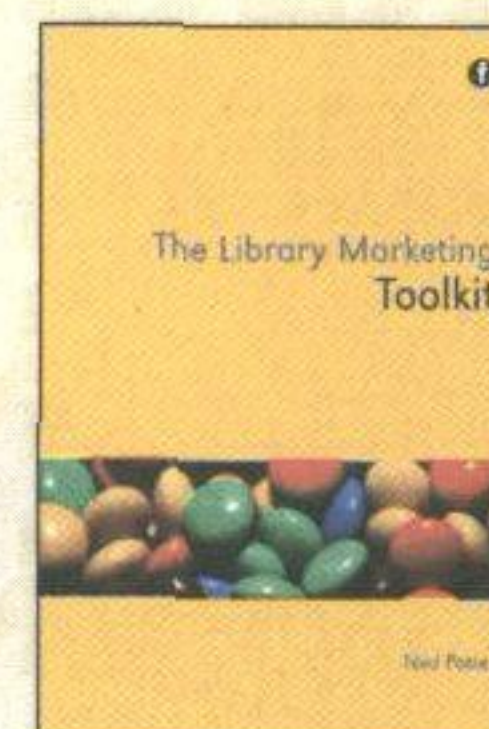


An interview with
Terry Kendrick, guru of strategic
marketing in libraries



Marketing your Library

By Ned Potter

I talked to him about all things marketing strategy for my recent book *The Library Marketing Toolkit* (Facet, 2012).

NED POTTER: Do you think that strategic marketing is undervalued in libraries generally?

TERRY KENDRICK: I do. I think strategy setting is very well respected, I think libraries are very good at writing strategy documents, and I think they're actually quite reasonable at doing tactical programs. The problem is that the strategic marketing planning part within those programs isn't always so well bought into, because it's hard and it requires a lot of resources that aren't always readily available.

What are the consequences of marketing as an afterthought? As in, the differences between making marketing a priority versus libraries that just do marketing if they get a chance once they've done everything else?

Many libraries are driven by a series of pump-priming initiatives, so very few use a full marketing approach. Many libraries feel the need to market what they've done as an initiative, and then they're quite often disappointed by it because it's been done as a series of one-off activities without the coherence of a marketing plan. Is there evidence that marketing makes a difference? What I see in North America—in Canada in particular, where they're more marketing driven—is that it does make a real difference.

Is the first step to creating a marketing strategy understanding your own library or understanding the market your library is in?

Terry Kendrick is the guru of strategic marketing in libraries. His book *Developing Strategic Marketing Plans That Really Work* is a must-read, and he writes, speaks, and runs workshops on marketing libraries all over the UK and in no fewer than 26 countries abroad. He also brings a nonlibrary perspective to the table, lecturing in marketing at the University of East Anglia in the UK.

The first step in creating any marketing plan is knowing what your ambition is. If you don't know what you want to be, the market doesn't matter and your capabilities don't matter either. It's very important to know what you want to look like—putting some numbers on that will focus the mind immediately. If you say you want to grow 30% over the next “X” number of years, that'll certainly focus your mind on the marketing: Where in the market will that 30% come from? Which users will give us issues, visits, enquiries, database hits—whatever it is that is driving the performance measures in that organization.

There is a difficulty in using numbers, though: Perhaps libraries aren't used to planning like that—they find that quite intimidating. They want to do the promotional side of things rather than the harder side of the thinking. They're very good at *doing* things, and it feels good to *do* something, but to think your way through something is hard work; it can cause discord. And because there's not a culture of connecting marketing with the strategic planning, the numbers that should be used as part of the marketing plan are seen as irrelevant to that process when, in fact, they're very important.

Tell me about the importance of the library brand fitting into the user's lifestyle.

For most of the things we want to be associated with, we've got to feel good about them. We've got to feel that if we're seen there, then we're seen as “okay” by the people whose opinions we value. People tend to have tribes and lifestyles, and they live their lives in particular ways. It's not always the case that a library fits closely to that. If you have a lifestyle that, for instance, is fairly relaxed, you might want the library to be relaxed. The trouble is others' lifestyles might not be quite as relaxed, so there'll be a tension there in the way you market your service, which is very difficult to do. Good marketers can deal with that; they can market to different user groups with different lifestyles simultaneously. Libraries don't always understand the life cycle of their users, what they're doing in their lives.

Are any aspects of marketing strategy true across the board, or should everything be “on spec”?

There are a few key concepts. One of them is that every library should be looking at the value it can offer its users in the way they live their lives, the journeys that they're on during their busy days, and how it helps them get there. There's no point in having (and talking about) resources when there is little value in the resource; the value only appears when the resource is in use. If you draw attention to the resource without explaining the outcomes that come from using that resource, you're actually setting yourself up to be cut, because suddenly you draw attention to a pile of money being spent (for example on databases).

All libraries need to look at their value. The other thing that is key is that not everyone perceives the same value

in library services. So for every library doing marketing, it's key to undertake segmentation, because it's the differences that matter rather than the similarities. It's no good looking for the one true way, but if you look at the value each segment attaches to the library, you've got the core of what marketing is about. Your planning should be driven by segments rather than the library as a whole, with an overarching strategy for the library. What brings in the business and activity are the segments.

How do we ensure marketing is ongoing?

As libraries follow certain initiatives (rather than whole-service planning), quite often lots of activities will happen that are unconnected. It's really important, structurally, to have somebody whose responsibility it is to look at the activities and find synergies to build on, particularly given that we know that one-off marketing activities will tend to be disappointing in their rate of response.

