Library Faculty Publications   University Libraries

Fall 11-2017

Digital Marketing Strategies in Libraries

Dana Haugh
SUNY Stony Brook, dana.haugh@stonybrook.edu

Recommended Citation

Haugh, D. (2017). Digital marketing strategies in libraries. In C. Shi, L. Xiong, & M. B. Huang (Eds.), Proceedings of the International Conference on Embedded Education and Instruction of New Models of Library Service: The 4th International Conference of Beijing Academic Network Library (pp. 297-303). Beijing, China: Capital Normal University Press.

Digital Marketing Strategies in Libraries

Dana Haugh

Stony Brook University Libraries, USA

Abstract: In this paper, the author examines the importance of digital marketing in libraries across the United States. As patrons become more technologically savvy, libraries are tasked with expanding their presence to digital landscapes. One way to do so is to implement simple and effective digital campaigns. This step can ensure ensure libraries remain relevant and indispensable to the patrons they serve. Marketing, once thought to be an unnecessary expense for libraries, is fast becoming a necessity. This paper explores different contemporary views on digital marketing in libraries.

Keywords: Marketing in libraries   Library outreach   Digital campaigns   Library outreach strategies

In recent years, one of the most effective ways of promoting a service has been through digital branding and marketing. Hundreds of thousands of companies have found success in basic online marketing campaigns and many owe their prosperity and recognition to the digital world. But online marketing isn't limited to those seeking a profit; nonprofit organizations and community centers have also reaped the benefits of online presences. Digital marketing makes it possible to advertise and connect with buyers, sellers, users, and researchers at little to no cost. Given this shift toward technology, it's not surprising that many libraries are also dipping a toe into digital waters. Librarians are realizing that as their patrons become more technologically savvy, so, too, must they. Gupta (2016) expertly addresses some of the reasons to market library resources to patrons, outlining how it can reduce barriers to use and access, inform the users about services offered in the library, and help satisfy user needs (p. 126). For many librarians, especially those new to the digital landscape, creating web presences on social networking sites and utilizing web 2. 0 platforms can seem daunting and inessential. However, there are many ways to reap the rewards of online platforms for little to no cost. Implementing these basic marketing strategies can benefit libraries exponentially and can help ensure their future popularity as a community center.

While there is no question that libraries should have an online presence, the best way of creating this presence can intimidating. In an article by Cole and Graves (2010), the authors believe a clear structural marketing method will glean the best possible results and outline four steps to success for digitally marketing libraries: "researching your market,

performing a SWOT analysis, formulating SMART objectives, and brainstorming the plan" (p. 183). Cole and Graves argue that using standard methods of analysis and segmentation will accurately assess patron needs and foster the best possible plan for effectively targeting these users.

Employing techniques such as SWOT analysis (strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats) and SMART objectives (specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, timed) can lay the groundwork for successful marketing campaigns for a wide array of demographics. Cole and Graves (2010) also believe a strong presence across multiple avenues is a useful tactic for effective marketing. Multi-channel marketing can be "any way you promote yourself, your services, and your library" (Cole & Graves, 2010, p. 184). This can include everything from a library's website, to blogs, wikis, social media, posters, flyers, and more. The authors encourage librarians to take advantage of all available resources and utilize each of them to create an effective, well-known brand.

Similar to Cole and Graves, Ashcroft believes creating a marketing strategy unique to a patron-base is the most effective way of successfully advertising to that demographic. In her article "Marketing strategies for visibility" Ashcroft (2010) states, Libraries should break down the user community into groups according to their user needs and requirements… Library and information services need to have an objective picture and understanding of what is unique in what they offer and its value in the marketplace. (p. 89)

According to Ashcroft, breaking down a patron base into specific sectors is the most effective way of creating marketing campaigns that will resonate effectively with each. Though there are stark differences between commercial establishments and libraries, Ashcroft believes similar marketing techniques can be explored and tweaked to fit the nonprofit sector. The author abides by the 4C's of marketing, a framework centered around the patron and therefore well-suited to libraries. The 4C's represent Customer, Cost, Convenience, and Communication (Ashcroft, 2010). Focusing on the 4C's enables a library to maintain a clear marketing outlook while keeping the customer (or patron) in mind.

Indeed Germano also highlights the importance of having specific, dedicated marketing strategies in his article "Narrative-based library marketing." Germano admits most libraries don't often give marketing a second thought. Instead, digital marketing in libraries is often an "ad-hoc" affair. He comments, though most libraries do not have a marketing strategy in place, it's not because they are not open to it; they just don't know where to begin (2010). Germano (2010) argues "library school curricula at virtually all ALA-accredited programs have no required marketing course and have limited opportunities for studying marketing" (p. 6). This is particularly problematic considering emerging librari-

ans need to have a comprehensive grasp of the digital world. According to Germano, there no "vision" or strategy for modern day library marketing, and thus little to no importance is placed in this crucial area (2010).

