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## Marketing Electronic Resources: Challenges & Opportunities for Libraries

**Sophie Hollis**

Community Engagement Librarian  
NC Live

**Devon Waugh**

Instruction Librarian  
NC Live

**Abstract:** This article presents the findings of a national survey which asked library professionals about their challenges in marketing e-resources to library patrons and strategies they use to overcome these challenges. The study was conducted by two librarians at NC LIVE in North Carolina to better understand the barriers that libraries of different types and sizes face when marketing e-resources. Survey respondents include 299 academic and public library staff from across the U.S., and the results include both quantitative and qualitative data. Respondents cited diverse challenges in getting patrons to use e-resources, including patron access to the internet and devices, patron aversion to technology, lack of staff resources for marketing, and lack of marketing expertise. The discussion section touches on ways that staff training, pre-made marketing materials, and other tools may help address these barriers at both the library and consortial levels. These results are intended to lead to practical recommendations for increasing patron engagement with e-resources.

**Keywords:** Electronic resources; Library marketing strategies; User engagement; Library consortia; Academic libraries; Public libraries

## **Introduction**

As staff members of a state-wide library consortium, we see tremendous variations between our member libraries' marketing needs. Some library systems have entire marketing and outreach departments; others rely on the precious little free time of their creative staff members. Because of these disparities, we believe that library consortia may be in a position to fill in some of these resource gaps. The purpose of this study is to determine the existing strategies that academic and public libraries use to market their e-resources and how those strategies vary between libraries of different types and sizes. This study will also identify major barriers that libraries face in marketing e-resources to their patrons. These findings will lead to practical recommendations for how library consortia can help address these challenges and make marketing e-resources more effective for all types of libraries.

## **Literature Review**

In her guide to library marketing and communications, Anderson (2020) draws on the Public Relations Society of America's definition of marketing: "The management function that identifies human needs and wants, offers products and services to satisfy those demands, and causes transactions that deliver products and services in exchange for something of value to the provider" (p. 1). She uses this in comparison to "Promotion," which they define as "Activities designed to win publicity or attention... Promotional activities are designed to create and stimulate interest in a person, product, organization or cause" (p. 1). In the context of this study, we take "library marketing" to mean some combination of the two. We are interested in how libraries identify the needs of patrons, create interest in their organization, and increase the use of their collections and services.

Existing literature confirms our experience that there are big differences between libraries when it comes to marketing. Some librarians have described marketing as “unnecessary” or “unsuitable” for libraries (Bhardwaj & Jain, 2016, p. 122), while others masterfully form relationships with local media outlets (Michael-Keller, 2025), effectively promote themselves on social media (Hicks, 2025), and manage wide-scale communications plans (Vinciguerra & Purnell, 2025). The differences in resources, formal training, and staff attitudes between libraries means that there is rarely a unified marketing strategy within a single library, much less across libraries. However, the literature also confirms that there can be marketing strategies that work for the unique challenges of libraries and non-profits (Nafiseh et al., 2024; Wang et al., 2025). What’s more, Wang, Wang, and Liu (2025) argue that marketing is now a “driving force” for demonstrating library value and sustainability. This and other recent studies (Nafisah et al., 2024; Jha & Pandey, 2021) represent a growing trend toward professionalizing marketing within libraries, aligning with earlier calls for a more strategic, evidence-based approach to outreach and engagement.

Within libraries that do organized marketing, the focus is frequently on library events. In a 2018 analysis of Facebook posts by public libraries, upcoming events, past events, library clubs, and storytimes accounted for 61.2% of all posts (Joo et al., 2018, p. 947). Collections are sometimes marketed in large-scale campaigns (Thomas, 2016; Cowart, 2017), though Joo et al. found that collections, books, and authors only accounted for 7% of public library Facebook posts (2018, p. 947). Traditional library marketing channels, like printed materials and face-to-face interactions with patrons, have also retained popularity, even for advertising digital resources. Surveyed librarians in Kelly’s study reported using flyers and table tents as their primary marketing channels, partially due to budget limitations (2013, p. 99). In

another survey, 66.7% of librarians reported that training patrons was the most effective way to market e-resources (Yi et al., 2013, p. 591).

One notable disruption of these patterns, though, was the COVID-19 pandemic. Especially between 2020 and 2022, limited in-person interactions forced libraries to put more energy into digital marketing channels, including email, websites, online instruction, and social media. “The pandemic forced libraries to look more closely at the effectiveness of their digital marketing efforts,” concluded Fraser-Arnott (2023, p. 12). As one example, librarians at Goldey-Beacom College in Wilmington, Delaware, created a marketing campaign that involved sharing library services with students via email, text message, and the project app Notion (Rysavy et al., 2021). Nafisah, Sa’adah, and Effendy (2024) similarly note that the pandemic accelerated the adoption of digital service marketing with libraries increasingly emphasizing user-centered design, mobile accessibility, and continuous online engagement. In other cases, marketing was put on the back burner while library staff responded to the more immediate needs of patrons during the pandemic (Mehta & Wang, 2020). Given the recency of the COVID-19 pandemic, libraries may still be adjusting and re-evaluating their marketing strategies based on the disruptions they experienced.

### **Social Media & Library Marketing**

Of the many marketing strategies available, social media is one of the more controversial in libraries. Social media is a popular topic in LIS marketing literature, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic (Fraser-Arnott, 2023, p. 11). Some see social media as an extension of the outreach and promotion work that libraries have done for decades (Bradley, 2015). Choi and Joo argue that the low cost of social media, which is often free to use, makes it a useful tool for public libraries (2021, p. 353). Though they agreed that “a lack of staff

resources, skills, and expertise were found to be the most critical challenges public libraries faced when adopting social media,” as well as “a lack of user engagement,” they maintained that social media should be one part of a comprehensive marketing strategy (2021, p. 362). But social media’s trendiness among librarians may not correlate with its effectiveness as a marketing tool. In 2019, Jones and Morgan found that university students reported little interest in following their school library on social media (2019, p. 8) and showed that they preferred library marketing in emails, the campus learning management system, posters, and the tutor bulletin over social media (2019, p. 9). Their questionnaire also found that librarians greatly overestimated students’ engagement with some platforms, like Twitter and blogs, and underestimated engagement with others, like YouTube and Instagram (2019, p. 7). Athukorala and Jayasundara found that while social media is generally accepted as a potential tool for outreach, there is still a need to better understand how to measure its actual engagement and to train staff to use it more effectively (2025). Ihejirika et al. also found that libraries often lack a clear purpose and plan for using social media, hindering its potential impacts (Ihejirika, K. T., Goulding, A., & Calvert, P., 2021). Mixed findings throughout LIS literature indicate that the best practices for social media are still being explored and are likely evolving along with the platforms themselves.

