

Cross-Functional Marketing: Partnering to Promote Library Services and Courses

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Abstract: The University Libraries and specific departments within the Walton College of Business (WCOB) at the University of Arkansas have taken the initiative to work cross-functionally to promote services and new undergraduate courses for business students. This partnership aimed to develop awareness of resources for business research, to improve outreach to students, as well as to shed light on newly created courses. This article defines cross-functional marketing and provides examples of how the concept can be applied in an academic setting. It examines a series of cross-functional marketing strategies through projects developed from 2015 to 2018. A summary of the benefits and limitations of cross-functional marketing is also included.

Keywords: Cross-functional marketing, target market, strategic marketing, outreach, WCOB, Walton College of Business

Introduction

Academic libraries have experienced rising subscription costs and diminishing budgets due to technological advancements and constant changes in the economic environment (Spalding & Wang, 2006). As a result, librarians have found themselves outnumbered when serving specific academic departments (Loesch, 2017). At the University of Arkansas Libraries, the business librarian provides service to a total of 6,055 students and 156 faculty at the Walton College of Business (WCOB), and both figures are expected to grow (*Enrollment report summary, 2018; Instructional faculty data, 2017*). As a result, it can be a challenge to promote research and outreach services consistently each semester. Reaching out to specific departments within the business school for assistance in targeting students who could significantly benefit from resources the University Libraries has to offer has been effective and has led to cross-functional marketing between the University Libraries and the WCOB.

What is Cross-Functional Marketing?

The origin of the term *cross-functional* stems from the management science term *cross-functional teams*. According to the New Penguin Business Dictionary (2003), cross-functional teams are defined as “a group of employees from a similar hierarchical level, but from different work areas, who come together to accomplish a task” (p. 89). Although there is not an exact definition for cross-functional marketing, Christopher, Payne, and Ballantyne (2002) have contextualized the term as the following:

This shift to cross-functional marketing reflects the difficulties traditional hierarchically structured and functionally oriented organizations encounter when they adopt a departmental or functional approach to marketing. The new view of relationship marketing emphasizes the organization of marketing activities around cross-functional processes rather than organizational functions.” (p. xii)

In this case, the benefit of working cross-functionally allows faculty and staff from different departments to incorporate marketing ideas and concepts in order to execute a project and develop organizational goals.

Background

The beginning stages of marketing cross-functionally at the Walton College of Business, University of Arkansas-Fayetteville, started in the summer of 2015. The associate director of technology services from the business school requested that the business librarian create a Web series reading initiative called the *Walton Reader's Spotlight*. The objective of the video series was to promote intellectual growth of the faculty, staff, and students of the WCOB through interviews with Walton faculty and students on personal book recommendations. Each episode was promoted through a variety of social media and news platforms. This project provided a forum to highlight what books and other resources the University Libraries had to offer. The table below shows the various platforms where the *Walton Reader's Spotlight* was promoted throughout the year.

Table 1. Promoting the Walton Reader’s Spotlight

Social Media Tools	Additional Platforms for Promoting Web Series
Twitter (3)	News.uark.edu
Facebook (2)	Student, staff, and faculty email. WCOB listserv
YouTube (1)	Walton College of Business building entrance and televisions.

Note. From “Risk Taking as a New Academic Librarian Through Media Outreach: ‘The Walton Reader’s Spotlight Web Series,’” by J. M. Torres, 2017, *Public Services Quarterly*, 13(4), p. 309-314.

The number three next to Twitter in Table 1 indicates a total of three Twitter accounts volunteered to promote the Walton Reader’s Spotlight (@UARKLibraries: the University of Arkansas Libraries; @uawaltoncollege: Walton College of Business, and @UArkansas: University of Arkansas). This was supplemented by two Facebook accounts (the University of Arkansas Libraries and WCOB), and one WCOB YouTube account. This promotional strategy increased viewership of the show.

Promoting a New Business Writing Course

What follows is another example of how cross-functional marketing was applied during the fall of 2018. The Business Communication Lab wanted to explore innovative ways to promote a new course called Advanced Business Communication for a Digital World, which at the time was experiencing low enrollment. A digital flyer for the course was created to display on the Main Library’s plasma screen located at the entrance of the building. After three months of promoting the new course, the enrollment slightly increased.

Strategic Marketing Process

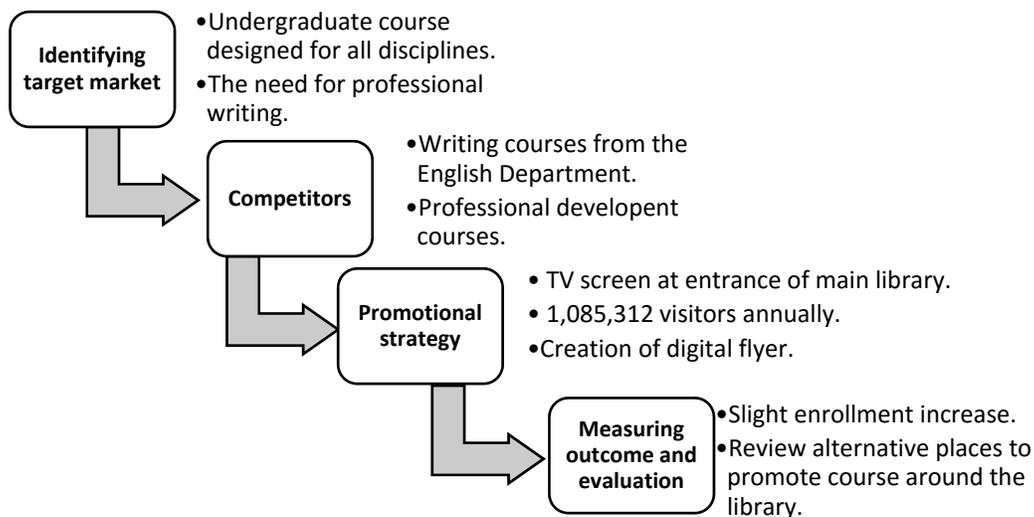
Throughout the United States, organizations and libraries have widely adopted a strategic marketing process (Spalding & Wang, 2006). This strategic marketing process provides a framework that allows teams to develop a clear vision and objectives based on a target market or audience. In Owen’s book, *Strategic Marketing in Library and Information Science* (2002), he states, “it is important that library and information agency directors lead their organization through a strategic planning process before developing strategic marketing plans which should be based on, and designed, to support the attainment of strategic objectives” (p. 33). This has been a critical component in creating marketing initiatives for upcoming projects. Developing a strategic marketing process differs based on

