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## **A Client-centred Marketing Approach For Your Library**

### **Abstract**

This paper will argue that the most important step to marketing your library is an in-depth knowledge of your clientele, the target market for your library's resources and services. I will discuss what this concept means and how to obtain that knowledge. In an academic library, the clients are generally students, faculty, administration, alumni and community. In relation to this, there are different types of promotional materials that are best for each type of clientele.

### **Introduction**

According to Crawford and Gorma (1995), "Libraries exist to acquire, give access to, and safeguard carriers of knowledge and information in all forms and to provide instruction and assistance in the use of the collections to which their users have access" (3). However, that is not just what libraries are; they are also social places and can be "centers of their communities, campuses, and institutions" (Crawford & Gorma, 1995, p. 118). Since libraries do so much, they really are important to any community. This is especially true of academic libraries; however, the view above of a library is changing for students.

Many academic librarians have probably heard their students say that they do not use the library for books; most students today use the internet to find their resources for homework assignments. Sometimes, it takes the internet to be down before they think about coming into the doors of a library for a book. A lot of students today use the library for more of a socializing place, to gain access to the computer or for quiet or group study space. This is a vast difference from libraries of the past; it used to be that reference librarians could only find the answers their students were looking for with books.

Today's society refers to our students as "net gen" students; since they are so fluent with the internet and technology, it is no surprise that the internet is a defining characteristic of this generation. These students are different from students of other generations, for instance, "Net Gener students are not just comfortable working together in groups, they may prefer it" (Gibbons, 2007, p. 16). Gibbons also believes that these students are skilled at multi-tasking and both "digitally and visually literate" (Gibbons, 2007, p. 17). Librarians need to keep these concepts in mind when deciding on how to deliver their collection and services. This also has implications for marketing strategies, which I will discuss further later on.

Academic libraries have seen changes in the delivery of their collections and services and this is likely a link to today's users. Crawford and Gorma state that, "library users want resources delivered in a manner that suits their needs and wishes" (Crawford & Gorma, 1995, p. 119). One major change is in the reference interview. As I work in Alberta, I can only speak knowledgeably about libraries in

Alberta and I have found that most libraries in Alberta are now providing services where our students can contact librarians via Meebo (an online messaging system), text message, and even Skype (an online video messaging system). Our Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) has also changed to meet the needs of our “Net Gen” student. OPACs now have the look and feel of websites like Amazon’s homepage, for example. Along these lines, many libraries including Canadian University College are changing over to using WorldCat Local. This service allows users to view information on material from many different sources: the library’s catalogue; any consortium a library subscribes to; worldcat.org; as well as Amazon.com and other online stores. According to the creators of WorldCat Local, the benefit of this service is that “To your Web-savvy patrons, WorldCat Local looks like part of your library’s online experience and feels like other search and social sites they use regularly” (<http://www.oclc.org/worldcatlocal/features/default.htm>). Therefore, this allows your users to easily access your library holdings and find the necessary information they require for their project.

A further change that has been seen in both the public and private sector is that libraries are now using fan and group pages on Facebook as well as updating with Tweets on Twitter. These sites have two functions; not only do they show what the library has to offer, but because of this, they can be used for marketing. Linking back to what Crawford and Gorma stated about users wanting resources in a manner that suits their needs, this has huge implications for library marketing.

This connects directly to another change seen over the years in libraries; this need for marketing library services and collections. Islam (2009) states, “Marketing of information products and services is an integral part of library administration, especially as a means for improving user satisfaction and promoting the use of services by current and potential users” (p. 132). Adventist College and University libraries also need to be marketing their library services and collections. While our libraries offer a wider variety of material related specifically towards our theology degrees, it is becoming easier to access all types of material from many different sources.

Islam goes on to explain in his article that, “with the mushrooming of new information providers such as cyber cafes, megabookstores, online book dealers, the Internet community consultants and individual customers, libraries, for example, cannot continue to assume that they are the only sources of information that people will consult.” (p. 25) Therefore, if we are to compete with other information providers we need to market library services and collections to our users. In order to be able to market our collections and services, libraries need to understand their clientele, and how best to market to each group of users.

### **Understanding users of an academic library**

According to Woodward (2009), “developing a practical strategy to identify and communicate with your customers must be at the center of any effective marketing plan” (p. 135). Therefore, the first and most important step in marketing that an academic library must take is to know who its clientele are. In an academic library the clientele are students, faculty, administration, alumni and the community.