### **Marketing Electronic Resources**

Very few studies specifically address how libraries market e-resources and analyze their usage even though e-resources tend to be a major collections expense. Some notable examples, including Lasher & Denzer (2020) and Fry (2014), track the impact of library events and instruction on usage of e-resources. However, some strategies have been identified as being particularly

effective at promoting e-resources, such as partnering with a vendor or publisher to lead in-person or online events (Profera et al., 2015; Ndungu, 2016). Building relationships with faculty and teaching students how to use e-resources in classes is also often more impactful than traditional marketing in print or online (Fry, 2014). Other libraries have taken advantage of their institution's learning management system as a means of communicating to faculty and staff about the existence and use of ebook collections (Harlow & Hill, 2020).

Given the limited literature on e-resources marketing specifically, there is a continued need to study barriers and strategies for e-resources marketing in multiple library types. Nafisah et al. (2024) suggest that consortia may serve as a vital structure for implementing shared marketing initiatives and achieving the kind of long-term coordination that individual libraries often lack. This perspective underscores that collaborative marketing, whether through consortia, vendor partnerships, or shared repositories, may represent the most sustainable model for promoting e-resources effectively.

Overall, the literature reveals a profession in transition. Libraries increasingly recognize marketing as vital for demonstrating value and sustaining funding (Wang et al., 2025), yet strategies and expertise vary widely (Yi et al., 2013; Kelly, 2013). Traditional event-based and print marketing still dominates the literature, even as digital engagement and online platforms have become central to users' expectations (Fraser-Arnott, 2023; Joo et al., 2018). Studies of e-resource marketing show both low patron awareness and limited strategic assessment, pointing to the need for collaborative and data-informed approaches (Fry, 2014). Nafisah, Sa'adah, and Effendy (2024) further emphasize that library consortia can provide the shared structure necessary to implement sustainable digital marketing. While libraries are moving toward

more coordinated, digital, and user-centered marketing, gaps in training, resources, and collaboration continue to constrain progress.

### **Research Questions**

The purpose of this study is to discover how different libraries market e-resources to their users. These discoveries will inform our understanding of what kinds of training and resources librarians need to improve their marketing and how a library consortium could potentially address those needs. Given these goals, the study will focus on the following questions:

- What strategies do libraries use to advertise e-resources to their patrons?
- What major obstacles prevent libraries from organizing effective marketing campaigns for e-resources?
- What resources do libraries need to help them promote e-resources effectively?

### **Methodology**

Since this study seeks practical recommendations for improving library marketing, we used a pragmatic approach that incorporates both quantitative and qualitative data. These data were collected through a survey that asked librarians about their experiences with marketing at their library.

We selected a survey as our data collection method based on the methodology of similar studies. Our survey design was modeled on the work of Harlow and Hill's identification of access barriers for online learners (2020), as well as Kelly's survey of marketing strategies across Catholic university libraries (2013). These two studies address similar research questions about the types of marketing libraries do and their efficacy. Additionally, a survey

allowed us to collect both quantitative and qualitative data at once, which will give a more nuanced picture of the differences between libraries.

### **Positionality/Researcher Role**

Both primary researchers drafted the survey questions and made decisions about which questions to include. Both researchers conducted outreach to recruit survey participants, and both reviewed survey responses independently before discussing them together. This collaborative study design helps safeguard against the biases of each individual and minimizes the risk of mistakes in interpreting data.

Our interest in this project is shaped by our positions as employees of a library consortium that supports the professional development of librarians. Our consortium also offers marketing tools and support to our member libraries. Though we have some existing perceptions of how libraries approach marketing, the purpose of this study is to investigate our current understandings. This desire to look beyond our professional experiences will limit the impact of our positions on the creation or results of the survey.

### **Sample/Research Participants**

This project surveyed both public and academic library staff. We selected this population because it is a broader group of the types of professionals served by [library consortium]. We used convenience sampling to gather responses by sending the survey to several professional listservs. Respondents self-identified as library professionals and voluntarily included their job title and role in their library in their survey responses.

The greatest limitation of this method is sampling bias, since time and willingness to participate in this survey may correlate with other, unknown conditions. We hoped to offset this limitation as much as possible by casting a wide net in recruitment and by gathering a high number of responses.

### **Data Collection Method**

Respondents were invited to complete an anonymous survey about their experiences with marketing their library's e-resources. The survey was hosted by Qualtrics and distributed via email to professional listservs for librarians. The survey did not collect names, email addresses, or any other personal, identifiable information.

The survey included both multiple-choice and open-ended questions. We collected responses for four weeks during August 2024. The survey asked what type of library the participant works in, their library's staff size, the methods that they use for marketing e-resources, and any training they have received on library marketing topics (see Appendix A).

### **Data Analysis Method**

Data collected in the Qualtrics survey were exported into a spreadsheet for analysis. Each researcher independently color-coded the open-ended responses to find themes, and then both researchers determined the strongest and most significant patterns together.

### **Results**

Our survey collected 299 total responses with 188 considered "complete" (respondents answered every question). We still included data

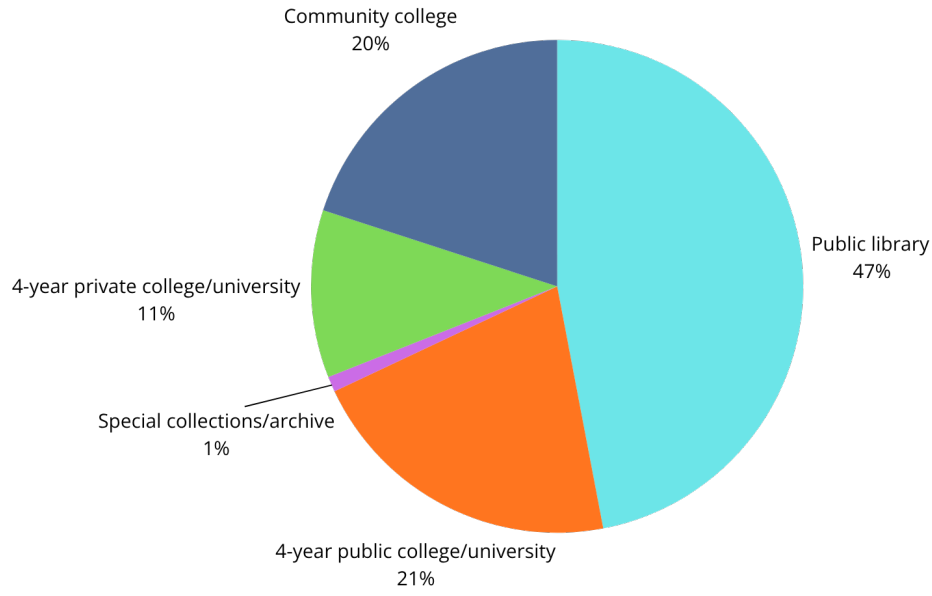
from the “incomplete” responses in our analysis since it was common for respondents to only answer some of the open-ended questions.

