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**The Marketing of Academic, National and Public Libraries Worldwide: Marketing, Branding, Community Engagement**  
edited by Patrick Lo and David Baker, Cambridge, UK:  
Elsevier, 2024, 732 pp., \$69.27, ISBN- 978-0-443-13435-7  
(paper).

**Reviewed by Barbie Keiser**

*The Marketing of Academic, National and Public Libraries Worldwide* presents 45 case study interviews with individuals responsible for marketing their libraries. Editors Patrick Lo, who served as an Associate Professor at the Faculty of Library, Information and Media Science, University of Tsukuba (Japan), and David Becker, former Principal and Chief Executive of Plymouth Marjon University and Deputy Chair of the United Kingdom's Joint Information Systems Committee (Jisc), make the reader work harder than necessary to uncover the insights of the eminently qualified professionals interviewed. This review suggests modifications to the text plus a re-envisioning of the monograph as a report that could give a second edition of the work more significant impact on LIS professionals specializing in marketing by extracting what works/what doesn't and identifying trends in community engagement.

Reading this work as published is boring, with questions and responses repeated 45 times—once for each participant. Emblematic of the libraries covered are

American public libraries in Los Angeles, Memphis, Cleveland, Iowa City, and Seattle; coverage elsewhere includes public libraries in Bremen (Germany), Belgrade (Serbia), and Wellington (New Zealand). National Libraries profiled in this work are the National Library of Finland, Qatar, The Netherlands, Latvia, and the Library of Congress (US). Academic Libraries represented in the text come from Australia (University of Sydney), Canada (University of British Columbia), Germany (Humboldt University of Berlin), South Africa (University of Johannesburg), Sweden (Stockholm University), United Kingdom (Cambridge University), and the United States (Princeton University, Georgia Tech).

The 21 – 31 questions range from soliciting background information, like professional training, educational background, and impetus for a career in librarianship, from the libraries' marketing, outreach, or engagement directors (“What did you study at university? Do you come from a family of librarians or educators? What motivated you to pursue a career in public librarianship?”) to identifying the mission, vision, philosophy, and brand identity of the library. Other questions ask about the respondents' roles and responsibilities, what is most rewarding and frustrating in their job, and what they would like to be remembered for when they retire. Responses ranged from a single sentence to three paragraphs and presented an occasional gem. The editors posed questions on:

- leadership styles
- career pathing
- the importance of teamwork
- the benefits of storytelling
- looking to private industry for inspiration
- the necessity of building an emotional connection with customers
- the importance of inclusivity
- engagement with community
- the importance of partnerships
- phrases used for successful branding campaigns.

Some changes that could have made this a more pleasant and informative read are discussed below.

### **Minor adjustments to improve the work**

A baker's dozen minor alterations to the existing work would make *The Marketing of Academic, National and Public Libraries Worldwide* a must-read for all libraries struggling to be heard within their communities. For example:

1. The statement in the Introduction, “a series of in-depth and semi-structured interviews” (p. xxvii), fails to clarify how the interviews were conducted: whether they were in-person, online (e.g., via Zoom), or through email as written responses to a questionnaire. Did the editors conduct the interviews, or did they engage proxies? A brief section detailing the study's methodology, interview protocols, examples of initial contact and follow-up "thank you" messages sent to participants, and the number of individuals approached for the study who declined to participate or were excluded would reassure the reader that the research adhered to generally accepted standards.
2. There is no indication of how the editors chose the individuals or libraries to participate in this study. Understanding the process—whether the editors solicited respondents due to their titles (e.g., Director of Public Relations and Marketing; Director of Engagement), the libraries in which they work, based on a news item about the library's marketing efforts/programming, or in response to a Call for Study Participants—would have been valuable.
3. The work lacks a summary of the distribution of participating libraries worldwide, as emphasized in the book title. A review of the Table of Contents reveals that Latin America is not represented. The inclusion of a statement as to the number of libraries from each, or a graphic illustration, such as a pie chart indicating the number of libraries by country, would help the

reader appreciate how many countries are represented by each type of library. Similar demographic questions posed to each participant that indicate participants' length of participation in the field would also have informed the study. For example, did early career professionals' responses differ from those of the recently retired? Were national libraries' responses significantly different from those of public or academic libraries?