Both current and prospective students are an important group. Current students need the materials we provide to complete their assignments so it is important for the librarians to know what the students are being taught in their classes. This can be done through several different ways: the academic calendar; syllabi; conversations with the professors themselves; and sitting on academic committees. Other uses of the library are for a quiet place to study; a room for a group study session; or for presentation preparation. Prospective students need to know about these above services to achieve their future academic goals. Students also make appointments with a librarian for guided research help.

Faculty use the library to find resources for teaching and research and may bring these resources to show their students in certain classes. Faculty may contact librarians to request materials that they would like to see added to the collection in support of their curriculum. These materials may be compiled into subject guides for classes in order to help aid students in their research. What is turning into a major trend in academic libraries is faculty understanding that librarians are also instructors. As a result, faculty members tend to call on the instruction of a librarian when teaching about research.

Alumni and community members also use the academic library. Depending on where your library is located this may not occur on a regular basis. Alumni usually have access to all materials in the library and this may be helpful if their field of work requires them to do research. Keeping in contact with the alumni group is a good idea when it is necessary to ask for donations to the library. An alumnus is more likely to donate if that individual knows what the library currently offers and wants to be able to offer. Community members also use the academic library for research or to read the newspapers and journals.

Administration also is an important part of the client base for a library. Not only will they use the library for research, but it is important for the librarians to keep in close contact with the administration if the library requires funding for projects. The administrators also need to be able to promote the importance of the library for the institution's board as well as to the faculty. Sharing the knowledge of what your library can offer a prospective faculty member is also important to an administrator during the interviewing process.

A key to knowing your clientele in depth is to survey your users. The surveys should cover questions on what the library is currently offering and if the user believes the products are meeting their needs. The users should also be asked what they would like to see included in the library. It is also important to have a survey in which clientele can describe to the librarians what they believe that the library can offer to them.

Librarians should market to all groups of clientele. However, students tend to receive the most marketing activity of an academic library, because they are the largest user group of the library and its resources. However, as Hallmark et. al. (2007) explains that, "academic libraries must reconsider how they are viewed by students and faculty to ensure they remain a competitive and valued resource" (p. 92). Therefore, it is important to know these client groups and understand what they need from the library, which leads into understanding the library's products.

## **Understanding products of an academic library**

Once a library understands who its clientele are the library then needs to understand its products. The library needs to understand their products in association with understanding their clients. Products of a library are different for each type of clientele within an academic library setting. This statement supports the notion that knowing your clientele in-depth is the most important step of marketing. The world today is filled with many forms of advertising and each form is always advertising a product. So what does the library have in terms of product to advertise? Mathews (2009) notes that, "the most identifiable item that a library offers is its collection: books and periodicals are our bread and butter" (p. 32). Understanding a library's products is necessary in order to know what needs to be promoted to the library's clientele.

One of the best ways to decide what your products are in an academic library is to look at it from the viewpoint of your clientele. The descriptions of the different types of products that follow are based on my observations from being both a worker and patron in various academic libraries. The first group to look at is your largest group, which in the case of an academic library are the students. The major uses of a library from a student viewpoint are: photocopying; printing; using computers; faxing; and finding research materials including books and journals (both online and in print); and using multimedia resources such as DVDs and audio CDs. In relation to the space of the library as a product, Mathews (2009) states that, "the library serves as a pit stop, a refuelling station before returning to the business of the day" (p. 10). Therefore, one could say that the library's quiet study area is also a product of the library. The library also provides group study rooms. Though students may not think of them as products the materials prepared such as citation guides and subject guides are also that they can use. According to Mathews (2009), "Technology plays a larger role in higher education, and libraries serve this need by offering rentals of laptops, cameras, digital voice recorders, camcorders, and other multimedia equipment" (p. 34). As a result this type of service is also a product of the library.

For faculty there are many similarities in products as with the students. However, they most likely will not need to use the library for photocopying, printing, computer usage or faxing as their office should provide those items. On the other hand, a faculty member may need to book a room for a presenter to present to their class when there are no other classrooms available. Most libraries have rooms big enough to accommodate this. Another product for a faculty member is the expert research instruction that a librarian can provide to the students. The faculty can also call on a librarian to provide orientation to students. Faculty can also make use of subject guides as another way to provide their students with help in their research.