Real results come from a certain amount of “touches” to a particular user group over a period of time. It's really important that somebody is overseeing this. They don't have to be called marketing specialists. Marketing works best when it's an *orientation* for the library as a whole.

The worst thing that can happen is we send out some marketing that is successful, people respond and come in to claim the “offer” we're giving them, and they're met with a poor response. That does more than just negate the activity you've just done; it positively reinforces the library as something that sends you irrelevant messages or makes promises it can't deliver. So next time they receive a message from the library, their first thought will be, “Last time I received a message, they made an offer they didn't deliver on,” not, “Let's open this lovely message from the library.”

Understanding the market is a key part of the process.

Yes, any activities a library does or any service it offers, it's unlikely these days that we'll be the only people offering the service that people want. It's really important when you make an offer to your patrons that you understand what other things will be in their minds, what other offers are being made to them that are similar, what other ways of achieving the same things people will have. Sometimes there'll be obvious other ways like Google. Sometimes it's less obvious: It may be a friend they know who can help them with the same thing, or a strong competitor may be doing nothing, as in: Why bother? It's important to understand what our offer looks like compared with competing offers. If we don't know that, we're likely to think that just marketing something will make it attractive. But who else is there? Who are our rivals?

Can we make more of marketing the librarians rather than the library?

The more we can make the service look personal, the better. An easy and quick way of doing this is to put pictures

NED POTTER'S

GUIDE TO LIBRARIES DOING GREAT MARKETING WORK

Topeka and Shawnee County (Kans.) Public Library is the king of the digital branch. In my view, its website is everything a library website should be: dynamic, informative, varied, and stylish, in a way we should all aspire to. Go to tscpl.org and have a look as soon as you finish reading this page. Digital Branch Manager David Lee King, who is also a columnist for *American Libraries*, provides seven tips for an awesome library website as a case study in *The Library Marketing Toolkit*.

New York Public Library is surely the most successful example of a library absolutely owning its social media. Staff members make excellent use not just of all the tools you'd expect, such as blogs and Facebook, but also the likes of Tumblr, Foursquare, and YouTube. With well more than 200,000 followers on Twitter (@NYPL), it's the leader of the pack on that platform, and in the *Toolkit*, NYPL provides a case study to tell you how the library did it.

Calgary Public Library in Alberta, Canada, proves that even in the age of social media, good old-fashioned advertising campaigns can be extremely effective. Its fantastic "Everything You're Into" campaign has been plastered everywhere: on coffee cups, in grocery stores, and even jet-washed onto local pavement. It aimed to change perceptions, and it really worked. See more at calgarypubliclibrary.com/about-us/marketing.

Columbus (Ohio) Metropolitan Library (columbuslibrary.org) is a great example of a library that has brilliantly overhauled its marketing. It started by segmenting users by behavior, then rebranded its services to appeal to different groups, and moved forward from there. Library staff members provide a case study in the book about going beyond counting (outputs) to measuring behavioral change (outcomes).

Troy (Mich.) Public Library recently came in fifth in a marketing-industry poll of most effective advertisers in the US, just behind Microsoft and ahead of Ikea, Unilever, and American Express. Its most eye-catching initiative has undoubtedly been its incredibly brave (and fabulously effective) reverse-psychology book-burning campaign, which saved the library from closure. Watch the video about it on YouTube: bit.ly/troyvid.

of librarians online and on promotional activity. I can understand the reluctance to do this, but we are, after all, a service, not a product. Services are created by people, and they depend on how well people respond. Products are the same wherever you get them from. Services are different—people have skills, which is what makes us different from an information resource. Provided we have high-quality skills, it's better to promote the people who deliver the service than it is to promote the products themselves. It's the people who add value to information.

Any tips for quick wins in library marketing?

Some of the quick wins in marketing are based around the key areas of segmentation and value. Many marketing activities will take quite a while to build up. If you try and look at the whole service at once, you'll probably find the set of offers you have are either not strong enough or you won't have enough resources to fully implement them. So it's best to choose one group of people you fully understand in terms of what they value, how they use your resources, what their outcomes are. Then take that segment through a whole marketing planning cycle. It should be more manageable and should have impact relatively quickly, and everyone knows nothing succeeds like success.

People don't want to necessarily do a large amount of marketing; those people need to see those quick wins. There's a phrase about how you can lead a horse to water but you can't make it drink. The real trick is to make the horse thirsty, then take it to the water. To make people thirsty for marketing within your organization, you have to show them quick wins, because in these difficult times no one wants to work hard on something that won't bear fruit for three to five years. There are a lot of benefits in the long-term view, but it takes a lot of nerve to just wait for them. So you need the quick wins to help get you there.

People always buy into marketing libraries; they really want to do it. But they go away, and it just doesn't happen. Six months later they've written a big document outlining everything, but the priorities have shifted. Advocacy and marketing, they've got to be bedfellows, haven't they? What a marketing plan does is make sure the offer that advocates make is actually there for the advocacy to work.

It's an important time because if you look around the world, libraries are being cut all over. It feels as though something bigger is happening, not just in libraries. We have to be careful because it could be that the last 30 years of libraries not biting the bullet on marketing is going to finally cost us. ■



NED POTTER is an academic liaison librarian at the University of York, UK, where he also manages the marketing interns. This interview appears in his *Library Marketing Toolkit* (Facet, 2012), which is available at alastore.ala.org. Potter regularly speaks and writes on the subject of marketing libraries and information services, having provided marketing expertise for clients ranging from the Latvian Ministry of Culture to the Bodleian Library at the University of Oxford. You can find more information about his book at librarymarketingtoolkit.com.

Photo: Paul Shields