

# Marketing the library: using technology to increase visibility, impact and reader engagement

Based on a paper presented at the 30th UKSG Conference, Warwick, April 2007

Technological advancements are changing the way people communicate, and methods of teaching, learning and research are becoming more varied and dynamic. The role of the library is central in responding to these changes, and in identifying opportunities for using technology to support the intellectual growth and success of the individuals and institutions that they serve. Fulfilling this role is increasingly requiring librarians to learn and apply marketing skills – understanding user and stakeholder needs, creating awareness and stimulating interest, building loyalty and demonstrating value. Technology is key in supporting effective marketing, and can be used by libraries to increase visibility, to raise levels of information literacy and to deliver a personalized service that anticipates the current and future needs of users.



**MELINDA KENNEWAY**

Director  
TBI Communications

## Technology in context

The impact of technology and Web 2.0 in the scholarly communications environment is a key talking point of the moment. Using technology for marketing is also a much discussed topic within the professional marketing community – a quick Internet search will bring up thousands of web pages, blogs and articles presenting a variety of views on what's hot and what's not. However, it is important to remember that there is nothing fundamentally new about technology. Take the wheel and the book, for instance – two of the greatest examples of life-changing technology in action, which we simply take for granted today.

Technology has always been, and will always be, with us. It is part of the human state to seek constantly to push forward the boundaries of our knowledge and experience. Perhaps one of the biggest impacts that the Internet has had is on the speed with which change can be made to happen. Global communications, coupled with lower barriers to entry into the scholarly communications market, will continue to have a profound effect on the

traditional ways of doing things. Some changes will stick, others will not, but the days of settled business models and secure revenues are well and truly behind us. Organizations that succeed in the future are likely to be those that establish and keep close and loyal relationships with the communities they serve.

## Marketing for libraries

Marketing in the scholarly communications world is really coming of age. The information environment is very cluttered; It is more competitive and there is constant innovation. This is the kind of world where marketing really can make a difference – by helping connect organizations with their customers. This is why marketing is perhaps now more of a critical issue for librarians than it might have been in the past. It is not enough just to be good at what you do anymore. You also have to be adept at communicating this and what that means for your customers.

The two central themes of marketing are:

1. Creating, communicating and delivering value, and
2. Managing customer relationships for the benefit of the customer and organization. These themes have strong overlaps with librarianship, as the role of the librarian shifts from one of being about provision of access to one of adding value to information and improving customers' experience of using that information. Marketing clearly is a skill that librarians should seek to develop.

### Technology for marketing

Technology offers a range of tools for marketing including websites, e-mail, RSS, SMS, blogs and wikis. They can be used alongside more traditional channels (direct mail, conference promotion, etc) to help organizations build awareness, usage, satisfaction and loyalty. Digital as a medium for marketing is likely to dominate over the course of the next decade. There are two key reasons for this:

1. Digital is becoming the predominant channel for accessing content.

A report by OCLC<sup>1</sup> projects continued strong growth in consumption of content through digital channels such as SMS, e-mail and blogs. Communication through these channels far outweighs non-digital channels such as post and inter-library loans. The same report also shows that the amount of digital content available is rapidly rising, with a strong growth in e-articles and other digital resources. Where the information consumer goes, marketing must follow.

2. The digital environment supports highly targeted, measurable campaigns.

The real wonder of technology for marketing is its ability to support the delivery of communications tailored to individual customers. These messages can then be delivered at a time and place to suit that individual, and all for a price that is generally significantly cheaper than more traditional marketing channels such as advertising and direct mail. You can leverage relationships within the community to help them market your services on your behalf and, through the two-way communication that technology supports, it is easier to stay close to customers and to respond swiftly to changing

needs and new opportunities. Finally, it is generally much easier to measure the effectiveness of digital marketing activities, so that organizations can continue to refine what they do to make best use of the resources available to them.

Although new ideas for using technology can sometimes be over-hyped, a recent report from Bluestreak<sup>2</sup> of 1,000 random online users showed that many of the new tools are already widely used. Of people questioned, 88% used text messages and SMS, 71% used message boards and forums, 63% used blogs, 36% used podcasts and 28% used RSS feeds. This makes them all relevant as marketing channels.

Deciding on which of these tools to use in marketing the library, and how to use them, depends on what you want to achieve, of course. However, there are four clear areas of opportunity that are likely to be generally applicable:

- the library brand in the digital environment: strengthening the library's online presence and brand
- personalization and pinpoint marketing: delivering personalized communications
- mobile marketing: marketing to users in their own time and space
- community marketing: helping build loyalty and create communities to advocate the library services.