The remaining clientele likely do not have specific products directly related to them. They come to the library to use the material mainly. Administration is commonly specifically interested in the numbers of material in the library and the number of individuals who use the library.

There are products that are more related to the operations of the library and thus, are linked to all of the user groups. As Matthews (2009) explains these are, “circulation handles user accounts, grants privileges, and issues materials; Interlibrary Loan ensures that documents are delivered; Systems makes sure that the computers stay online” (p. 34).

## **Methods of Marketing**

Based on my understanding of marketing methods, I would place marketing into three types of categories: print, online, and audio-visual. Within the print section these are many of the popular methods of marketing: a report on statistics, brochure, flyer, banner, bookmark, stickers, notepads, business cards, post cards, and advertisement in a magazine and/or newspaper. Each type of print advertising works for a different set of clientele. Therefore, one needs to pick the best option to get their message across. (See below for what I believe are the best methods for each clientele group.)

Different methods of online marketing are: websites, blogs, social networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter, YouTube videos, Google Alerts, pod casts, and banner ads. Circle (2009), notes in her article that there are certain marketing trends librarians should be paying attention to. A major advantage to most of these is that they are free. The first trend that she mentions is using Twitter to market the library stating that through Twitter, “you can speak directly to your customers” (Circle, 2009, p. 26). This will help know who is loyal to your library by those that “follow the library on Twitter, these are your uber-advocates, and they are your new best friends” (Circle, 2009, p. 26). Another form of spreading the word about your library according to Circle (2009) is to sign up for Google Alerts (<http://www.google.com/alerts>). Google Alerts allows you to receive daily emails of what is being said over the internet about your library. Circle (2009) uses this as, “an easy way to gauge public reaction and head off issues before they blow up” (p. 26). Video marketing is another trend that Circle (2009) suggests. It is very easy for a library to videotape a 30-second clip advertising a service offered. Once the clip has been videotaped it can then be uploaded to YouTube. Students often go to YouTube for help using a product it would be great if we could reach them this way as well. If an individual really loves a video there are ways to post a link directly to Social Networking tools such as Facebook and Twitter.

The audio-visual category can include some of the same methods from the online category. For instance YouTube videos and podcasts would fall under this category. Other methods include: word of mouth, radio advertisements, television advertisements and television news reports.

## **Choosing marketing methods to meet each user group**

Once an academic library establishes their client base, their products and their potential marketing methods, the next challenge is to figure out how to combine all three. According to Konata, (Fall 2009), “The first step in transforming the image and perception in a consumer’s head is to find out what’s the current perception held by the user and attributes they think the library has” (p. 20). This can be done through the surveys mentioned earlier. When this is established, a librarian can then go about choosing the best method of marketing.

A literature search has resulted in finding studies that talked about the concept of marketing. But there are few recent research papers that talk specifically about what the best method of marketing would be for an academic library's client base. Nawe (2005) conducted a study in Africa to find out if librarians marketed their services and what method of marketing they choose to market their services. Thirty-five individuals responded and these were their choices for marketing methods. The following is a list of methods used from greatest to least in popularity: library notice boards (100%), current awareness services (91.4%), circulars (91.4%), brochures (85%), exhibitions (65.7%), other notice boards (57.2%), website (20%), other (which Nawe does not specify, 14.3%), newsletters (8.6%), and mass media (2.9%). Brewerton (2003) discussed ways that Oxford Brookes University Library chose to use to market their new website. The library chose the following methods: library newsletters; targeted communications, electronic publications, and informal networks. Neither of these two papers discusses the most recent methods of marketing that the "net gen" student would look at; for example, Facebook and Twitter. Therefore, the following is a proposal of how I believe marketing in the library should be done, including the collection of data to show success.

The best method for marketing to the administration of a university is with statistics which can be presented in a report with many charts and graphs. I believe that showing numbers visually has a greater impact than just writing the number in a paragraph. Numbers such as gate count (the number of people that walk in the library), hourly head count, total number of books/journals, number of checkouts and the number of books in each section of the collection are what I refer to as statistics in this instance and they all tell a different story. An hourly head count is good when trying to justify the hours your library should be open or the need for more staff at a certain time. The total number of books/journals in your library shows how you are using your budget. The number of checkouts shows how often the books are actually being used from the library. The number of books in each section of the collection will show what section should be focused on for purchasing within that year's budget. Administration would also be interested in statistics from the usage of the library's website and online subject guides. The use of Facebook, Twitter and a blog can also be tracked. These kinds of statistics are important as a means of tracking our success to reach the "net gen" student.

