

Creating a Marketing Plan with a Marketing Team of One

Carrie Girton

Miami University Hamilton

Abstract: For librarians with little or no marketing experience, marketing plans can be daunting and overwhelming. However, they are not as difficult as they may seem. This article describes how the author created a marketing plan for a small academic library based on the structured, 5-part process, based on Kathy Dempsey's 2009 book, *The Accidental Library Marketer*.

Keywords: marketing, marketing plans, academic libraries

Introduction

Many librarians must figure things out as they go when they are given more marketing-related duties and become increasingly involved in the marketing efforts of their libraries (Dempsey, 2009). Embarking on new responsibilities, especially with little or no experience in the area, can feel overwhelming, but a marketing plan can help by managing and organizing the marketing efforts for the library. This, at least, was the experience of this author, who developed a plan for Miami University Libraries, a small, regional campus library with very little previous marketing experience and no marketing team.

The first step the author took was to conduct research and gather as much information as possible about marketing plans. There are many valuable resources that can guide one through the process of creating a plan. Articles and books, both library-related and business-focused, provide information about what should be included, as well as general advice. The most valuable piece of information the author gleaned from the research was that it was going to be much easier than they originally thought!

A marketing plan is a document that helps guide the library's marketing efforts and, among its most important functions, helps determine what to promote and specifies its target audience. Marketing plans "...should address the target market(s), who will be doing the marketing, what can be marketed, the nature of the marketing activities, what should be included in the marketing activities, assessment of each activity's effectiveness, and budget considerations" (Smith, 2011, p. 335). They serve as a guide and give direction to marketing endeavors. They also ensure that marketing efforts stay in line with the library's strategic plan and mission. Dempsey (2009) suggests that,

marketing plans should always be written after the strategic plan and should spell out the major goals you want to reach and actions for getting you there. While you'll have one major plan, you'll probably end up with many smaller sub-plans that detail individual projects. (p. 162)

Pearson (2014) describes them in a non-marketing way, making it easier for beginners to understand them by saying,

A good plan is like a good story: it will have a beginning, a middle and an end. The beginning should state the goals of the plan. What are we trying to achieve? The middle will state the method of the plan. How are we going to achieve our goals? And the end will state how we are going to measure that we have achieved our goals. (p. 92)

To the non-marketer, it may appear that a plan needs to be an elaborate, detailed, and lengthy document. However, according to Jantsch (2009), "Your marketing plan should be a simple (in some cases, one-page) document that specifically answers who you are, what you do, who needs what you do and how you plan to attract their attention" (p. 98). Westwood (2013) reiterates this point by saying, "The written plan should only contain the key information that needs to be communicated – it should be clear and concise, and excessive or irrelevant detail should be excluded" (p. 112). If too much detail is specified, then it begins to move away from its intended purpose of being a guide. "A written marketing plan is the backdrop against which operational decisions are taken. Consequently, too much detail should be avoided. Its major function is to determine where the company is, where it wants to go and how it can get there" (McDonald & Wilson, 2011, p. 48).

Because this was the author's first attempt, it was decided to follow the five steps of creating a marketing plan, as outlined in Kathy Dempsey's 2009 book, *The Accidental Library Marketer*:

choose and describe your target market; describe the services you offer for this group, in terms that really attract customers; identify your competition and how you can overcome it; pick a few promotional strategies that will reach your chosen target; and establish measurable goals. (Dempsey, 2009, p. 164)

Additionally, before writing a plan, librarians will need to gather certain information. This information includes "statistics and trends related to your community/campus, your product/service, your chosen target market, and competitive alternatives to your product/service" (Fisher, Pride, & Miller, 2005, p. 12). While not all the information will necessarily be included in the final version, it will play an important role in the planning process.

As with many libraries, Miami University Libraries has many target audiences and each one of those groups has sub-groups within it, all with varying needs. Being aware of these groups and their needs enable librarians to better ascertain the services and that would be most useful to actual users, and to determine the most effective ways to communicate and market in a targeted way. For each user group or subgroup, demographic details may aid in determining the most impactful type and venue of marketing to that group. For example, demographic data for

the student population on campus is included in the notes that accompany Miami University Libraries' marketing plan.