To solve this, he proposes creating an individualized "story" that is unique to each library; a story that resonates with patrons and unconsciously creates a library brand. These stories would focus on particular demographic needs and wants and highlight how the library can fulfill them (Germano, 2010). It fosters a recognition of the library as a crucial establishment for each and every individual it services. It is a type of marketing strategy not based on monetary gain, but on consumer satisfaction. At its core, a story should "have a strategic vision, one that clearly defines what success looks like" (Germano, 2010, p. 7). Having a clear vision on what a library represents is a critical step toward guaranteeing the success of a marketing campaign. In this way, Germano believes libraries can begin to implement digital campaigns in a gradual, naturally effective way.

In the article "Theory, research, and practice in library management," Sen (2010) explores the notion of marketing orientation (MO) in the library setting. Like Cole and Graves, Sen believes there is substantial success to be had in traditional MO within public and private sectors. The world of digital marketing is fast replacing print media and Sen argues it is important to learn from commercial forms of marketing and adjust them to suit libraries across the country (2010). Like many of her contemporaries, Sen believes that targeted, narrative-based marketing strategies would be most effective in the library community as it ensures interest and future establishment survival. Sen comments that libraries need to move "from an ad hoc approach to information sharing, to a formal information and knowledge management strategy with improved communications" (Sen, 2010). In doing so, libraries will find more success in customer retention and engagement. Like Germano, Sen believes custom digital marketing strategies are vital to the success of a library's continued importance as a community establishment.

Similar to Germano's idea of creating a personalized marketing campaign, Hafner and Ackers suggest building brand recognition through taglines and logos. The authors argue that creating a brand is one of the most important marketing strategies a library can do. It is an invaluable step toward establishing an identity that patrons can recognize and take pride in. According to Hafner and Ackers (2011), A library's brand is the sum of its customers' perceptions about the library and their interpretations of their impressions. A brand is what first comes to mind when one hears the organization's name or sees a graphic element representing the organization. A brand represents an immediate, intangible, sometimes emotional perception that is associated with the qualities or value of a product or service. (p. 34)

Essentially, a library's brand should represent what they stand for as a community center. Creating a recognizable logo and tagline are extremely beneficial for developing a marketing campaign and slogan. Hafner and Ackers believe that having a professional, consistent logo fosters a sense of unity and pride within a community, something immediately distinguishable from other libraries.

A logo, coupled with a tagline or mission statement, is a simple and effective way to brand a library. By creating an instantly recognizable logo or phrase, a patron is more likely to develop an attachment to that establishment and thus view it as an important part of the region. Hafner and Ackers also encourage libraries to involve the community in the logo/tagline creation (2011). They believe including patrons in such an important decision is a great way to encourage collaboration and truly make patrons feel that they are an integral part of the library system. The authors propose these simple branding techniques as a step toward effectively creating digital marketing campaigns that will speak to both online and offline users throughout a community.

In addition to this tactic, Russo (2017) believes in creating strong, targeted messages that connect with your patrons on social media: "… in order to get your audience to consume your content and want to share it, it has to be of substance, it has to be meaningful, it has to [have]editorial quality" (p. 46). It's not enough to have a bland sentence about an event or resource offered at your library; content needs to resonate with the audience, so much so that it drives them to share it among their peers and generate widespread interest. Always aim for "quality over quantity when posting content to any channel" (Russo, 2017, p. 47). A quality message is more likely to engage a patron, while high quantities of less meaningful information is likely to steer them away. Russo appreciates the time one must invest in order to create meaningful content, which is why she stresses "creatively repurposing" content for each social media channel the library participates in (2017, pp. 46 — 47). This ensures a consistent message is being spread through the library's various social media channels while not burdening the messenger.

Halevi and O'Hanlon (2016) also found success in repurposing their social media communications and advised readers to "be consistent with your messaging and post similar communications to all your channels to reinforce the message" (p. 344). Like Russo, Halevi and O'Hanlon saw the benefits of repurposing content twofold: 1. It ensures you're spreading a consistent and recognizable message to all of your constituents, and 2. It puts less stress on the messenger to come up with new content for every social media and communication platform.

In "Quick and dirty library promotions that really work," Jennings andTvaruzka outline simple, yet effective digital marketing strategies for the library in need. Like Hafner and Ackers, Jennings and Tvaruzka encourage librarians to take advantage of little to no cost marketing solutions that resonate with their patron base (2010). They found particular success in promotional events on Facebook and fun contests that aimed to change the standard users perception of the library as a strictly quiet, stern environment. The authors detail how they sought to change media perceptions of library stereotypes and found success in online campaigns that were both cheap and effectively marketed to their younger patron base (Jennings, 2010). Jennings and Tvaruzka emphasize the minimal time and effort needed to create these campaigns, saying "Minimal time was needed to create the contest … in just one afternoon, the Facebook group was created and publicity was developed. Reading and judging all of the contest entries took approximately half a day for two librarians. (p. 9)"

All in all, the feedback from their targeted marketing contests was very positive and the effort was minimal. Simple techniques such as these are proven to be extremely effective once strategies are developed. Realizing that their patron habits were changing, these librarians sought to stay current and adjust marketing practices to better reflect the digital landscape.

