

## **658.8: Marketing for academic libraries**

**Theodorou Roxanna<sup>1</sup> and Tsoubrakakou Anastasia<sup>2</sup>**

1 Library of Hellenic American Union

2 OTE SA

**Abstract:** Libraries all around the world are more and more adopting marketing techniques and concepts to better understand their users' needs, to create meaningful services, to justify funding and expenses, to raise awareness, to communicate with external audiences, and generally become more visible and appreciated. The last few years, use of marketing has increased as budgets are shrinking and the needs of the users are becoming bigger and bigger.

In Greece, though, although marketing is a very popular study field, it doesn't seem to find its place inside the Library community, as it's often considered a far commercial concept for non-profit institutions. Additionally, academic libraries have an already established audience, which is going to seek their services, as they seem to have no other choice.

But, as information production and dissemination methods change and evolve and more and more informational products make their appearance, Libraries have to study their users a lot more closely and possibly create new products, make them appealing and useful and offer them to the public.

The aim of this paper is to identify marketing techniques that have already been used internationally focusing on the same target groups as Academic Libraries and that have helped to either design products and services that appeal to them as consumers or that have successfully promoted the message of the product and/or the brand to said community. It is widely accepted that a satisfied user is the best marketing tool for promoting library products and services. The question is if academic libraries need or use marketing techniques to improve their functionality creating innovative services. Marketing projects and promotional materials aren't just about convincing users to use a certain service. They also serve to change attitudes and preconceptions. Academic libraries, although they have a clearly defined audience, have a lot to gain by being more open and extrovert. More often than not, academic libraries seem to rely heavily on the fact that their users have limited choices when it comes to their information resources. Of course, this is not as much true as it was a little more than a decade ago. But still, a student or a researcher rely very much on the library services. The goal, however, for academic libraries would be to convince their users that their existence and services are not a "necessary evil" rather than a privilege and an opportunity. In order to gain that,

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thought, libraries should focus more on message design and branding, public relations, publicity and advertising.

What this paper will try to do is identify some of the more successful (or notoriously unsuccessful) marketing campaigns that focus on the same target audiences as academic libraries. Next we will try to pinpoint and analyze the specific characteristics of these products and campaigns, which made them successful and communicated the message across by convincing and engaging the consumers. Finally, we will try to evaluate and determine which of those methods and characteristics can be adopted in the nonprofit environment of the academic libraries, and more specifically, by Greek academic libraries.

**Keywords:** library marketing, academic libraries

### **1. Introduction**

Libraries and information centers have come from a tradition of being a public good. Staff has historically been confident that their products had such intrinsic merit that customers would automatically be attracted; they believed that people “should” use the library. This is now considered yesterday’s thinking. The former strategies of telling the community what the library has available and of using persuasion of convince potential users is simply not successful in a world of escalating change, diminishing fiscal resources and increasing personal options.

In a library as everywhere else, marketing is a process of exchange: the exchange of elements of the value between producer and consumer. In many ways, marketing can be regarded as a partnership that is established based upon this premise of mutual benefit.

### **2. Marketing Definitions**

Marketing is defined by Philip A. Kotler (1975, 5) as the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational goals (Owens, Ir., 2003).

[...] Marketing is the science and art of exploring, creating, and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit. Marketing identifies unfulfilled needs and desires. It defines, measures, and quantifies the size of the identified market and the profit potential. It pinpoints which segments the company is capable of serving best and it designs and promotes the appropriate products and services (Kotler Marketing Group, 2012).

A non-profit organization like an academic library, in order to take full advantage of the potential offered by the adoption of marketing concepts and options, should:

- Understand marketing theory, realize the differences and distinguish marketing from selling, promotion, public relations, publicity and other functions or aspects that are part of the marketing process and
- Organize marketing strategy and create marketing plan that will contribute to its efficiency and performance (Ojiambo, 1994).

In the early 1970s, librarians began to consider that the idea to market their library according to their user's needs could contribute both towards the fulfilment of the overall library objectives and the improvement of the existing services (Gupta, 2003).