#### *The library brand in the digital environment: strengthening the library's online presence and brand*

Libraries are now working in a much more competitive environment. A number of studies imply that users are visiting the physical library less and less, searching for information online and starting with a general search engine rather than the library website. A report by OCLC<sup>3</sup> on the library brand also discovered that people associate libraries very strongly with books, in a rather fond, nostalgic way. There is clearly work to be done to persuade people of the value of the library service and its ongoing relevance, which means overturning some outdated perceptions. This is a problem that needs tackling both at the macro level (what is a library and what value does it offer?) and the micro level (making sure the library service is visible however and wherever it is accessed and used).

If 'books' alone is not the big idea for the library any more, what is? This is not particularly a

technology issue, although using technology in engaging and imaginative ways for marketing the library can help overturn old and outdated ideas of what the library is. However, it is a really important question to address – both for individual providers of the service but also for the profession.

The public library community faces much the same question, and there have been a number of initiatives designed to overturn outdated perceptions and create a new idea for the public library beyond books (not that there is anything bad about 'books' per se – but a library does have a lot more to offer). An example is the Public Library at Tower Hamlets in London. They addressed the problem of declining visitor numbers by relaunching as the Idea Store, complete with a new website and physical space that offered users a much more ambitious idea of what the library was and had to offer. This initiative was a fantastic success, with reports of membership being substantially up after the first year, bucking national trends. Another interesting initiative from the public library community is the 'Love your Library' campaign. It is a national campaign supported by publishers, government and libraries, amongst others. The campaign uses advertising and public relations to overturn outdated attitudes and encourage usage by local communities.

Combining resources like this is, in my opinion, the best way to bring about really significant shifts in attitudes. This is clearly something the American Library Association recognizes. They have had their national library marketing campaign – '@ your library' – in place for several years now. It is these kinds of initiatives that are most likely to be successful and it is critical that momentum is maintained. However, individually libraries can still do great things to communicate a bigger and more engaging idea about the library service. From Manchester Metropolitan's award winning 'get the knowledge' campaign through to the Open University's experimental Digilabs – individual libraries are also making great strides in overcoming obsolete perceptions about the academic and research library.

Libraries can also make a difference individually by addressing brand at the micro level – that is, ensuring that however and wherever the library service is accessed, it is clear that the library provides it. Controlling brand in the web environment is difficult to do. People can arrive at the content the library provides at a very deep level.

They rarely work their way down through the library portal. So it is important that libraries clearly badge their service, deep into the content for which access is provided, making use of third-party branding tools (such as those provided by ISI Web of Knowledge and ScienceDirect) where they are available. The website design and structure provided as a launch-pad into the library service also needs attention, to be sure that it creates an experience for the users that reflects the way you want them to feel about the library.

#### *Personalization and pinpoint marketing: delivering personalized communications*

Personalization is not just for products and services; it is also important, perhaps more so, in marketing. As we get increasingly bombarded with marketing messages, we increasingly filter out those that are not relevant. The modern marketing professional's job is to make communications relevant and useful.

The first principle of personalized marketing is segmentation. That is the idea that not all audiences have the same needs, or respond to the same messages. Libraries serve large and diverse customer groups, and technology can be used to deliver marketing tailored to these different groups. Faculty and students are one obvious division but the reality is that there are many fine divisions. Increasingly, there is a move towards using attitudes and behaviour patterns for segmentation. For example, you might identify 'technophobes' as a group to work with to increase their confidence in using technology – but that group is likely to cross over staff and students.

When you use technology to take this approach to its full potential you are moving towards the idea of pinpoint marketing; that is, delivering the right message to the right person at the right place and time. This is particularly successful when communications with customers and other stakeholders are developed as a holistic whole, rather than a series of individual transactions (customer relationship management: CRM). This can all start to get very complicated, but there is software available to help do this and, unlike in the '90s, when CRM systems were being sold for huge amounts of money, the systems you can buy now are much more affordable, even for small organizations.

You can deliver personalized messages to some degree without this kind of software though, and

the Open University library provides a good example. They have set up screen savers that can be used to deliver service and marketing messages. It is segmented for key groups so that staff, students and alumni can be sent different messages. It is a great tool for helping distributed groups (a particular issue for the Open University) to feel part of a community, which in turn can build loyalty to and awareness and usage of the library service.