### **Library Type, Size & Staff**

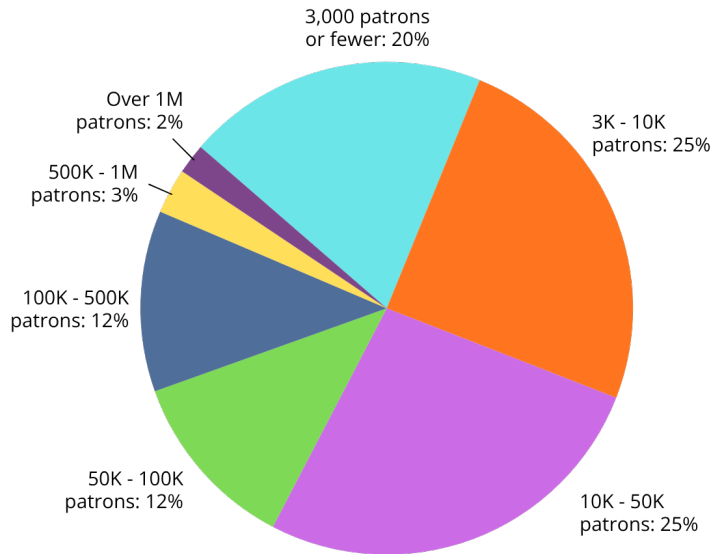
In total, 52% of respondents are from academic libraries and 47% are from public libraries. The remaining 1% specified that they work in a special collections library or archive. In the breakdown of academic libraries, 21% work in a four-year public college or university, 11% work in a four-year private college or university, and 20% work in a community college (see Figure 1).

Variation in library service population and staff size was also significant; of respondents, 20% serve a library with a service population of 3,000 patrons or fewer; 25% serve a population of 3,000–10,000; 27% serve 10,000–50,000; 12% serve 50,000–100,000; 12% serve 100,000–500,000; 3% serve 500,000 to one million, and 2% serve populations of over one million patrons (see Figure 2). By library staff size, 24% of respondents work in libraries with 1–5 employees, 17% with 6–10 employees, 26% with 11–30 employees, 14% with 31–60 employees, and 18% with 60 or more employees (with part-time employees counted as 0.5) (see Figure 3).

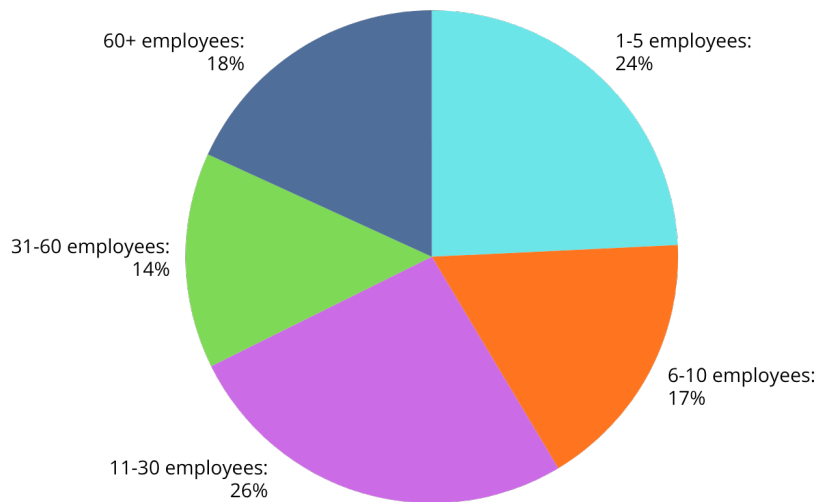
### **Figure 1: Responses by Library Type**



**Figure 2: Responses by Library Service Population Size**



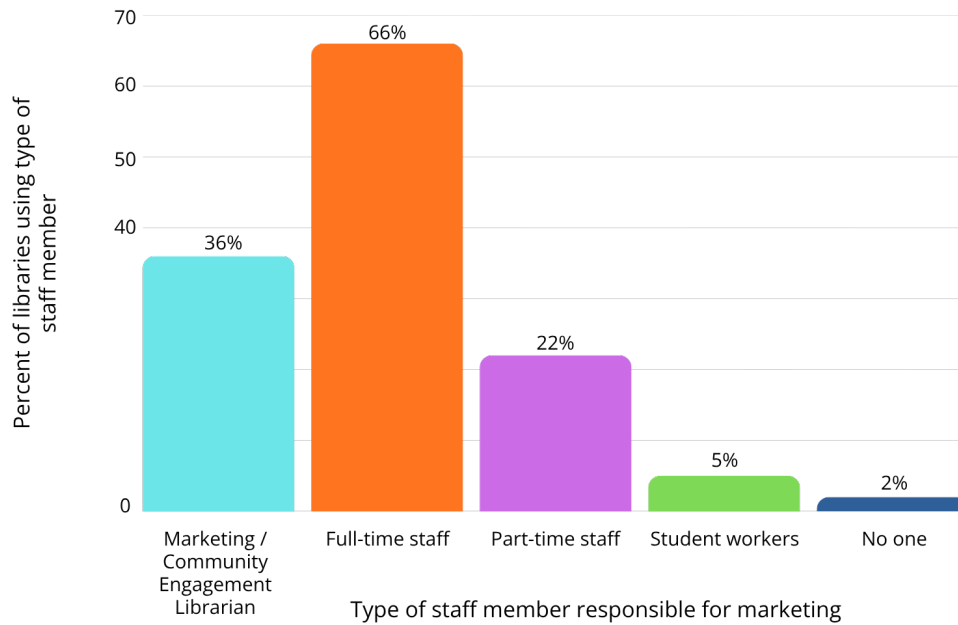
**Figure 3: Responses by Library Staff Size**



As we expected based on existing literature (Yi, Lodge, & McCausland, 2013; Kelly, 2013), most libraries reported that library staff who are not specifically trained to do marketing were in charge of creating marketing materials. Only 36% of libraries have a marketing or community engagement librarian who is responsible for creating materials; 66% of libraries reported

that other full-time library staff are responsible, and 22% said that part-time staff were responsible. Five percent said that student workers were responsible, and 2% said no one in the library was responsible for marketing materials (see Figure 4). Some of the “other” staff members who create marketing materials, including the IT librarian, the public services librarian, reference librarians, the information literacy librarian, and the electronic resources librarian. Several respondents also reported a separate department that creates and/or approves marketing materials, such as a communications or public relations department. Of the number of employees responsible for marketing in the library, 27% said 0-1 people are responsible; 56% said 2-5 people are responsible; 10% said 6-10, and 7% said more than 10 people.