The history of marketing library services began long before the actual concept was born. Samuel Swett Green in his often quoted speech at the ALA Conference in 1876 advocated "improved personal relations between librarians and readers." It could be said that today's marketing of library services has its roots in parts of the USA and Northern Europe, in countries with few illiterates and more money, libraries, and library schools than the rest of the world. This certainly does not mean that the idea of libraries reaching out to "the common man" has not occupied librarians in other parts of the world. For instance, there is the example of the "library movement" in India at the beginning of the 20th century (Renborg, 1997)

Philip Kotler created a very useful tool, so successful in the private sector, that has been translated into the nonprofit sector as well; a model called the "4Ps". The Ps as adapted and defined for the library profession include:

Product: Those programs and services that the library provides to its users.

Price: What it costs to produce its product, plus any user fees that are assessed.

Place: How products and users are connected

Promotion: How the library communicates with its users relating details on how user's needs have been identified and what responses have been developed to meet those needs (Weingand, D., 1998).

### **3. Marketing and Academic Libraries**

Academic Libraries in Greece operate under a very specific set of governing laws. Every University has its own central Library, which is officially called "Library and Information Services Center". Its mission is to strengthen and support the educational and research activities of the Institution, to contribute to the management, and dissemination of information. Every University or Technical School have one central library, and in certain cases (those of very large institutions with many academic departments) they also have several departmental libraries. The truth is that the laws governing the operation of academic libraries have changed several times through the years, especially since 1974, and every new government seems to want to rearrange the map of education in Greece and leave its own legacy. In fact, a new law reforming the education system in Greece is being past these days that this presentation is being written.

Some things, though, at least as far as academic libraries are concerned have remained largely unchanged through the years. Their funding comes almost exclusively from the State, which is pre allocated, by the ministry of Education to any and all expenses the Library is allowed to make. In that sense there is little room to create new products and services (as they are not provided for by the Ministry), if they cost any amount of money. Also, they have no expense allocation for advertising campaigns and procedures. Academic Libraries are

considered to be able to run on auto pilot, since they are an integral part of the University life (and function). And to some extent, this is, or used to be, true.

Academic libraries are a very peculiar genre, marketing wise. The products and services they offer are predefined by their users to a very large extent. (For example it is very common for academic libraries to base their collection development policies and procedures mostly on faculty requests, limiting the role of the librarians in the process). Also, until very recently, they did not have to find ways to persuade users to use their services. They use was more or less mandatory, at least if the student wanted to get decent grades. Attending university, means submitting assignments, which usually means having to perform some form of basic research, which in its turn means the use of the university library resources. The university has an inspiring environment, where students, faculty members and researchers gain their motivation to work and produce research results. The university library is an integral part of this academic body.

Of course, as we have come to understand, times have changed and the digital age came, bringing along huge amounts of easily accessible information. Or at least seemingly so. Now students, but even faculty and researchers tend to use the academic library a lot less, at least its physical spaces, and a very large part of their information needs is covered online, from the comfort of their homes, or a nearby café with complementary Wi-Fi access. And even more importantly, the information they use does not even come through necessarily academic outlets. So, in essence, academic libraries began bleeding users. The information society, however, is not that new anymore, and libraries had time to recognize changes, change themselves and adopt. Libraries, in general, have embarked the digital age with success. Their collections are not limited by geographical boundaries anymore. They offer huge collections of online resources that can be accessed and used remotely. Communication with library personnel has become even easier, either through simple email enquiries, or by the use of systems like “Ask a Librarian”, which in essence is a chat box available during working hours. Library websites, also feature an abundance of tools for online visitors, helping them create documents, giving them guidelines on formatting, and citing resources, giving online tutorials on several subjects etc.

So, in truth, users do not necessarily have to actually visit the physical space of the library in order to use at least some of its services. On the other hand, not all services are, or can be delivered on line. Print collections may be shrinking but are still relevant and totally indispensable to research. Physical, in person interaction with librarians and other personnel is often more effective than remote help. And of course, not all users are equally, or even adequately technology savvy.

The question is which academic libraries need to make marketing campaigns and which of them can do a successful one? Libraries with great budgets or libraries with limited resources? Do academic libraries need to advertise?

While more and more students may be visiting the library (physically or virtually), the real question is, are they aware of everything that we have to

offer? Just because they are in building doesn't necessarily mean that they are using library services effectively (Mathews, 2009).

The library can become a premier campus destination rather than just a place that students have to go. Alire (2007) supports that academic libraries have historically been well behind public libraries in the area of marketing library services to their users.

There are two marketing approaches that are effective in academic libraries such as "relationship marketing" and "word of mouth marketing".