With so many products available in the library for students, the question becomes what to market and why. One suggestion comes from Matthews (2009) who suggests that, "each item can be promoted independently, but by strategically bundling items together we can focus on serving specific needs at specific times, increasing awareness, and ultimately making the library more relevant to users" (p. 32). An example of this could be to market available study space and library hours during an exam period. These two products would both be necessary for students to know independently, but will especially meet students' needs at this specific time. I would also recommend bundling methods of marketing in order to get the attention of the students. For instance, I would use both Twitter and Facebook to advertise library services, since some students may use one or the other, but may also use both at the same time. An option for print marketing could be to use brochures and flyers to give more information about any of the library's services. The student clientele is likely the strongest group that would be interested in audio-visual marketing methods. As mentioned earlier, this often goes hand-in-hand with online methods; consider making a YouTube video about study spaces and posting it onto your library's Twitter page or blog. Twitter will show an individual how many people are

following their tweets. This would be a good way to show the success of the use of Twitter. A high number of the followers equal a success of reaching your clientele. YouTube also provides you with a number of times your video is being viewed. Facebook like Twitter allows you to see how many people join your group. Another way to evaluate these services would be to conduct a survey to find out how users came across the information you ask them about.

In addition to this, I believe that new students need additional attention. Rhoades (2008) states it best; “new student orientations provide an ideal opportunity to be more innovative and proactive in creating first impressions of library resources and services” (p. 1). In a new student orientation, you could combine print marketing, such as giving out flyers and show students your library’s homepage, and mention the library’s online marketing strategies as well. Matthews (2009) argues that “the most effective way to tell someone about the library is face to face” (p. 14) and while I believe that is true for all types of clientele, the library really has an opportunity to do this with new students. Once a new student has gone through the library orientation it would be a good idea to survey the students and discover what they remember. It would also be a good opportunity to find out if there was a better way to provide them with the information they need.

Video-taping portions of different types of library instructional sessions and posting those clips online would be a way to market instructional sessions to faculty. Faculty may also become interested in the creation of a subject guide for their class if they see examples of subject guides already completed. I would also provide faculty with brochures explaining the materials that the library offers. These printed materials should be subject related for each faculty. For example, when providing information on what books and databases we offer to the Science department, I would give examples directly related to the Science fields. The best way to evaluate these methods of marketing to the faculty would be to keep track of the usage of each service. If the numbers increase then the marketing tools used are successful.

A library newsletter can be created to send out to alumni of the academic university. This newspaper can include some of the graphs and charts that are used to show usage statistics for administration. It can also include interviews from librarians about their personal research. Other items that can be included are links to the library's Facebook page, tweet and blog. Alumni would also be interested in the visions for the future and what is presently being offered to the users. One can say that marketing to alumni is successful, if more donations come in specifically for the library to use the librarians have been successful in their marketing efforts.

Marketing your collection concerns all of your clientele. There are many different ways that this can be done. One way that Canadian University College does this is through highlighting books of interest on a display screen that is located at the circulation desk. CUC also sends out new book lists to the CUC community after a certain number of books have been processed. New books can also be highlighted in a blog or shared on Facebook. CUC will be including these ideas in the near future as this is made easier with WorldCat Local. If a library has ways to keep track of the number of times a book has been checked out it would be the ideal way to see if the marketed books are used more often.

## **Conclusion**

Matthews (2009) states that, “to be user-centered, a library has to be more than just a great channel for academic services; it should provide a rich atmosphere that supports cultural, social leisure, and creative activities as well” (p. 28). Most libraries provide these services already we just need to let our clientele know that they exist. The first step is identifying all of the different client groups and then looking inward to understanding all of your library’s products that you offer these groups. Therefore, we need to talk to those that are in our clientele and learn what they need and want and make sure that we are offering it to them. Once we do that we need to find the right ways to communicate with each specific group about the services and collection we have in our libraries. Marketing has often been defined as a process, which is very true in this case; when marketing academic libraries to individual client groups; it is the process of bringing together the clientele with the library's products. The success of this is based on finding the right method to do so. A successful library that participates in marketing will increase the usage of its current services and collections and may also add to its services and collections. Evaluation methods need to be devised to show the success of these methods. Librarians need to collect data on the success of their marketing attempts and publish the results if we are to advance the field.



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