4. Mentions of the COVID pandemic allow the reader to intuit the dates of these interviews. One would expect a simple statement in the introduction:  
“Interviews were conducted from Month/Year to Month/Year.”
5. It would have been helpful to have a list of figures, such as the “Plan on a page,” included in Jane Cowell’s chapter (18) from the Yarra Plenty Regional Library, Northeast Melbourne Region (Victoria, Australia). Photos of the library and events accompany each interview. Additional examples of marketing collateral *and an explanation as to why they led to successful library programs* would have been instructive to readers who may not have marketing expertise on their staff.
6. The Table of Contents does not distinguish between the chapters numbered 1 to 46. In fact, Chapters 1-19 present interviews with librarians responsible for marketing in their public libraries; Chapters 20-28 are interviews with marketing librarians at national libraries; Chapters 29-45 focus on academic libraries; and Chapter 46 is “Conclusion.” Organizing the chapters

into three sections (public, national, academic) and aligning the sections in the order shown in the book's title (academic, national, public) would have allowed readers to target the sections in which they were most interested.

7. The final chapter, "Conclusion," does not draw "together the main themes discussed in the interviews" (p. 719). It lacks a proscriptive for the reader, that is, recommended actions that librarians should take to foster greater engagement within their library's constituent communities--a theme that echoes through the interviews. Some of the chapter's sections, such as Skills, contain the information readers seek (e.g., soft skills, teamwork, emotional intelligence, creativity, technical skills, writing, editing, and communicating). The editors bury these skills in lengthy quotes from the interviews rather than presenting them in bulleted form or distinguishing the recurring mentions that capture the reader's attention. Where the editors quote from interviews, they do not ascribe the responses to specific individuals. Attribution would allow the reader to refer to their chapter to gain additional context for the quote.
8. Readers might expect nearly identical questions to be posed to all libraries within a classification (public, national, academic), while slight variations are to be expected based on the type of library. That is not the case. Also, adding a number before each of the questions posed by the interviewers would allow readers to compare responses by different subjects more easily.

9. The editors make no effort to follow up cursory responses to elicit greater detail. For instance, responses to the question, “Could you provide a list of outstanding public relations and marketing programmes initiated by <LIBRARY>,” are often the name of the marketing campaign, such as “Teens Leading Change” or “Latino Outreach.” The interviewee was responding to the question (“list”), but additional probing as to why these were successful and the indicators used to demonstrate the success, would have been more beneficial to the reader.
10. A section in the Introduction, which outlines the “Values and significance of the book” (pp. xxviii-xxix), such as serving “as a primary guide for library professionals to build their own brands via effective marketing campaigns, as well as [forming] long-lasting relationships with their communities” would have been better served by providing the “comprehensive account of the skills and knowledge necessary to become a successful LIS professional specializing in marketing, branding, as well as community engagement.” The reader must go chapter by chapter to compile responses to these questions to gain a clear picture of the professional path.
11. The alphabetically arranged Index provides details of responses by name of the interview participant rather than adding points of entry to the text. For example, “Engagement” leads the reader only to two pages (pp. 104-105) in

the chapter about the Kent District Library (Michigan, USA), while “engagement” was mentioned by multiple respondents.

12. A chapter analyzing the responses to questions asked of all participants would have offered readers additional insights, for example, a chart indicating respondents’ career path: # (X%) of the individuals interviewed for this study had no formal education in marketing. Even a word cloud of terms used in response to questions related to the knowledge, skills, and personality traits of a successful leader in marketing/branding would have improved the overview of marketing librarian as a professional path for the reader to pursue.
13. The book organizes chapters identically as a series of questions, each question followed by a response. This editorial decision makes the text a dull read. Adding callout boxes or summaries at the end of each interview, “here’s what we learned,” would have enhanced the text. Highlights from the interview or reminding the reader that other participants in the study had similar responses could have made this a more effective work.