**Figure 4: Marketing Responsibility by Type of Staff Member**



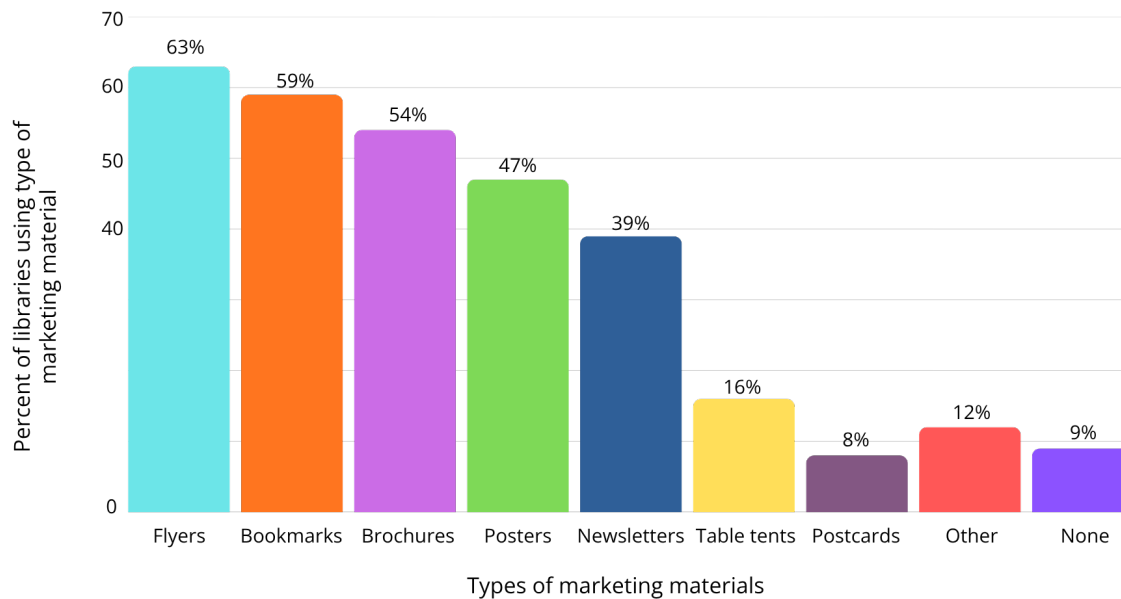
Also in line with our expectations was wide variation on marketing budgets. Of respondents, 32% said their library has a marketing budget; 48% said their library does not, and 20% were unsure. Of the libraries with

marketing budgets, 61% said that less than 10% of the budget goes to e-resource marketing specifically.

### **Marketing Tools**

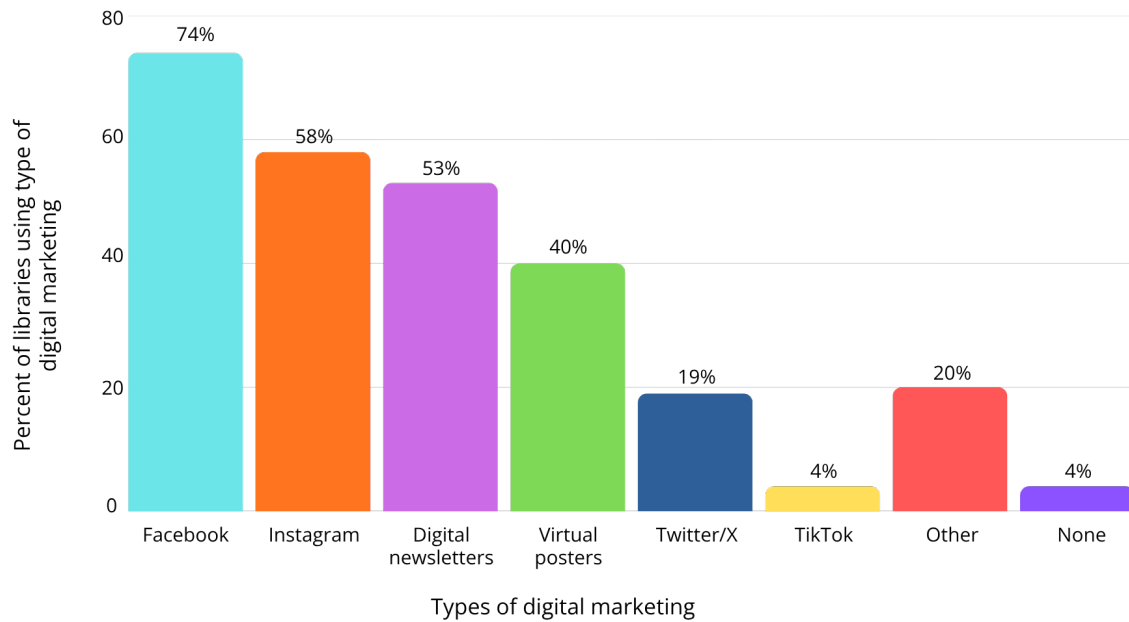
For types of marketing materials libraries use to promote e-resources, 63% of respondents reported using flyers; 59% use bookmarks; 54% use brochures; 47% use posters; 39% send newsletters; 16% use table tents, and 8% use postcards. 9% of respondents say they use no marketing materials at all for e-resource promotion (see Figure 5). Other kinds of materials, used by 12% of respondents, include displays, QR codes, prize items (like pens, notebooks, and keychains), stickers, blog posts, welcome folders for new patrons, booklets, bulletin boards, shelf talkers, press releases, and library-produced magazines. Several respondents also mentioned the importance of word of mouth marketing and library events, which is consistent with findings from Joo et al. (2018) and suggestions from Alman (2007).