In "Targeted marketing: utilizing and engaging library staff," Keller (2011) focuses on the importance of involving library staff in marketing practices. Keller describes the rebranding and employee participation of Queens Library and its 62 community branches and focuses on how important it was to the success of the campaigns. LikeHafner and Ackers, Keller believes that creating a marketing campaign specifically based on a community's wants and needs is essential to successful digital strategies. When discussing the rebranding of the Queens Library community, Keller comments that "even our central library … looks more like the United Nations than an administrative office. Therein was the creative solution: We developed an advertising campaign based on our employees" (Keller, 2011, p. 33).

He details the overwhelming success of involving employees in the digital branding of the Queens Library community, and found that employee satisfaction was tremendously improved because they felt that they were also an integral part of the community (Keller, 2011). By including the staff in online advertisements and digital campaigns, it created a sense of accessibility not often found in traditional brand marketing strategies. Patrons enjoyed recognizing "their" staff on flyers and banner ads and it enforced the notion that Queens is a community center, with real people and real resources.

While there are many articles outlining the importance of having a digital presence, there is often some concern as to how a library should create one. For example, in an article by Sarah Clark (2009), the author comments that, Many librarians have focused on marketing as a solution to the perceived irrelevance of the library…While there is much pressure to discuss the library in economic terms, this model of discussion is not only incomplete but also undermines the library's democratic underpinnings. (p. 97)

Clark believes that marketing a library goes against what the establishment truly stands for: free public access to knowledge. The author believes that once marketing strategies and digital campaigns are introduced, important funds that would have otherwise supported library related functions will be dumped into marketing strategies that aren't necessarily helping the community. In this way, Clark argues that pushing these public institutions toward a more business-like, results-driven approach would be detrimental to the establishment as a whole. Instead Clark (2009) proposes, "the solution for the future of the library does not lie in marketing, but in advocacy" (p. 97). Advocacy, in Clark's opinion, is a way to promote a library without threatening the integrity of the institution.

Clark's article outlines five ways of advocating libraries: create a message, share the message, reflect the educational and democratic mission in library services and collections, form meaningful partnerships, and make the library part of the community (Clark, 2009, pp. 97—98). Clark believes that by doing this, patrons will develop a sense of responsibility to support the library and feel a kinship toward the establishment as a whole. In her opinion, advocating not only what a library offers, but also why it offers it, creates a more cohesive reason on why a resident should use it and thus offers a more valuable method of "marketing".

Technology has become a pervasive companion in today's world, and so it can be easy for patrons to forget they have access to exceptional resources and active communities in a physical space. Libraries have long been the stoic pillar of research, scholarship, and community but the digital age has threatened the relevance of their existence. Digital marketing is a technique libraries can use to in order to better connect with their audience. As evidenced in this paper, there are dozens of inexpensive and meaningful ways to promote and share the important work that all libraries engage in. It's up to librarians to welcome these new and exciting opportunities.

References

Ashcroft, L. (2010). Marketing strategies for visibility. *Journal of Librarianship and Information Science*, 42, 89—96.

Clark, S. (2009). Marketing the library? Why librarians should focus on stewardship and advoca-

cy. *Progressive librarian*, (33), 93—100.

Cole, K., Graves, T., &.Cipkowski, P. (2010). Marketing the library in a digital world. *Serials Librarian*, 58(1—4), 182—187. .

Germano, M. (2010). Narrative-based library marketing. *The Bottom Line*, 23(1), 5—17.

Gupta, D. (2016). Everything is marketing: an analysis of functional relationships of marketing and libraries. *DESIDOC Journal of Library & Information Technology*, 36(3), 126—130.

Hafner, A. W., & Akers, S. G. (2011). Building the library's brand using taglines or logos. *Public Libraries*, 50(1), 34—37.

Halevi, G., & O'Hanlon, R. (2016). Creating content marketing for libraries. *Journal of the Medical Library Association*, 104(4), 342—345.

Jennings, E., &.Tvaruzka, K. (2010). Quick and dirty library promotions that really work. *Journal of library innovation*, 1(2), 6—14.

Keller, J. (2011). Targeted marketing: utilizing and engaging library staff. *Public Libraries*, 50(1), 30—33.

Russo, L. (2017). Mastering marketing. *Library Journal*, 142(4), 46—48.

Sen, B. (2010). Theory, research and practice in library management. *Library management*, 31(4), 344—353.

Author Bio

Dana Haugh is the Web Services Librarian at Stony Brook University Libraries where she leads the design and development of the library's evolving web presences. Her research interests include web design & development, library outreach & marketing, information literacy, and researcher empowerment. She holds an MLS from Queens College and a BA in English from Stony Brook University.