Reorganizing the text into eight chapters corresponding to the eight research questions specified in the Introduction would have improved the book’s structure. Below is one option for a future edition of the work.



## Recommended reorganization of the text

By re-envisioning the book as a report of a study that involved 45 interviews, the 732 pages of the present work could become Volume 2 of a two-volume study. Adding a Methodology section for the evaluation study, creating a matrix of questions posed, and mapping questions by type of library could illuminate differences across the three types of libraries covered in this work or even regional differences.

The eight research questions stated in the Introduction (pp. xxvii-xxviii) were seemingly operationalized and modified to fit the three library types, resulting in 20+ questions addressed by the study participants. A taxonomy of research questions indicating which of the 20+ questions posed corresponded to which of the eight research questions from Lo and Baker (as principal investigators) would have been useful. Qualitative analysis could be completed using a coding system developed to organize and categorize responses to the research questions and presented in eight chapters:

**RQ1.** New and emerging best practices in library marketing and branding

**RQ2.** Key elements for successful marketing, branding and community engagement practices

**RQ3.** The extent to which effective marketing and branding programmes contribute to meaningful connections between the library and community, leading to social cohesion

**RQ4.** New and emerging roles of marketing and community engagement librarians

**RQ5.** Use of online social media platforms for marketing, branding and community engagement

**RQ6.** Challenges and difficulties of participating librarians, particularly in the face of increased competition for funding, resources, audience attention, etc.

**RQ7.** Perceptions and attitudes towards current marketing and branding practices, and internal and external factors influencing these attitudes.

**RQ8.** Common characteristics and personality traits of successful marketing and community engagement librarians.

A comparative case study design would have identified characteristics of libraries across the three library types (public, national, and academic). It was imprudent to treat all libraries as a homogenous group. An evaluation designed to identify differences and similarities within each type of library or location, and where broader thematic comparisons were possible across types of libraries, would have given the work more impact among libraries worldwide.

Had I an electronic version of the book instead of a paperback, I would have uploaded the text to an AI tool, such as the qualitative data analysis software NVivo ([www.lumivero.com](http://www.lumivero.com)), theming responses to gain insights from the interviews. The current work fails in its aims, as stated by the editors in the Introduction (pp. xxvi – xxvii). Still, a second edition that implements some of the recommendations contained in this review has the potential to make a significant contribution to library literature. As it stands, *The Marketing of Academic, National and Public Libraries World* is an uninspiring read.

### About the editors:

Dr Patrick Lo currently serves as a Senior Lecturer, Faculty of Education, The University of Hong Kong and Director of the Liberal and Martial Arts Association (Hong Kong). From 2012-2018 he served as Associate Professor at the Faculty of Library, Information and Media Studies at the University of Tsukuba, Japan. He earned his Doctor of Education from the University of Bristol (U.K.), and has a Master of Arts in Design Management from the Hong Kong Polytechnic University, a Master of Library & Information Science from McGill University (Canada), and a Bachelor of Fine Arts from Mount Allison University (Canada).

Dr. David Baker has over 30 years' experience in higher education, including as Principal and Chief Executive of Plymouth Marjon University, and as Deputy Chair of the UK's Joint Information Systems Committee (Jisc). His degrees include an MLS, a PhD and an MBA. He also holds fellowships from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals, the Chartered Management Institute and the Royal Society of Arts.

### About the reviewer

Barbie Keiser is a peer reviewer and active contributor to several library journals. Barbie teaches courses for the University of Kentucky, Johns Hopkins University, and Library Juice Academy. Her first publication from 1994, co-authored with Carol Galvin, *Marketing Library Services: A Nuts-and-Bolts Approach* (International Federation for Information and Documentation (FID)). Marketing libraries remain

a primary interest and focus of her consulting efforts. Barbie holds an MSLS from Case Western Reserve University and has been appointed to two Fulbright Specialist positions (Slovenia and Lithuania).

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