**Figure 5: Types of Marketing Materials Used in Libraries**



For digital marketing tools used to promote e-resources, most respondents use Facebook posts (74%), Instagram posts (58%), and digital newsletters (53%). After these top three channels, virtual posters (such as images on TV screens or websites) was the top used method at 40%. Only 19% of participants use Twitter/X posts, and only 4% post on TikTok. 4% of respondents do not use any digital marketing tools. 20% of respondents also use additional tools, including blog posts, direct or targeted emails, videos, presentation decks, website banners, LinkedIn posts, and listservs (see Figure 6). Several participants also listed their LibGuide research guides as marketing tools.

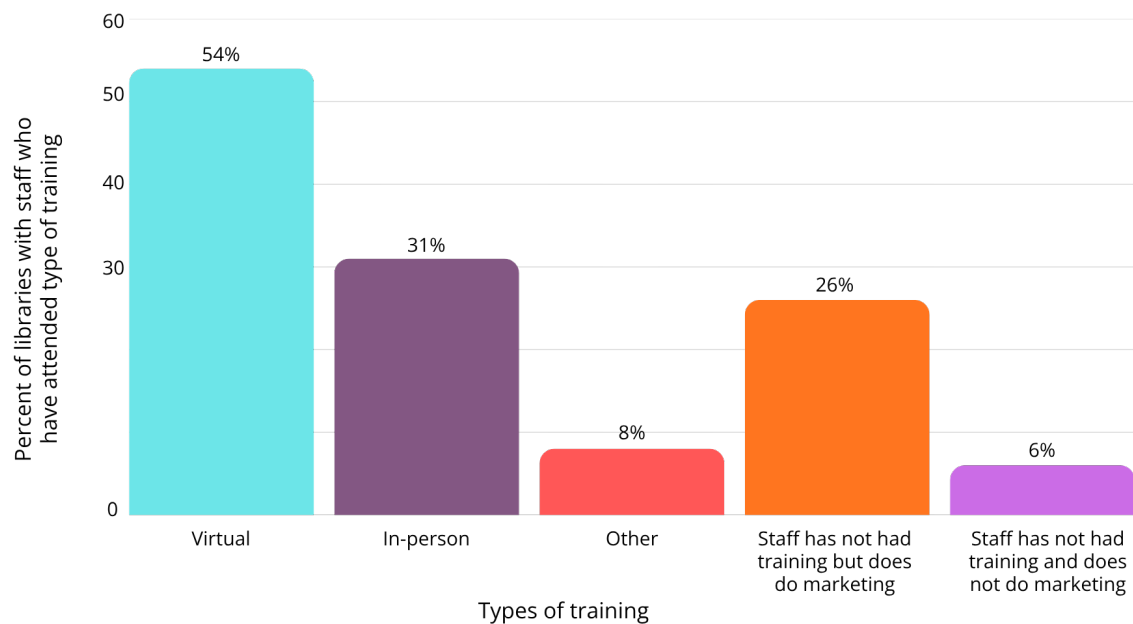
**Figure 6: Types of Digital Marketing Tools Used in Libraries**



## Training

In terms of training, 26% of participants said that their library staff does library marketing but has not received any training. Of respondents that have received training, 31% said someone on staff has attended in-person training on marketing; 54% said someone attended virtual training, and 8% said a staff member received a different form of marketing training, such as a class in a library science program. Only 6% of participants said that their library staff does not do any library marketing and therefore does not do any training on the subject (see Figure 7). For the respondents whose staff have attended a marketing training, 33% had someone attend within the last 6 months, 22% were trained between six months and one year ago, 16% were trained one to three years ago, and 1% were trained five or more years ago.

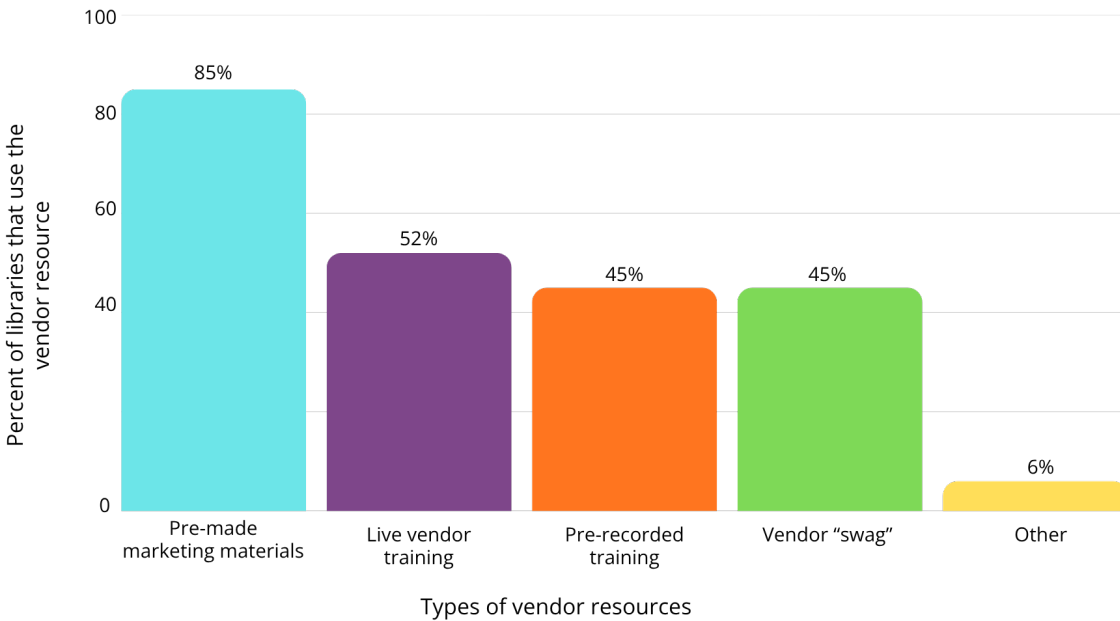
**Figure 7: Types of Marketing Training by Library Staff Participation**