For the second step of creating a marketing plan, the library listed all the services and resources and listed the groups that utilized and/or benefited from the services the library offered. The marketing plan should provide a service description for each of these services and, according to Fisher, Pride, and Miller (2006), this description "...states what the service is, for whom the service is intended, and what benefit the service offers the user" (p. 30). This description will give clear guidance as to who is best served by this service, and might spark some creative ideas on how to market this service. As part of this step, the author modified an activity that Kurnit and Lance (2009) describe in their book, which prompts each library staff member to think about the library and library staff and list five words that uniquely describe the library and staff as well as at least three strengths of the library as a whole (p. 119). While there was some overlap in the answers from the staff, there were also some unique strengths and descriptions. This activity allowed the marketer to view her library and its services through different perspectives and gain some insight about services and strengths that should be highlighted in marketing endeavors.

The next step, determining who the direct competition is, might be difficult depending on the type of library. For this academic library, the most direct competition for checking out books or researching in databases might be the local public library. However, public libraries often do not have the breadth or depth of database options or scholarly books and textbooks that college students need. Competitors for space similar to the library's could include other locations on campus that foster studying or working in groups, or local coffee shops or bookstores that offer those same environments. Marketing pieces could highlight the benefits of utilizing the library and its resources over one of the other alternatives.

The next step was to determine all of the venues and media through which the library staff was already marketing resources and services and then map out which user groups each of those platforms reached. The author discovered that the current marketing endeavors are already covering all of the libraries' market groups.

The last step is to create measurable goals or objectives—both long- and short-term. Westwood (2013) advises that "marketing objectives should always be SMART: specific, measurable, achievable, realistic, and time-bound" (p. 36). This is the part that begins to articulate more specific details. As explained by Kurnit and Lance (2009), goals are important in helping determine whether the current efforts are effective (p. 163), and provide an opportunity to describe the desired end result—what success will look like (p. 204). The goals listed will give librarians specific direction and will guide their decisions about marketing efforts.

In order to manage these objectives, the author created a calendar to outline and schedule when to promote each particular service or resource. It also served as a visual aid to help manage marketing activities. They referred to the list of services to market, considered at what point in the semester it made the most sense to advertise each one, and then wrote that service on the calendar in the week or day that service should be promoted. Some items were on the calendar multiple times. For example, most professors on campus assign research assignments to be due towards the middle of the semester and towards the end of the

semester. So, during the weeks that many students are working on the research for those assignments, marketing pieces highlighted research consultation services and reminded students that the libraries' online resources are available 24/7, both on- and off-campus.

While executing the marketing plan, the author made notes along the way of things that worked really well and things that could be improved. As with all planning, it is important to periodically evaluate the plan, assess the effectiveness of the marketing efforts, and check to make sure marketing efforts are on track with the outlined goals. As Fisher et al. (2006) explain,

Planning, both strategic and marketing, is a cyclical activity. Plans that are made are executed. The strategies, tactics, and outcomes are monitored and evaluated. Lessons learned about the target market, the environment, and the marketing mix are fed back to be used in the next planning cycle. ... As you implement your marketing plan, make it a practice to evaluate your actions as you go along, keeping track of both outputs and outcomes. (p. 92)

Plans are meant to be evolving documents. As services, resources, and patrons change, it will need to be updated to ensure that marketing efforts are still effective.

Marketing plans can also show the value of the library to its constituents. According to Fisher et al. (2005), the "best way to show value is to have a plan that analyzes the target market for a specific service, has strategies and tactics to encourage use of the service, and has methods to monitor effectiveness of those strategies and tactics" (p. 25). They also go on to explain that "marketing goals, objectives, a core marketing strategy, a positioning strategy, and marketing mix strategies help you focus limited resources on a path that benefits your community, help you show your value to key stakeholders and maybe get you more results" (Fisher et al., 2005, p. 67). Marketing efforts should lay out in a very succinct way all the services and resources the library and library staff provide to patrons. They put this information in one place so that stakeholders can see an outline of how the library supports learning and teaching on campus through the resources and services it provides, as well as all of the patron groups who utilize and benefit.

Creating a marketing plan is essential to guide marketing efforts, and while this process can seem overwhelming, especially to those who have little marketing experience, they do not have to be difficult. Once librarians discover how accessible marketing plans can be, they will be able to tweak, adapt, and change the plan periodically to help ensure the continued effectiveness of marketing efforts. Plans can expand and evolve as the librarian's marketing experience grows and the resources available, services provided, and needs of patrons change. A marketing plan is an important document to guide every library's marketing efforts, even with a marketing team of one.

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