Empathy by Design: Empathy-Driven Marketing for Libraries by Sabine Jean Dantus, Chicago, IL: Association of College and Research Libraries, 2024, 160 pp., $38.00, eEdition PDF e-book.

Reviewed by Barbie Keiser

Outreach and reference librarian at Florida International University Libraries (Miami, FL) Sabine Jean Dantus appears to agree with Professor Atul Gawande of the Harvard Medical School and the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health who said, "Once we lose the desire to understand—to be surprised, to listen and bear witness—we lose our humanity. Among the most important capacities that you take with you today is your curiosity. You must guard it, for curiosity is the beginning of empathy" (Gupta, 2018).

Dantus is empathetic and seeks to understand each user so that she can tailor her marketing strategies and promotional materials to them. As she states at the outset of this book: "An empathy-based approach is essential to ensure that all library resources are seen as relevant and accessible" (p. xii). To this reader, an empathy-based approach is necessary for all marketers. *Empathy by Design* purports to focus on empathy, but most tips presented throughout the work are just good marketing practices. As a book on "empathy" in marketing, it's okay; as a practical marketing "how to" guide, it's great. Those who wish to read more

about topics covered in a given chapter will find only a minimal number of references at the end of each chapter. More satisfying is the extensive glossary at the end of this text.

Mistakes library marketers make

Aiming for the "average" user instead of the full range of user experiences can hide a library's impact(s) on its communities. Libraries can target their messaging by explicitly collecting user demographic data while also monitoring user behavior. Dantus explains what happens when libraries fracture responsibility across work groups instead of integrating expertise about empathy with users into each library product and service team *at every point in the design process*. She urges libraries to consider empathy an essential skill for all new hires.

What is empathy?

Dantus says, "Empathy involves not just understanding but caring about the needs of customers" (p. 74). She encourages library staff to feel first and think second. Librarians should take time to understand how users see the world. When explaining a libraries' services, marketers should show users the benefits of those services. Library marketers accomplish this when they:

· Understand the pain points or needs users are trying to address with the services

- Consider the emotions services evoke in users

- Use language that is relatable and understandable to users

- Focus on the target audience's needs and wants rather than what's available at the library or what libraries want to market

- Share stories and experiences to help libraries connect emotionally with users

- Build trust by being transparent and honest about intentions (p. 8).

The author reminds readers that all libraries must align their services with their organization's mission, tailor library messaging, and maintain consistent branding, and recognize *and value* the diversity of perspectives within our communities

Dantus "considers various demographics, such as age, gender, socioeconomic status, and educational background, when developing library marketing campaigns" to ensure "that campaigns are designed with all types of library users in mind, so they are relevant to everyone's individual needs. Additionally, this method allows for the segmentation of messages to be tailored specifically toward different groups within the population... *Empathy by Design* also explores how empathy helps us recognize the nuances within our communities that often go unnoticed without careful consideration" (p. xiii).

Compassionate library marketing is a powerful tool to fight discrimination and exclusion. Librarians can lead the way in ensuring the services they provide are accessible to all. "By infusing empathy into library practices and incorporating DEIA [Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Access] principles into existing policies, such as collection development policies and hiring processes, libraries can begin down the path toward making sure none of its users feel unwelcome or excluded from accessing the wealth of knowledge stored within its walls" (p. 17).

Empathy + Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility Values

In Chapter 2, Dantus presents three steps for developing library marketing strategies to promote an empathetic approach to DEIA values; this helps to ensure that a library's services and programs reflect the community's diverse needs and approaches while providing equitable access to resources and opportunities. She encourages library staff to "engage in meaningful conversations with stakeholders to ensure everyone's voice is heard" (p. 19). Chapter 2 explains "common ways to promote DEIA values in your library" (p. 20). The goal is to "create meaningful relationships that foster mutual respect between people of different backgrounds while encouraging individuals to explore resources available through their local library system" (p. 21).

Chapter 3 focuses on user-centered design for library marketing, including how user feedback is collected. The author suggests that libraries create personae to ensure their messages resonate. In this chapter, Dantus sets out the five steps of

the empathic design process, though readers may note that this is not necessarily different from other design processes:

Step 1: Observation: "By observing users, we can learn how they interact with our libraries" (p. 32). Chapter 4 explores what might motivate someone to use the services. Dantus identifies "Three specific triggers [that] can be used to market with empathy: social connection, self-expression, and playfulness. By incorporating these triggers into your marketing strategies, you can create a more empathic connection with your audience and better understand their needs. Social connection refers to people's need to belong and to feel connected to others, such as when library users feel like they belong or are part of a community. Self-expression triggers empathy by allowing people to express themselves and be seen and heard, like when they can express themselves in the library or through the library's resources. Playfulness can provide fun and relaxation where the user can explore and experiment" (p. 33).

Step 2: Capturing data: Chapter 5 focuses on the various methods used to gather market research, including surveys, interviews, focus groups, usability testing, and observational reports. It provides tips for conducting each technique in a concise, bulleted format.

Step 3: Reflection and interpretation of data: In Chapter 6, the author reviews the need to synthesize data collected from a library's multiple market research efforts, to transform findings into actionable insights, and to make recommendations for revising library services and programming. Empathy maps illustrate user attitudes and behaviors.

Step 4: Brainstorm or ideate solutions. In Chapter 7, the author provides a step-by-step guide to conducting a brainstorming session, including brainwriting, SWOT and PESTLE analyses, Start/Stop/Continue exercises, mind mapping, six thinking hats, and more.

Step 5: Create potential prototypes and test solutions. The author uses Chapter 8 to explain the differences between crafting a marketing strategy, writing a marketing plan, and the various promotional channels a library might use to convey its message(s) to users. However, the steps for building an empathy-driven marketing plan are no different than any good marketing plan. Both require researching the audience, identifying their pain points, leveraging social media, testing and measuring, and analyzing feedback. Dantus favors prototyping each resource, program, or service introduced, as well as library marketing campaigns.

One purpose of marketing is to build awareness of a library's service or program. While everyone's reasons for using the library might differ, they must first be aware that it exists.

In Chapter 9, the author explains how the FIRST Values Framework--Fellow-feeling, Identification, Responsiveness, Self-awareness, and Thoughtfulness—allows "libraries to promote their services in a way that was appreciative of their users' feelings" (p. 85). Chapter 10 builds on the FIRST Values Framework by discussing Evaluating and Measuring Success using qualitative and quantitative evaluation methods. The chapter explains SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Relevant, and Timebound) goals in detail.

Appendix A is an Empathetic Library Marketing Solutions toolkit that details the process for developing a library's brand, including conducting market/user research, identifying values, developing a brand strategy, and creating outreach, communications, and marketing plans. Some might quibble with the order in which these topics are presented, but this is probably the best part of the entire work. The empathy and journey maps may be new even to old marketing hands.

While much of the material in chapters 1-9 is repetitive, the toolkit in the appendix is central to the work's thesis. Some repetitive material from Chapters 1-9 could have been eliminated and the toolkit included within the text itself instead of in a separate appendix. Appendix B includes a list of questions to be used in the

FIRST Framework. Again, it would have been better to include it in Chapter 9.

Appendix C is a detailed outline of a Marketing Plan.

This is a worthwhile read for librarians wondering how they can improve

their library marketing. It has a larger market than those looking for empathetic

marketing, and I hope it finds this audience.

Works cited

Gupta, A. (2018, June). Curiosity and What Equality Really Means. *The New Yorker*.
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