### Other Considerations

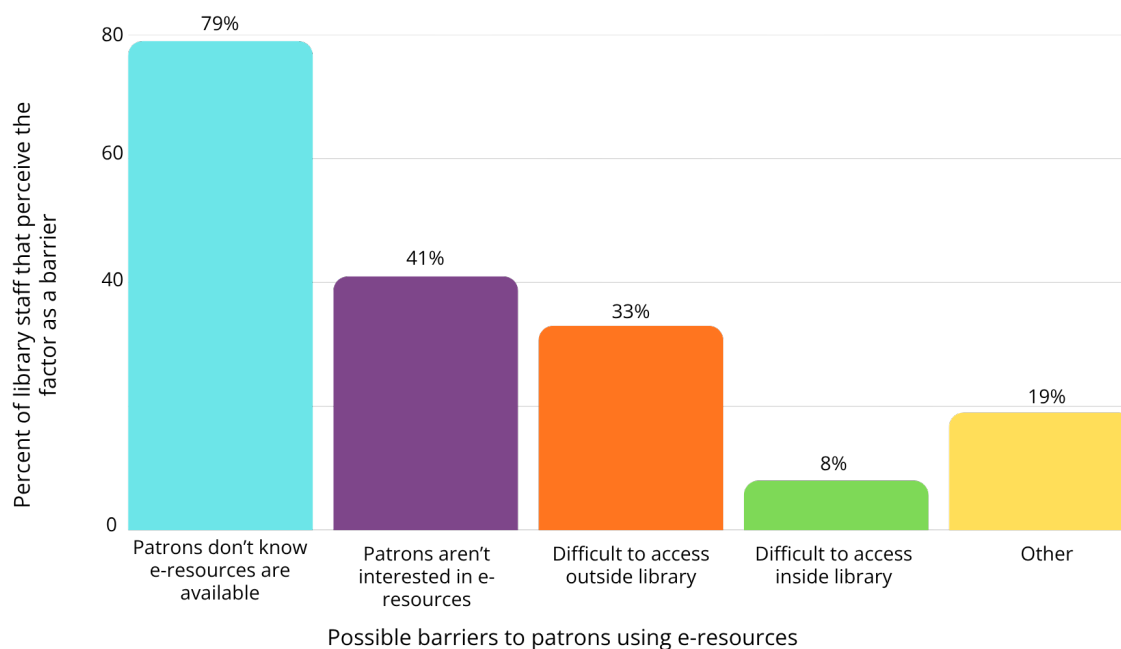
In response to previous literature about the benefits of libraries working with e-resource vendors on marketing and instruction (Profera et al., 2015; Ndungu, 2016), we found that 67% of respondents already work with vendors to promote e-resources. Of vendor tools, 85% reported using pre-made marketing materials, such as bookmarks and flyers; 52% use vendor-created webinars or in-person training; 45% use pre-recorded instructional videos; 45% use vendor “swag” items (like stress balls, lanyards, pens, etc.), and 6% use other tools, such as vendor blog posts and direct meetings with representatives (see Figure 8).

**Figure 8: Types of Vendor Resources Used by Libraries for Marketing**



Finally, we asked participants to select all of the factors that they believe prevent patrons from using e-resources ahead of the open-ended questions. A large majority—79%—believe that patrons do not know that the e-resources are available through the library, indicating a great need for e-resource marketing. Additionally, 41% said that patrons aren't interested in e-resources; 33% said e-resources are difficult to access outside of the library; and 8% said e-resources are difficult to access within the library building. 19% of respondents also said "other" factors contribute, many of which are illustrated in the open-ended questions.

**Figure 9: Perceived Barriers to Patrons Using E-Resources**



## Barriers to E-Resource Marketing

### *Difficulty Accessing E-resources*

While we expected to see barriers with the time, resources, and skills required for effective marketing, many participants reported barriers that preceded the marketing process. Just as in the previous question, library staff reported that it was difficult to access e-resources both within and outside the library, and this dissuaded them from e-resource promotion. First, physical access barriers were commonly cited, including a lack of devices and/or internet. One respondent listed, “Internet and phone service consistency and availability in our area,” as a top barrier, while another listed, “Lack of broadband access in rural areas.” Other respondents shared that patrons “don’t have access to a computer outside of the library,” and “Patrons don't have a user-friendly device to access e-resources (like a Kindle or phone with a large screen).” One respondent said, “Remote access [is not] available [for] some e-resources.” Some of these barriers may be better addressed by lendable technology programs than marketing strategies, but they are noteworthy nonetheless.

Additionally, the mechanisms of the e-resources themselves seem to be frustrating to many patrons. Respondents listed, “Too many steps/too much friction for people getting started,” “Having to navigate several webpages and authentications just to get to the e-resource they want,” and “Patrons not wanting to create accounts” as top barriers. The process of logging in and searching “seems more complicated than Google,” which respondents said patrons were more likely to go to for online information. Similarly, compatibility with personal devices, like Kindles or phone apps, was something respondents said patrons complain about. While many of these barriers are related to the usability of e-resources themselves, other respondents included problems with library infrastructure and discovery as well, noting, “Often, e-resources are hard for patrons to find,” and “Our website is broken and outdated.”

### ***Aversion to Technology***

The perceived difficulty of accessing e-resources may also be a contributing factor to a similar theme, which is the limited digital literacy of patrons and/or a general aversion to technology. Responses in this category ranged from, “People don't like e-resources as much as print materials,” to “Some patrons fear technology.” The sources of patron discomfort with technology are not perfectly clear; many respondents pointed to explanations like the “learning curve in searching practices” and patrons’ age affecting their relationship with technology (ex. “unfamiliarity with electronic devices in an aging population”). Another respondent guessed that “People are burnt out on technology since relying on it all the time during Covid and want to use print resources to relax. They say staring at screens makes their eyes hurt.” While this barrier may not be exclusive to e-resources, it may still be a topic that can be addressed through more effective marketing and education.

### ***Limited Awareness and Interest in E-resources***

One of the most-cited barriers was limited awareness of e-resources, which seems to suggest a need for increased e-resource marketing. Participants said that patrons “don't know we have [e-resources]” and “they don't know the difference between them.” Similarly, patrons may not know “the extent of the resources available” or the types of e-resources available, with one participant pointing to streaming video as an example of underused media. This lack of awareness seems to extend to both patrons and staff, since some respondents specifically listed “staff awareness of the resources available” as the barrier.

Respondents also noted significant disengagement among users who are aware of e-resources through the library. Again, this disinterest encompasses both patrons and staff; participants responded, “Lack of interest in the resources available,” “Staff apathy,” “Patrons not having a desire to use them,” and “Getting students to pay attention” as examples in this category. One respondent put, in all caps, “THEY AREN'T INTERESTED.” For academic libraries, library staff reported disengagement among both faculty and students. However, several respondents also noted that this disinterest lasted until the moment when a patron had a specific need for an e-resource. One person wrote, “Students don't care *until they need it*” (italics added). Others commented, “Patrons only want immediate needs,” and “Patrons [are] not interested in e-resources until they have an urgent situation, at which time they don't want to learn.”

