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MARKETING LIBRARY SERVICES

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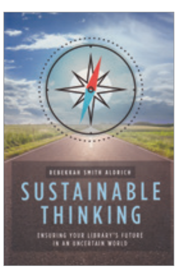

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How to Communicate Value Using Assessment Evidence

How-To | By Amanda B. Albert

Working as an information literacy coordinator means I am often communicating the value of library instruction on many fronts via various formal and informal marketing campaigns. For example, as part of my work at Washington University in St. Louis, I talk to library colleagues who teach and to library administrators about the number of classes that take place in the library. I talk to faculty about the impact our instruction has on student research output, and I talk to students about how working with a librarian might help them get better grades. Oftentimes, this is a two-way communication, or something that involves assessment.

I use data I gather from assessment to communicate the value of library instruction with my stakeholders on all levels. The communication might go like this: "We can do X for you in order to enable you to achieve Y." The assessment that informs the communication might go like this: "Since we did X for you, were you able to achieve Y?" Essentially, what I create is a feedback loop that allows me to understand the impact we're having through assessment, and I can communicate this back to my stakeholders by using that assessment data. This process allows me to better communicate library value.

Communicating Library Value

I define communicating library value (CLV) this way: Integrate planned strategies into current workflows to allow all library staff members to tell a compelling story of the library's value, supported with assessment evidence, to targeted audiences. Let's unpack this lengthy sentence. What this means is that you are intentionally and strategically integrating the communications process into your day-to-day workflows. This allows

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LMCC Moved to Snowy St. Louis

Special Report | By Kathy Dempsey

I recently attended the fourth annual Library Marketing and Communications Conference (LMCC; www.librarymarketingconference.org). Some attributes remained the same as at the past three meetings—a crowd of excited learners, a wide range of useful sessions, organized networking dinners, and November timing. However, many things were different this year too, the biggest being the location change from the Dallas area to St. Louis. A new chairperson, Christina Pryor, had taken over for me in organizing the event, and some different volunteers aided in planning, with a few veterans leading the way. As it has every year since its inception, LMCC drew more attendees than the previous year—this time there were more than 400 people.

One of the most exciting things, to me, was that during this event, the organizers were able to announce the date and location of next year's conference. When LMCC was brand new, the uncertainty kept us from being able to contract for space too far in advance. Now, its successful track record—and having an official nonprofit entity to oversee it—enabled more advance planning. So I'm thrilled to report that the 2019 event will take place in the same location, the Hyatt Regency St. Louis at The Arch, along the Mississippi River, next November.

Inside and Outside of the Marketing Funnel

LMCC 2018 began on Nov. 14, a chilly Midwestern morning. After Pryor welcomed everyone, Jennifer Burke, president of the Library Marketing Conference Group (LMC Group), reported on the state of the nonprofit. Since it's only about 18 months old, the organization is concentrating on things like financial stability, succes-

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sion planning, trying new things to improve user experience, and adding more board members and event volunteers.

Then Burke introduced the opening session, the format of which was another departure from past years. Rather than having a standard keynote speaker, she had planned a President's Program, which consisted of Burke sharing the stage with a library marketing expert and having a semi-scripted conversation. That opening speaker was Cordelia Anderson, who was until recently marketing and communications leader at Charlotte Mecklenburg Library in North Carolina. During her tenure there, her team won *Library Journal*'s 2016 Library Marketer of the Year award. Anderson has since left to become a consultant.

All photos by Kathy Dempsey

Cordelia Anderson (R) cautions LMCC attendees about people dropping out of library marketing funnels during her discussion with LMC Group president Jennifer Burke.

The duo started at the beginning, defining "marketing" and "public relations" and discussing how they differ. Marketing, Anderson said, is the science of understanding human wants and needs and designing services to meet them. PR, she explained, is about building mutually beneficial relationships to encourage people to be aware of, and take advantage of, the services and products on offer. These two women share my frustration with people using the terms as synonyms without understanding that PR is just one activity that falls under the broad umbrella of "marketing" (along with outreach, advocacy, promotion, and the like.)

Anderson lamented that librarians often put heavy emphasis on promotion, making it a one-way conversation of us telling people what we think they should know. However, it should be a two-way relationship. Library staffers should "spend as much time listening as talking, not just pushing info," she urged.

The conversation turned to the idea of a "marketing funnel" that's wide on top and narrow on the bottom. The concept is that we "pour" community members into the top of the funnel, some drop out along the way, and those still left at the bottom will be the true believers in libraries. However, Burke joked that libraries have so many holes in these funnels that they're more like sieves. Many challenges can make people slip away from library usage and/or support: arcane policies, bad user experiences, difficult logins, barriers to getting or renewing library cards, fines, or lack of open hours (bit.ly/funnel-LMCC).

One widespread problem that falls outside the funnel is when staff members decide what programs they want to hold, start planning them, and *then* ask for marketing help at the last minute. Mentioning this pet peeve brought laughter and applause from an audience that has clearly faced it too many times—an audience that understands that they should be brought in *before* programs are conceived to use data to help decide which programs should be chosen in the first place.

Marketing Communications and Assessment

After a much-appreciated coffee break, the first breakout sessions began. The conference had four tracks per day, so there were always four sessions to choose from. I was speaking in this timeslot, giving an advanced talk I'd named The Art and Science of Marketing Communications. I explained to members of my standing-room-only crowd how they should always consider the science of psychology and the art of language while crafting important messages that are meant to influence listeners. It's vital to know the audience, what terminology they use, what they value, and where they look for information (this is why audience segmentation matters). Marketing messages should be devoid of library lingo and use powerful, active words that tout the *benefits* of library services (not the services themselves). The tone has to be right too—confident, but not pushy; enthusiastic, but not over the top. The session included some writing practice, but I wish I'd had time for more of that to ensure that everyone would have gotten some individual editing and evaluation. People did tell me that they got a lot out of it, and I hope they start incorporating my guidelines into all of their writing.