*Mobile marketing: marketing to users in their own time and space*

Back at the end of the 20th century, the library generally sat at the physical heart of the university, drawing people in through its doors to access its repository of knowledge. The world today is a much more complicated place, with users in a more distributed environment, requiring libraries to communicate with customers in new spaces.

One key element of this is mobile marketing. There is likely to be continued and significant growth in people using personal digital assistants (PDAs) and other mobile devices to access information over the next few years. Marketing through mobile devices is already a huge business in the commercial world – over 100 million advertising messages are sent every month in Europe alone. It is not surprising that mobile marketing is taking off. There are over 2 million mobile users worldwide – that's double the number of Internet users, so marketing through mobile devices can potentially reach a much larger audience.

This kind of marketing is likely to become more and more mainstream over the next few years. In the UK, one of the major TV broadcasting stations (ITV) has recently announced that it will roll out mobile marketing during 2007. In Japan this technology is already one step ahead, with wide use of QR codes (a kind of two-dimensional bar-code) on posters, products and other marketing materials, which simply require you to take a picture of the code with your phone. In return, you are sent detailed further information and/or links to websites. Perhaps on a slightly more controversial note, there is also increasing interest in using radio frequency identification (RFID) for marketing purposes. An early trial of this technology in Seattle has been successful and is now being extended to Chicago. In this trial people were invited to buy an RFID tag (called an Omni tag) on which they stored personal information. They could then visit

one of six 'reader stations' located across Seattle, at which they could present their tag to be provided with personalized offers based on their location and interest.

An example of this technology in a library context might be the provision of RFID tags to students and the availability of 'library reader booths' across campus, from which they could download assignments and reading material direct to their mobiles. Several libraries are already using mobile communications to notify students of overdue books, and podcasts (e.g. library induction/tour) are widely available. Duke University have taken this further by issuing all their students with i-pods. The library can obviously arrange to get podcasts of library tours and other promotional services uploaded to these i-pods. But the real opportunity will come if Duke switches to Apple i-phones when they become available this summer, at which point the library would be able to send regular, tailored communications.

*Community marketing: helping build loyalty and create communities to advocate the library services*

Community marketing is attracting great interest at the moment and is particularly well supported by technology. This idea for marketing is based on encouraging users to advocate an organization's products and services to others. Success creates a grid pattern where individuals pass on marketing messages to friends and colleagues who then continue the process with others. Sometimes this is called 'viral' or 'word of mouth' marketing, and it is generally achieved through e-mail or marketing through social networking websites such as YouTube and MySpace. This kind of marketing requires a real subtlety of touch and respect for people's privacy and social space. It only ever works if what you are promoting adds value to the community and is also communicated in a way that matches the spirit of the community.

Marketing through e-mail is an everyday event now, and has all the benefits of measurability and low cost, which are important in marketing library services. Community marketing through e-mail can be very powerful – give a few influential people the right message and they have the potential to distribute this on to a large audience, and your message gains value as it comes from a trusted friend or colleague. One of the best known examples of e-mail viral marketing came from Google when they launched their new e-mail

service, GMail. This was launched into a crowded market where Yahoo and Hotmail already offered free services. Google did not spend any money marketing the service by conventional means; instead, they simply e-mailed invitations to join the service to a few well-connected power users. These power users were given a small number of invitations to send out for others to get a free account. By creating scarcity they drove up demand to the point where people were bidding on ebay for a GMail account, when they could get much the same thing from Hotmail or Yahoo already!

Marketing through online social networks has been very successful for entertainment services such as music and films. Viral videos on YouTube have also worked for some organizations. One of the most famous of these came from Dove – a company which sells beauty products and which is currently promoting a ‘campaign for real beauty’. They posted a short video to YouTube showing the transformation of a woman into the final made-up and digitally altered image that appeared on a poster. This video generated over 1.7 million viewers and drove more traffic to the campaign’s target site than their advertising during the SuperBowl.