### ***Lack of Library Resources***

Unsurprisingly, a lack of library resources dedicated to marketing was another commonly listed barrier. Many respondents noted a lack of staff time

in general, with some specifying a lack of “time to create compelling promotions on my part.” Staff time as a limitation was also referred to obliquely in comments like, “Staff does not want to do marketing advertisements due to work priorities.” As we saw in the quantitative data, some participants noted a “lack of dedicated marketing staff” as a significant challenge. Funding also appeared in a number of ways, from “Finding marketing software that fits into a budget,” to “E-resources can get cancelled due to budget, so it feels like a lot of work goes to waste.” For their “three primary barriers,” one person put simply, “1) Money 2) Time.”

### *Lack of Marketing Expertise*

Perhaps nested within a “lack of resources” is specifically a lack of marketing expertise among library staff. Among responses in this category, library staff members said they struggled with “Reaching people,” “Meeting patrons at point of interest,” “Figuring out the right time to share information,” “Phras[ing] it in a way that is accessible/interesting,” “Target[ing] audiences,” and generally “Not knowing best practices of how to market.” In some cases, this barrier was expressed as primarily the fault of patrons, like when respondents said, “Faculty don't read emails,” and “People not reading signage/newsletters/etc.” One respondent shared a frank anecdote: “Some of the promotions we have made are also quite boring. They're generic and text heavy, so people scroll past them. A few staff members have tried to shove [e-resource marketing] materials in corresponding print resources, but many patrons mistook these items for trash and just threw them away or returned them to the desk.”

The lack of marketing knowledge is compounded by additional communication challenges outside of library staff members' control. Several people noted the crowded media environment with comments like, “Standing

out among all the other marketing done by other departments at my institution,” “Getting [patrons’] attention when so much is competing for it,” and “Overflow of information/promotional material for other library programming.” Many respondents worried about, “Being overinformative and overwhelming.” Others argued that any communication is a challenge when other departments have control over their social media accounts or other channels. One person said, “We don't really have direct access to patrons unless they physically walk into the library or they visit our website.”

## Discussion

### Addressing Barriers

#### *Library Staff Apathy*

In response to the question, “How have you tried to address these barriers in the past,” one strikingly common response is, “Yes,” as in, “We’ve already tried everything.” To expand on this attitude, one person added, “Many, many, many, many times,” and another wrote, “Lack of training and resources have made us live with our problems.” Another respondent explained, “It's been hard. We have certain staff who work on these promotions, and they aren't eager to make materials more engaging.” These types of answers certainly mesh well with extensive responses on limited staff time and a lack of interest in e-resources, and those are certainly discouraging. They also match Bhardwaj & Jain’s findings that many staff members still think of marketing as something outside the necessary work of libraries (2016). However, if libraries want to improve staff and patron engagement with e-resources, this attitude is one of the first barriers that must be addressed. As one of the above respondents noted, training and marketing resources may be part of changing this attitude, but it may also depend on the willingness of organizational leadership to change it.

## *Training*

One strategy that can be used to address some of the barriers listed is training for both library staff and patrons. For patrons, especially those who may be unfamiliar or uncomfortable with technology, one-on-one appointments with librarians have been effective. One respondent wrote, “We have ‘Book a Tech’ appointments and tech programming to help train tech-averse patrons and let them know about our resources.” If staff time is too limited, another respondent wrote, “We have volunteer ‘Patron Helpers’ who can sit with patrons at the computers and spend more time with them than what staff can provide.” These kinds of educational opportunities help address several perceived barriers at once, including the lack of awareness, discomfort with technology, and challenges with communication.

At a consortial level, we also recognize a widespread need for library marketing training. Such training must be accessible to busy library staff with limited travel resources (ex. recorded webinars), and it must address the challenges that respondents listed above. When asked if they would attend marketing training sessions, 42% of respondents said they would “definitely attend,” and 29% said they would “probably attend.” By topic, 52% of respondents said they are interested in “any topics related to e-resource marketing;” 27% are interested in how to boost e-resource usage through library events and programming, and 15% are interested in “how to promote e-resources in online spaces, such as social media.” It is clear from these data that there is an unfulfilled need for marketing training for library staff, and we hope that further training can help eliminate some of the barriers. Additionally, given the survey responses on library staffs’ limited time and resources, training (on both marketing and the specific e-resources) may be one area where consortia can fill a need.

## *Marketing Materials*

Another strategy for cutting down on the library resources and expertise needed to market e-resources is for vendors and library consortia to provide pre-made marketing materials. When asked whether they would be interested in pre-made marketing materials, 91% of respondents said they are interested in print, digital, or both. Only 8% said they preferred to make their own materials, and only 1% said they are not interested in marketing materials at all. Additionally, only 4% of respondents said they were interested in training on “how to create marketing materials to promote e-resources, such as flyers and posters,” indicating that pre-made promotional materials (for example, by vendors) may be more useful for library staff.

Pre-made marketing materials can certainly help address the awareness barrier, and it can also help make up for some of the knowledge required for marketing. Pre-made materials can be created by experts to ensure that they communicate clearly with the right language and attractive graphics. They can also help save staff time, reducing the amount required to download and/or print the materials. Our results indicate that digital materials, like Facebook posts, may be more widely used than physical materials, though the divided literature on the effectiveness of social media marketing in libraries may point to a need for a diverse set of media. While vendors can certainly provide relevant, useful marketing materials, this may be another area where library consortia can step in to fill a resource gap and provide materials that are tailored to the needs of their communities.

These suggestions indicate the need for libraries to work with their consortia to help fill some of the resource gaps when it comes to e-resource marketing, but the precise balance of responsibility will likely differ between libraries. Where consortia may have the greatest impact is among libraries

with limited staff time and/or knowledge about marketing, in which case, training on these topics and pre-made marketing materials can be a strong starting point. Consortia may also have a role to play in creating public awareness and building partnerships, but those recommendations would require further research and discussion.

### **Conclusion**

Understanding how libraries promote e-resources to their patrons can have profound implications for both library services and the broader community. We hope that libraries and other consortia can use our findings to tailor their approaches to better meet the diverse needs of their users, potentially leading to increased use of e-resources and enhanced patron satisfaction. There is potential for broader collaboration across professional organizations and consortia on a national level to share best practices and offer a comprehensive curriculum for library marketing. Within the context of this data, we challenge ourselves and other library consortia to explore some of the ways that they may fill in some of the gaps in training and marketing resources for their member libraries. Additionally, the constraints on funding and staffing for library marketing also invite an opportunity for library directors and deans to assess what support and training their staff need to promote e-resources and demonstrate a clear return on investment. While we know that adoption of our suggestions will be harder for some libraries—and perhaps not even appropriate for every library—we hope that a greater understanding of these barriers will lead to more ideas about how to overcome them.

