

library marketplace

MARKETING, COMMUNICATIONS, AND LIBRARIES

I'd Like to Buy the World a ~~Coke~~ Library

By **Catherine Baird**

Imagine yourself sitting at the boardroom table at the annual international summit of marketing experts for Coca-Cola. What conversations do you think you'd hear around that table?

"If people only knew how good Coke tasted," sighs one.

"Yeah, that's it—people just don't know how thirst-quenching Coke is," pipes up another. "We just need to get the word out."

A third concludes confidently, "Perfect, let's make a book-mark!"

It may sound comical in this context, but libraries often take just that approach to marketing. We tend to think about ourselves first. Phrases such as "If they only knew that we had this service" or "If they only knew about this great resource" occur as frequently as "People just don't know what we do." We think marketing is simply about raising awareness. We think we just have to tell people and that's it – our marketing work is done. Marketing becomes an answer to a problem, rather than a tool. Technology hasn't solved all of our problems, and neither will marketing. But both can be leveraged to achieve what we want.

I'm not saying that letting people know what you're up to as an organization isn't important. And of course, book-marks will continue to have their place in library promotion. I'm simply saying that there can and should be more to marketing ourselves well. As libraries, we need to figure out how we fit into people's lives and then do everything we can possibly do make sure that fit stays relevant, useful, and apparent.

In theory, we have the easier task compared to the folks at Coke. After all, nobody really needs a sugary soft drink, do they? But they do need many of the things that libraries offer.

The challenge, then, is that we fit into people's lives in

many very different and often diametrically opposing ways. People need and want very different things from us. For one person, the library may be a quiet place to visit and enjoy a period of self-reflection and study. For another, we aren't a physical space first and foremost, but an online tool for accessing information. For yet another person, we provide more of a social space, to meet and work with others.

Do we make all of these people happy? **How** can we make all of these people happy? And how do we know **whether** we are making them happy?

Let's think about these people and about our audiences in a more deliberate and organized manner.

You can start this by making a list of all the activities you embark upon each year that you would categorize as marketing, communications, advertising, or public relations. Then, divide up all of these activities according to what audience you are targeting with each activity.

Now ask yourself a few questions:

Is the audience that you consider most important being targeted most frequently and most effectively?

Do your activities for this audience build upon one another?

Is there a consistent message across these activities?

If you've answered yes to all of these questions, then you're probably well on your way to having established a target audience and you're planning your marketing and communications activities around that audience. If you answered yes to all of those questions, you've also likely moved on to answering this kind of question: "How do you know that your audience is listening to what you have to say?"

If you answered no to all of the above questions, then it's time to re-evaluate. You may be a bit anxious about prioritizing one audience over another. But the idea is that you'll eventually be able to manage your activities for multiple target groups simultaneously.

Defining your target audience and thinking very carefully about how libraries fit into these people's lives is a great first step towards good marketing and can form the beginnings of a successful marketing plan.

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