trialed include Scopus AI, Scite, and Keenious. The CUL's challenge has been to learn how these tools work, who would benefit the most from using them, and how best to teach and market them to patrons. A trial inherently provides a great marketing opportunity. There is a real need for AI instruction, and this has provided CUL a chance to let patrons know what we are offering, to brand the library, and to engage our audience. A trial is time-bound, with a chance to collect data or an assessment that can provide valuable insights. The upfront work is learning about the tools, taking part in any related teachings or workshops that might be associated with them. The librarians at CUL have continued to learn about

gen AI by reading, discussing, attending webinars and conferences, and producing content for faculty on campus. This remains an investment of CUL and a focal point in our most recent three-year strategic plan.

Since the fall of 2024, the research and instruction team at CUL has worked to understand how students have been feeling about gen AI. Through quick in-class polling, we gathered some initial data, which has helped us tailor our approach. Preliminary research on how gen AI could be used in your community is especially helpful before embarking on an AI project. In addition, through one-on-one meetings and informal talks, we received feedback regarding how other stakeholders on campus are feeling regarding AI. We realized that feelings were mixed, and there is a need to provide what we have called “library-centric gen AI.” Knowing where the patron base is coming from has been a useful place to start.

A central concern has been how to teach these tools, as gen AI is a completely new technology for our users. We have been tasked with marketing to a group of students who have primarily learned about AI through ChatGPT or similar large language models (LLMs). A major challenge in this pilot has been promoting the distinction between ChatGPT and the library-centric tools we are providing. Our patron base is new to gen AI. No previous knowledge or AI literacy had been introduced when we began the pilot. There is a fine but distinct line between a tool like Scite or Keenious and a tool like ChatGPT. One of the goals of marketing is to increase awareness of the differences between tools with a controlled corpus (e.g., Scopus AI) versus OpenAI. For example, Scopus AI allows users to quickly read a summary of main insights from a curated database of scholarly literature, ensuring accuracy and traceable sources. This is critical for academic integrity, and the quality of the sources is vastly superior. There are ethical implications of OpenAI that we want our patrons to understand. Ethical implications of tools that rely on OpenAI include hallucinations, bias, privacy concerns, and source attribution. To answer the question, “What is an ethical use of gen AI” begins with marketing. The trick is to make the distinction known to our patrons and market it as such.

We initially began marketing and developing a hands-on virtual workshop geared toward faculty, since we knew getting them on board and comfortable with the technology would be critical. The workshop was well-received, and knowledge of the tools has been spreading across campus. It continues to be discussed, as the workshop lives in our virtual learning platform for faculty to access at any time.

To reach students, we are still hashing out the specifics. We know we will have to take a multiprong approach to have the broadest impact, incorporating both synchronous and asynchronous learning opportunities and resources. Initially, we thought setting up focus groups for our pilot project would work best for us. This would allow us to get more granular data on how students are feeling about these tools, ease of use, and the positive and negative aspects of using the tools. Ideally, there would have been a monetary incentive to participate. As the fall and spring semesters 2025–26 are underway, we will continue to gather more data on gen AI and include it in our instruction sessions (or “one-shots”) that we do. We will be connecting it with the services we already provide on information literacy, as AI literacy becomes an evolution of what we already teach.

Partnerships

A good marketing campaign is enhanced by strategic partnerships. In CUL’s case, we partnered with the Center for Faculty Excellence (CFE) to help promote our workshops and send out marketing materials to faculty. Generally, workshops are advertised in daily newsletters that are delivered directly to faculty and staff inboxes. We also had a flyer campaign with QR codes to sign up.

Higher-level discussions were held between the director of the library and campus stakeholders. Strategic partnering can help get the message out more quickly and “share the marketing load” with another.

Time Devoted to Marketing

In addition to strategic partnering, a key component of any successful marketing campaign is the amount of time one’s staff can devote to it. It can be helpful to have one person, or a small group made up of committed and creative workers, to work on library marketing. On busy campuses, for example, it can be hard to get one’s message out. There are always many events going on, and how to engage patrons is a central concern. This can be where partnering makes all the difference. Newsletters, flyers, and email campaigns can all work to further a marketing message. We utilized all the above for our pilot project.

Assessing and Measuring Success

For CUL, “marketing success” means that when patrons start thinking about learning more about gen AI, the library is part of that conversation. A humorous article in *Library Journal* puts it well: market the library like Hellmann’s markets mayonnaise—market everywhere and make your brand the first thing people associate with meeting an information need¹—or, if you’re positioning as an AI hub, with AI itself. Promote your services widely and in diverse ways. Let it percolate in someone’s mind, consciously or not, that the library is there when the moment of need arises. While a library cannot be everything to everyone, a strong branding campaign can assist in forging the connections that need to be made, depending on your goals.

Each library will define success differently. For academic libraries, it can look like increased awareness and engagement. Beyond hard numbers, this can be hard to measure; hence, where the “market like mayo” concept comes in. Reaching assessment goals and utilizing exit surveys can also help. For many of us, our goals remain to be full campus partners and educators; marketing can help our education efforts by placing librarians as collaborators. At CUL, we aim to get invited into classrooms as guest lecturers, for example. An increase in that can be a marker of success. In addition, an increase in AI instruction and digital literacy can also indicate the success of a gen AI marketing campaign.

Challenges and Concerns

If libraries are to be marketed as AI learning hubs, there are challenges and implications in doing so.

With AI tools and services becoming separate add-ons or new products (such as in the case of Scopus AI), there is a monetary concern. Not everyone can afford “library-centric” gen AI. It’s not like a book or journal article that a library can ILL to someone. It leads to the question: If some institutions have availability, but others don’t, what edge do those places have? With budgets ever dwindling and with the lack of federal support in libraries, I wonder how budgets can stretch to accommodate new technologies, learning, and personnel support.

A further concern is the loss of an increasingly unique role libraries play in *how* we offer services. Libraries generally provide a human-centered reference transaction, where a patron can speak to a (live!) human to get their questions answered. We provide a personalized approach, and librarians and library staff get to know their patrons, and vice versa. This has been modified with chat reference, which is still largely human centered. If AI were to replace (some or all) of this,

we risk leaving behind a differentiating aspect of what we provide. I would be hesitant to market tools that could disconnect me from the patron and potentially from the work I do. How to market the library as a hub for gen AI, without marketing the librarian out of the equation? While some research suggests AI chatbots, for example, can “liberate librarians from laborious and repeated work,” I am not entirely convinced of that argument.² Librarians provide context and nuance as well as personalized guidance depending on learning needs and different learning styles. Librarians understand how a user is feeling (e.g., if a patron is getting frustrated or confused); AI cannot, by nature, be emotionally intelligent. We need to be thoughtful in what tools we offer to patrons, how we are marketing them, and to whom. Ideally, literacy and education remain at the heart of it, and the library as a space for human connection remains paramount.

Conclusion

Finally, as we navigate the evolving landscape of gen AI and libraries, it's essential to keep the library's mission at the heart of what we do. Libraries remain vital centers of learning and connection, and marketing these changes reinforces our relevance and encourages innovation for both us as librarians and for our patrons. We will continue to learn and respond to the possibilities of gen AI.

Notes

1. Ned Potter, “Marketing Libraries Is Like Marketing Mayonnaise,” *Library Journal*, April 18, 2013. <https://www.libraryjournal.com/story/marketing-libraries-is-like-marketing-mayonnaise>.
2. Vivek Kaushal and Ritu Yadav, “The Role of Chatbots in Academic Libraries: An Experience-Based Perspective,” *Journal of the Australian Library and Information Association* 71, no. 3 (2022): 215–32.