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## Appendix A: Survey Questions

1. What kind of library do you work in?
  - Four-year public college or university
  - Four-year private college or university
  - Community college
  - Public library
  - Special collections or archives
  
2. How big is the library faculty and staff at your branch/location? Please count part-time staff members as 0.5.
  - 1-5 employees
  - 6-10 employees
  - 11-30 employees
  - 31-60 employees
  - Over 60 employees
  
3. What is the size of your service population?
  - 3,000 or fewer patrons
  - Between 3,000 and 10,000 patrons
  - Between 10,000 and 50,000 patrons
  - Between 50,000 and 100,000 patrons
  - Between 100,000 and 500,000 patrons
  - Between 500,000 and 1 million patrons
  - Over 1 million patrons
  
4. What kinds of print materials does your library use to advertise e-resources? Please select all that apply.
  - Newsletters
  - Brochures
  - Posters
  - Postcards
  - Bookmarks
  - Flyers
  - Table tents
  - Other (please describe)
  - None

5. What kinds of digital materials does your library use to advertise e-resources? Please select all that apply.
- Instagram posts
  - Facebook posts
  - Twitter/X posts
  - TikTok posts
  - Other social media posts
  - Digital newsletters
  - Virtual posters (images on screens)
  - Other (please describe)
  - None
6. Who is responsible for creating marketing materials at your library? Please select all that apply.
- Marketing or community engagement librarian
  - Other full-time librarians or staff members
  - Part-time librarians or staff members
  - Students (including student workers)
  - Other (please describe below)
  - No one
7. Other: Please tell us the job title(s) of the person(s) in your library responsible for creating marketing materials:
- 
8. How many staff members are responsible for marketing library resources? Please include all kinds of marketing (print, digital, outreach, and other) in your total.
- 0-1 employees
  - 2-5 employees
  - 6-10 employees
  - More than 10 employees
9. What kinds of training has your library staff received on marketing/promotion? Please select all that apply.
- We have a marketing or community engagement librarian on staff.
  - Staff have attended in-person professional development (workshops, etc.) about library marketing.

- Staff have attended virtual training (webinars, etc.) about library marketing.
- Our staff does not participate in marketing library materials and therefore has not attended any training.
- Our staff does participate in library marketing but has not attended any training.
- Other (please be descriptive)

10. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

11. When was the last time that someone on your staff attended a training about library marketing?

- Within the last 6 months
- 6 months to 1 year ago
- Over 1 year to 3 years ago
- 5 years ago or more
- I've never attended training about library marketing

12. Do you have a budget for marketing?

- Yes
- No
- Unknown

13. If you have a marketing budget, what percent of that budget goes toward promoting **e-resources**? (E-resources include databases, online journals, digital newspapers, ebooks, and any other resources that patrons access through the library via a computer).

- Less than 10%
- 10-20%
- 20-30%
- 30-40%
- 40-50%
- 50-60%
- 60-70%
- 70-80%
- 80-90%
- More than 90%

14. Has your library ever requested funding from an outside organization, such as a grant, for library marketing projects?

- Yes
- No
- Unknown

15. Do you ever work with e-resource vendors, such as EBSCO, ProQuest, Overdrive, or others, to help market e-resources within your library?

- Yes
- No
- Unknown

16. If you have worked with vendors to increase usage of their resources, how have they supported you? Please select all that apply.

- Pre-made marketing materials, such as posters, flyers, or bookmarks
- Training (either in-person or virtual) on how to use vendor resources
- Pre-recorded instructional videos on how to use vendor resources
- Physical “swag” items advertising vendor resources, such as stress balls, lanyards, pens, etc.
- Other (please specify below)

17. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

18. How do you assess the effectiveness of your current marketing strategies? Please select all that apply.

- We look at usage data (check outs, full-text views, etc.)
- We ask patrons for feedback formally, like using a survey
- We ask patrons for feedback informally, like anecdotal evidence
- We don't assess the effectiveness of our marketing strategies
- We assess in another way (please explain below)

19. We assess in another way:

\_\_\_\_\_

20. What factors do you think prevent patrons from using e-resources at your library? Please select all that you think contribute.

- Patrons don't know that the e-resources are available
- Patrons aren't interested in the e-resources available
- E-resources are hard to access in the library (ex. not enough computers for people to use, etc.)
- E-resources are hard to access outside of the library (ex. patrons don't have their own devices, the resources are inaccessible by proxy, etc.)
- Something else (please explain below)

21. Other: \_\_\_\_\_

22. What are the three primary barriers you encounter when promoting e-resources to patrons?

23. How have you tried to address these barriers in the past?

24. If a library professional organization or consortium offered training on marketing e-resources, how likely would you be to attend *based on interest*? (For this question, assume you would have the time and resources to attend.)

- I would definitely attend.
- I would probably attend.
- I might attend.
- I would probably not attend.
- I would definitely not attend.

25. Which of these topics would you be most interested in learning more about?

- How to increase e-resource usage through library programming, like events
- How to create marketing materials to promote e-resources, such as flyers and posters
- How to promote e-resources in online spaces, such as social media
- I'm interested in any topics related to e-resource marketing
- I'm not interested in any e-resource marketing topics

26. If there are other specific topics related to marketing e-resources that you would like to learn about, please tell us here.
27. Would you find it useful if a library professional organization or consortium made marketing materials for you, which you could print or share in your library? Assume these materials would be free.
- Yes, I would be interested in printable materials.
  - Yes, I would be interested in digital materials.
  - Yes, I would be interested in both printable and digital materials.
  - No, I prefer to create my own marketing materials.
  - No, I'm not interested in marketing e-resources in my library.
28. Is there any other kind of marketing support or training that you would like to get from a library professional organization or consortium?

### About the authors

Sophie Hollis is the Community Engagement Librarian at NC LIVE, where she is responsible for communications, marketing, the annual conference, and member library relationships. She is passionate about building connections between libraries and the broader communities they serve, especially within her home state of NC.

Devon Waugh is the Instruction Librarian at NC LIVE, a library consortium that serves public and academic libraries in North Carolina. She leads the training program, which provides webinars, in-person workshops, customized training, and self-paced courses, videos, and tutorials for 200+ member libraries. As a librarian with a background in K-12 education, she is interested in the ways that library workers learn on the job and developing creative, scalable offerings.

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