

Philosophy Statement

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The principles of marketing include the attraction of sufficient resources, the conversion of resources into products or services and the distribution of out-put (Woolfs 217). What does marketing have to do with a philosophy of librarianship? Plenty. Librarians, information specialists, whatever we call ourselves have an excellent product - information. Sadly the vibrancy of our product is lost if people do not understand our product and what information can do for them. Doug Johnson charges librarians to become rabble-rousers - to get out and make a little noise about our indispensable product (Johnson 3-4). In order to succeed in the 21st century, librarians need to recognize that our noble missions of education and service depend upon their practical counterpart: the business of marketing.

The first principle of marketing is the attraction of sufficient resources. Unfortunately, resources are always scarce. For example, the State of Indiana (likewise Texas, North Carolina and many other states) obviously faces a budget crunch. This past fall, cuts in public funding jeopardized the INSPIRE network. Further, funding for school library books failed to meet even the conservative goal of two new books per child enrolled. How do librarians attract resources that are non-existent?

Librarianship requires that we campaign for resources - and make a little noise. Private industry marketers are not afraid to get in the public's face to sell, sell, sell. Librarians may be reluctant to plead with the public for fear of appearing pushy. I think we need to be pushy. Daniel Callison is particularly adept at garnering public attention. His recent articles in the Indianapolis Star highlight the importance of School Media Specialists in public education. We can follow suit. Publishing in library-centric circles is preaching to the choir. We need to appeal to the public and engage in politics when resources run short. When scrambling for resources, the librarian is not a neutral mediator of the public sphere. She is an active participant. We need to leave the safety of the library and hit the pavement.

Librarians join larger organizations to make a collective noise. I joined the Indiana Library Association and serve on sub-organization committees because I wanted to be a part of something larger than myself. In working to forward ILF causes, my solo voice becomes much louder. The same goes for ALA, ASIST, ACM and other professional organizations that lobby for library and information science resources and advancements. According to the ALA website, there are approximately 117,419 libraries in the US with 392,839 people working in them. That's potentially a lot of noise!

What can we do to turn the resources we already have into exciting products and services for our users? Simply put, developing a product requires knowing our target audience. We anticipate user needs. Traditional surveys work. Monroe County Public Library recently conducted a huge user survey. Via a computer program, users logged-in upon entering the library. The user took a few minutes to answer key, general questions about library use and needs. Analyzing circulation and shelving trends to determine popular interests will key a librarian in to community needs.

Larry Cunningham, Director of the Jennings County Public Library practices an even simpler plan. He goes to all the local haunts, diners, movies, bars, county fairs, feed and seed co-ops and listens. Then he synthesizes what he hears into library services. Listening is simple, elegant and best of all free!

Once we assess the needs of our users, librarianship requires strategically adapting the product. Our product is a potentially overwhelming mass of information. A dialogue with the public helps us determine what kind of access is needed to what kind of information. Larry Cunningham heard talk of an agricultural community losing its financial and productive luster. When he oversaw construction of a new library, he wired it in such a way that the JCPL is part of the College Cooperative Southeast Program and INSPIRE. Now the residents of this rural community have access to continuing education, on-line databases, and the world. One woman found the necessary on-line resources to develop a specialty crop of lettuce. She now sells her product to high-end chefs all over the U.S. This director listened to the community concerns and designed the product with their participation in mind.

Perhaps librarians complain too often about services they have that no one uses. Part of the problem with little used library services is that the product doesn't match a need. Without the interconnection of needs of services, the library process is useless and frustrating. Librarians need to listen without interjecting personal agendas. Jacqueline de Ruiter observes that middle-aged and older users are often skeptical about the value of the Internet. They may require extra instruction when using digital resources and desire more print resources (199). Patrick Hall suggests that especially when librarians deal with people of color "interpersonal relationships or the cohesiveness of the group play a vital role" (319). The traditional focus on access to objects (books, computers) may not be as important as fostering a rich sense of community (Hall 319). Knowing our users and anticipating their needs is critical to marketing our product.

Finally, librarianship requires developing channels for the distribution of information. We need to advertise old products as well as new ones. Flyers and posters alone are insufficient. Monroe County Public Library activities are advertised on local cable channel 12 and local radio stations. A simple, tested website that easily guides patrons to library resources aids patrons immensely in understanding what the library can do for them. Outreach programs can visit retirement communities, Boys and Girl Clubs, schools, service clubs - anywhere patrons gather is a potential marketing venue. If librarians are public servants, we ought to be found reaching out to the public at sites ranging from the state prison to the county fair. Again, librarians need to make a little noise to promote their services.

Our profession is one of the best kept secrets out there. It is time to let the secret out. In an age of information overload, librarians are equipped to make sense out of chaos. I do not know what setting I will find myself working in when I finish my MLS. I do know the overarching principles of marketing will follow me anywhere. Our product offers the public tools for practicing active citizenship, pursuing a successful career, building community, discovering cultural diversity, developing personal well-being, finding inspiration and enjoying entertainment. Aspiring to serve the public requires developing resources, hearing needs and promoting services. Librarianship is a very public job. Sometimes it takes making a little noise - and good marketing.

Works Cited

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