Some libraries are already experimenting with this kind of marketing. The McCracken County Public Library in Kentucky has posted a short video promoting library events to YouTube with some 379 views and a five-star rating – small numbers perhaps, but the beginning of engaging with their community in a new space. On the other hand, the ‘March of the Librarians’ video posted to YouTube (a mock documentary based on the ‘March of the Penguins’ film taken from video footage at last year’s ALA meeting) has attracted over 190,000 views. This has clearly been put together in a way that would appeal to the YouTube audience; however, while it is entertaining, it does not do much to move forward people’s attitudes about librarians! A more productive approach might be to provide short videos on important topics that can at the same time be made entertaining. For example, plagiarism is obviously an important issue today, and some librarians are taking a lead in helping educate students about this. Imperial College Library has produced a DVD on this – it is entertaining, with a serious message, and has proved very popular with students. Perhaps a shortened version of this DVD could be

made and posted to YouTube. The message can reach a much larger audience that way, and it raises the profile of Imperial as taking a lead in this area, and in having a fun attitude to serious issues that might attract future students to study at the University.

Another interesting trend is marketing in virtual worlds, such as Second Life. You can already buy virtual billboard advertising in Google Earth and Microsoft’s Virtual World. Second Life is full of organizations promoting their products and services to its 5.8 million ‘inhabitants’. If you think this is all too far-fetched for a library then you might be surprised to hear that there is a significant library presence in Second Life, including a whole virtual digital library 2.0 on Information Island. Talis and the Alliance Library System announced just a few months ago the launch of Cybrary City in Second Life, where libraries can take space to showcase their digital resources. Publishers are also experimenting in this environment, with Nature Publishing Group having established ‘Second Nature’. Universities are also exploring leasing space to experiment with it as a learning environment.

It is easy to dismiss this as hype, or to bewail the social implications of this kind of environment. However, I think to do so would be a mistake. This kind of use of technology represents one of the first big steps away from the ‘browser’ as the delivery mechanism for content, and offers a future where visualization becomes a key tool for exploring and sharing knowledge. Second Life itself may be a passing fad, but the use of technology in this way to enable people to visualize, interact with and explore information will – I believe – be a huge trend in the future. It also presents an exciting environment within which to market.

Perhaps community marketing for libraries is more likely to lie within the community sites that are being developed by universities and libraries themselves, which may not preclude the involvement of people from outside the university. There are predictions that there will be a trend towards a breakdown of large, general networks into smaller groups with niche interests, and a growing number of professionals as well as social communities. Virtual Learning Environments and Virtual Research Environments will be natural places for marketing the library service. The kind of community and communication tools that are generally available in these environments, such as wikis, blogs, RSS,

tagging and bookmark sharing, can also be used to support conversational marketing activities – helping librarians to engage constantly with their audiences to learn about changing needs, as well as giving users marketing information to help them get more value from the services that are provided. Satisfied users of the library service are then also able to use these tools to share their enthusiasm with friends and colleagues.

### Marketing in context

Ultimately, good marketing is the same as good librarianship. It is about adding value, communicating this, and building strong relationships with customers. Changing technologies will continue to present new marketing opportunities, and when considering whether any of these channels are appropriate for marketing the library service I suggest you ask yourself the following questions:

1. Are your users there?
2. Do you have something to offer the community?
3. Does it help you meet a marketing objective?

It is important to experiment, but equally important to keep focused on how these channels and techniques support your marketing strategy. Technology in marketing is a means to an end, not a goal in itself.

### References

1. OCLC, *Information Format Trends: Content not Containers*, OCLC 2004. Available at <http://www.oclc.org/reports/2004format.htm>
2. *Emerging Digital Channels: Consumer Adoption, Attitudes and Behavior*, Bluestreak, October 2006. Available at <http://www.bluestreak.com/happenings/Press%20Releases/2006-1031.html>
3. OCLC, *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*, OCLC December 2005. Available at <http://www.oclc.org/reports/2005perceptions.htm>

Article © Melinda Kenneway

---

■ **Melinda Kenneway**  
**Director**  
**TBI Communications**  
**62a Church Road**  
**Wheatley**  
**Oxford, OX33 1LZ**  
**UK**  
**Tel: +44 (0)1865 875896**  
**Fax: +44 (0)1865 876346**  
**Web: [www.tbicommunications.com](http://www.tbicommunications.com)**  
**E-mail: [melinda.kenneway@tbicommunications.com](mailto:melinda.kenneway@tbicommunications.com)**

---

To view the original copy of this article, published in *Serials*, the journal of the UKSG, click here:

<http://serials.uksg.org/openurl.asp?genre=article&issn=0953-0460&volume=20&issue=2&spage=92>

For a link to the table of contents for the issue of *Serials* in which this article first appeared, click here:

<http://serials.uksg.org/openurl.asp?genre=issue&issn=0953-0460&volume=20&issue=2>