Word-of-mouth is communication about products and services between people who are perceived to be independent of the company providing the product or service, in a medium perceived to be independent of the company. These communications can be conversations, or just one-way testimonials. But the essential element is that they are from or among people who are perceived to have little commercial vested interest in persuading someone else to use product and therefore no particular incentive to distort the truth in favor of the product or service (Silverman, 2001).

The fundamental objective of word-of-mouth marketing in academic libraries is getting people to talk to others about library services so that those services are more heavily utilized. "Word-of-mouth is thousands of times more powerful than conventional marketing (Silverman, 2001). Why is that? It's because word-of-mouth marketing is basically using the offline marketing technique of getting folks to talk about a service positively (Kirby and Marsden, 2006).

The essential components of word-of-mouth marketing is the interpersonal communication and the exchange of information based on a product, brand or service. In addition to, the communicators have to be perceived as unbiased (Alire, 2007).

As Balter and Butman said (2005), word-of-mouth marketing is the honest and genuine sharing of real opinions and information about services. Users continue to rely on the credibility of their friends', family's and acquaintances' opinions because they are pure and without manipulation.

Relationship marketing emerged through direct response marketing in the 1960s and two decades later its main target was the value it gave on creating long term relationships rather than impersonal transactions. Relationship marketing is about knowing the user's needs and providing them a wide range of products to meet their needs.

Gronroos suggests a framework where relationship marketing will involve interaction process as the basis, an organized communication process as the marketing communications support through specific media, and a customer value process as the result of relationship marketing (Gronroos 2000).

Relationship marketing in Academic Libraries should:

- Go further than the needs and demands of their users and should try to fulfil even greater expectations.(Singh 2003)
- Relationship marketing offers specific benefits to academic libraries as well as to digital library services.(Henderson 2005)

Academic Libraries should take into consideration the six following relationships and alliances: customer markets, internal markets, supplier and alliance markets, referral markets, recruitment markets and influence markets. (Besant, Sharp 2000)

Thus, the focus of relationship marketing is not just on gaining users for single exchanges but on retaining and building meaningful connections with users as the foundation for an ongoing long-term relationship.

The creation of a marketing plan is an essential step in getting the word out about the academic library. The plan should support the overall mission and goals of the library and should be reviewed and updated annually.

1. The first step is the identification of the environment, the opportunities and the challenges. (What is the environment?)
2. Then, it is appropriate the description of the desire outcomes, of the dreams. (What do you want to happen?)
3. The objectives should be doable and measurable. (What will be accomplished?)
4. Then, the determination of the library image, the competitive advantages and the library's unique "selling points". (How do you want the library to be perceived?)
5. The next step is to decide what groups would the library like to reach with the message and why is the academic library, its resources and services important to users? What does the library want them to think? Feel? Do? (Who needs to hear your message?)
6. The key messages are the most important thing the library, wants others to know. The key message should be repeated as often and as consistently as possible in person, in print, online and in other materials for maximum impact. It should be easy to say and remember – no more than 15 words. Different messages might be appropriate for different audiences. The three messages from an academic library Campaign are:
  - Academic Libraries are changing and dynamic places.
  - Academic Libraries are places of opportunity.
  - Academic Libraries bring you the world.
7. Then, the decision of the delivery ways should include strategies like:
  - Library newsletter
  - Web site
  - General promotional materials
  - Letters to the Editor
  - Radio
  - Television
  - Presentations
  - Gifts with the message
8. The objectives should provide a clear means of evaluation. Frequently used measures include: circulation, Web site visits, attendance at programs, number of media stories placed/speeches given, follow-

up surveys/interviews, word-of-mouth feedback, letters of appreciation, honors received. Review each strategy and why it did or didn't work. Use what the library learned in making future marketing and communications plans. (How will you know what worked and what didn't?).

So two major points arise. Given that the information environment is changing rapidly there is a need and an expectancy for libraries to adapt. They need to create even more new services that will address the needs of the users in a more effective way, making them more relevant to today's age.

One the other hand they have to make their presence known, to create a more alluring brand for themselves, so that already existing and future services will receive the attention that they deserve, and thus, ensuring that the libraries continue to play an important role in the educational process.