the project and objective. The strategic marketing process for the Advanced Business Communication for a Digital World writing course was based on the following:

- Identifying your target market: It is essential to understand the audience that is targeted. Determining the student major and college level is a critical component in this process.
- Competitors: In this instance, the main competitor would be a comparable writing course from the English Department. The cross-functional marketing team must brainstorm what makes this professional writing course uniquely different from others.
- Promotional strategy: It is important to tactfully promote your product or content in areas that will reach your targeted audience.
- Measuring outcome and evaluation: Reviewing successful strategies and determining areas of improvement is vital in the marketing process.

As mapped out in Figure 1, the target market for Advanced Business Communication for a Digital World was identified as undergraduates in all disciplines who would benefit from a professional writing course. The course competitors were writing courses from the English Department, as well as other professional development courses. The promotional strategy consisted of uploading a digital flyer onto the plasma screen at the entrance of the main library. The objective was to make the digital flyer visible to patrons who entered the main library.

Figure 1. Strategic Marketing Process Map for Professional Writing Course.



After three months, we measured outcomes such as enrollment figures as well as student and faculty feedback in order to identify areas of improvement. Overall, the ability to work cross-functionally allowed library faculty and staff to work seamlessly and encouraged departmental collaborations within the University of Arkansas.

Benefits and Limitations to Cross-Functional Marketing

This form of collaborative marketing requires little cost to create materials, and both faculty and staff from the University Libraries and the WCOB add value with resources that are easily accessible. Throughout the past year, there have been a variety of opportunities and challenges that have been associated with cross-functional marketing. For example, for the Walton Reader's Spotlight, the associate director of technology provided professional film equipment and the location to interview faculty and students, as well as promoted the campaign on the business school's social media platforms. The University Libraries purchased all of the recommended publications of every guest on the show and promoted the episodes on its social media accounts. Again, the director of the Business Communication Lab provided the University Libraries public relations coordinator with a digital flyer to promote the course throughout the summer. For 2019, the business librarian and the WCOB Technology Center are making a video to promote the University Libraries' services and resources to a targeted audience of undergraduate and graduate students. Creating opportunities to work cross-functionally allowed the University Libraries to strengthen relationships with the students, staff, and faculty of the WCOB. During the first year, it was a challenge to individually meet and interact with everyone at a business school of the WCOB's size. The need to scale the effort has prompted the University Libraries to create quality digital content with the WCOB's editing and recording tools that are used to create online tutorials. By creating meaningful content, it created the opportunity to demonstrate research tools and capabilities that go beyond traditional library services.

Most importantly, working cross-functionally provided the opportunity to work in partnership with the WCOB. Nonetheless, many issues can arise when developing cross-functional teams for marketing objectives. One critical problem stems from team members not understanding specific marketing objectives. It is easier to integrate a team if the members have a common understanding of marketing principles and practices.

Recommendations

Developing innovative content may be considered one of the final stages of cross-functional marketing. However, there were many obstacles throughout the process that were encountered based on specific outcomes. We present some comprehensive recommendations that can assist with developing successful cross-functional marketing teams:

1. Develop strong relationships with specific outreach departments. This is especially important for new academic librarians. By earning the trust of staff and faculty from outside of the library, librarians will create paths using valuable resources and recruiting team members.

2. Identify the skill set of each group member. A collaborative work environment will allow engagement and creative thinking amongst team members.
3. Distribute the workload effectively in order to meet deadlines. This is a critical component when managing times and schedules of team members during the semester.
4. Create an "elevator pitch" to target faculty and departments who may benefit from promoting a course or specific services. As a disclaimer, please be sure to keep your pitch professional. In other words, explain the services that you can provide while treading lightly on the issue. Avoid pitches such as, "I have heard no one is enrolling in your course, but I can promote it to make your class better."

Conclusions

Working in cross-functional marketing teams has presented many opportunities. Throughout this process, the Walton College of Business and the University Libraries have created a substantial amount of media content which has gained the attention of students, staff, and faculty from across campus. This initiative has provided creative ways to explore partnerships with specific departments; the next phase will be determined based on the needs of specific departments and professors of the business school. As time progresses, the intention is to develop cross-functional techniques and strategies for the University of Arkansas Libraries subject librarians to implement within the departments they serve. This form of collaborative marketing can certainly be an enriching experience for both libraries and academic departments. Most importantly, cross-functional marketing can make a profound impact on different departments working together on developing innovative services, promotions, and outreach programs.

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