There is also the uncomfortable truth that libraries are considered a little bit obsolete, a thing of the past, a relic even, at least to the minds of younger people (and which they consist the vast majority of academic libraries users). Marketing can help a lot in changing that perception. Of course this is not a new idea, obviously. But academic libraries tend to focus on their serious role a lot more than is necessary. Other types of libraries have tried to use humor and unconventional methods to promote their services (or simply their existence). Academic libraries, tend to focus more on the "academic" part and serious profile.

#### **4. Modern marketing approaches or Sell a library story**

In an effort to see what makes a campaign effective we identified some of the most influential and successful ad campaigns for products that target the same group such as academic libraries. Educated, young people of the ages of 18-34, both male and female. Although, there were a lot of beautifully executed campaigns, seemingly varying a lot, in terms of products, styling, message and so forth, there are some characteristics that they all have in common:

1. They are memorable
2. They try to communicate how the product fits into the consumer's life
3. They stand for values above and beyond the product it self
4. They are inextricably linked to the brand (and thus the ad cannot be attributed to a competitor) (Greenwald, 2014)

It would be useful at this point to see a few of the most successful and talked about campaigns of the year before, and identify any common denominators.

- The world's toughest job (American Greeting's Cardstore <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HB3xM93rXbY>)

This ad features people interviewing for what they're told is the "world's toughest job". It truly sound brutal – 135 hours a week; no vacation; medicine, finance and culinary decess required; no salary.

It got 24 million YouTube views, and it was one of the biggest ads of 2014

- Far Far away from your parents - HBO go  
([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5g5D4\\_aS\\_A&list=PLIMU41eptuRurNkTcCOyz8Bj6I6R\\_8VwS](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=B5g5D4_aS_A&list=PLIMU41eptuRurNkTcCOyz8Bj6I6R_8VwS))

This series of ads aimed at the millennials, and their goal was to promote not just the service itself, but the edginess of the network. It featured great acting, good pace and humor that both parents and children could easily relate to.

- Parents - Coca Cola  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=yRqUTA6AegA>)

A very simple, and completely relatable ad for Coca Cola, which almost ignores the product and focuses straight on the lifestyle. Both funny and moving it was one of the best family ads of the last years.

- Sketches Campaign - Dove  
(<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=litXW91UauE>)

The Sketches campaign is the second part of the Campaign for Real Beauty. It was designed to encourage debate regarding the definition of beauty and how women see themselves. It's empowering, inclusive and broadly relatable, and also, not a bar of soap comes up the screen!

A lot more campaigns could be shown here, but the truth is that there would not be enough space. The more pressing point is how all these can relate to libraries, what can they learn from these huge corporations and how can they use it to their advantage.

So, even if until recently, a company that wanted to sell more refrigerators, for example, would create an advertisement with pictures of refrigerators and put them on magazines and newspapers and billboards, now the selling methods have changed. Now the companies try to sell a story, something that people can identify with, even if in the end the product is something as mundane as a kitchen appliance.

And, surely, who would be more appropriate to sell stories than a Library? But to do so, librarians (and all other professionals involved in library operations) have to own up to their profession. A number of studies have recorded that librarians do not often think their profession is important enough, or that they, themselves, are not important enough (Dupre, 2009). Although they are trained professionals, that provide important and useful services, they have a hard time communicating that to the general public. One important factor for this miscommunication could be traced to the librarian stereotypes, about old spinsters that are concerned more about the orderly fashion, than the workings of the world.

## 5. Conclusions

However, the problem remains. Librarians do not know how to talk about libraries. This is the gap that a modern marketing approach could fill, and help libraries open up to the world, prove their worth, connect with the people,



promote their services, and stay relevant to their times. It can also help reinvent the image of the library (and the librarian) and make the professionals themselves prouder of their work.

As in all other industries, marketing, if used properly can help professionals create products that are wanted by their clients (in this case users) and communicate them in a more effective way. And although, the first part of this statements may not be so pressing, as libraries, especially academic, seem to have embraced the digital revolution and try to take advantage of these changing times, the second part becomes more and more an issue.

Libraries that will end up creating more useful services, and if these services are make known to the public and if the public relates to the libraries more, then as a result, libraries will gain a lot more visibility, a lot more users and subsequently a lot more funding and support.

If users are not aware, of the services offered by libraries, they will never seek them. Libraries exist because people consider them important and invest some of their time visiting and using them. If they stop doing that, then they are doomed to extinction. It will be a pity to lead them there due to inadequate marketing.

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