Interesting Images; Constant Campaigns

After a tasty lunch, I chose a session of a different flavor—Fundamentals of Compelling Design: Movement and Texture. Jason Wright taught his listeners some subtle techniques to make design more compelling, since "We're constantly awash in visual information." Here are a few of the main points he shared while demonstrating them with colorful slides:

Jason Wright dissected numerous examples of color contrast and font combinations in collateral designs.

- Contrast "wakes up the eye." So use opposite colors together, and use both serif and sans-serif fonts (but not too many different fonts; ideally one from each family).
- Don't work too hard on creating lots of features on a piece of collateral; if you find one good image that pops, that can be 90% of your design. Also, follow the design principle "build once, use everywhere," meaning that you can take elements of a project and repurpose them for various social media needs, posters, webpages, etc. This also supports branding.
- Try to incorporate movement that leads the eye to the important information. You can do that with arrows, chevrons, and textured backgrounds.

Speaking of repurposing content and doing consistent branding, my next session dug deeper into that and more. Abbey Lovell and Allison Morrow presented One Hook, Many Hats: How to Create an Evergreen Marketing Campaign. Few libraries have enough marketing staffers to constantly come up with new promotional ideas

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and campaigns. So, Lovell counseled, look at all the sorts of things you want to publicize, and group them by general themes—then you can create branded templates and simply change the content over time. One great example was a "Did You Know?" campaign that allowed marketers to easily deploy messages about almost anything, such as library history, upcoming events, and technology loans.

Allison Morrow (L) and Abbey Lovell explained how to simplify work by planning "evergreen" marketing campaigns.

This duo also discussed a video project at Columbia University Libraries that profiled staff members of all types, a We Are Your Library campaign. They encouraged their colleagues to sit for short interviews and talk about their expertise, why they love their jobs, etc. These videos were eventually edited for different formats and used in website vignettes, social media posts, blogs, etc.

Serve Your Community by Advertising

Even though my brain was getting tired by 4:15 p.m., the last session I attended really kept my attention. Adding Advertising to the Budget was presented by Kiley Roberson, who was a TV news reporter and producer prior to working at the Tulsa City-County Library in Oklahoma. Like many of us, she realized the library had a lot of great offerings that nobody knew about and wanted to advertise them, but had zero advertising budget. Undaunted, she took logical and progressive steps that eventually convinced members of the library's board to spend money on ads.

Here's the gist of her plan, simplified for space: She took stock of the promotion already being done and listed what she'd like to do. She asked her media contacts what they felt would be the best use for a tiny bit of money and found that local CBS and NBC TV affiliates would match ad spending, doubling the impact. She wrote a plan that showed what the library could get for a little money, connecting the ads to campaign and organizational goals and identifying key performance indicators. Roberson pitched the plan to administrators and board members, stating that they were doing a disservice by *not* advertising to make citizens aware of all the services their tax dollars were paying for. And it worked!

After working with a nearby university student who wanted to shoot library video, Roberson edited his work into a 30-second TV commercial. She chose when her paid spots would air, and the stations chose when their matching PSAs would appear. Librarians heard anecdotal "I saw you on TV!" evidence, and Roberson got viewer stats from the TV stations. (Of course, pieces of the original video were repurposed for outreach presentations, Instagram, etc.) The board was so pleased with the results that it approved $2,000 per month as a continuous advertising budget.

That evening, OrangeBoy (www.orangeboyinc.com) generously sponsored a reception at the main building of the St. Louis Public Library. Amid lovely snacks and drinks, there were brief remarks from the vendor, along with guided tours leaving the reception throughout the evening. I'm grateful to have been able to see some of this amazing building.

Breakfast and Food for Thought

A mix of precipitation had coated the city throughout the first evening and into the next day, but since the conference was right in the hotel, everyone only had to "commute" downstairs to enjoy breakfast and to hear the second day's keynote speaker, Todd Baker, VP and senior strategist at Milwaukee Direct Marketing. He made two points that stuck with me: 1) Yesterday, the most successful service organizations were the ones people knew best. Today, however, the most successful are the ones that know their constituents best. 2) An in-your-face strategy is short-lived. But an in-your-life strategy is long-lasting. So tell your stakeholders how libraries can be important parts of their lives.

I found more food for thought in my first session of the day, Marketing Library Services to Distance Learners at an Online College: Strategies and Lessons Learned. Katie Stewart, a distance education librarian at Johns Hopkins University's Sheridan Libraries, discussed the challenging task of promoting to students who aren't on campus. She began by stressing that it's necessary to have a strategic plan with a multifaceted approach, and it should include SMART (specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-bound) goals and tactics and a timeline. Also, faculty members are powerful advocates in this case, since they can include library resources in their lessons and course websites.

Since most promotion for distance learners is online, Stewart talked about the importance of branding everything to help students know what's coming from the library. She urged listeners to consider accessibility too, saying she's used a color-blindness simulator and a color-contrast analyzer for her visuals. She's learned how important it is to create templates (in different sizes for various online platforms). One of my takeaways was a question Stewart posed: If you stripped away your logo, would people still recognize your posts and promotions as the work of your library?

Attendees listen to Todd Baker's keynote.

Being Inclusive and Serving the Underserved

One of the afternoon sessions I attended was in a jam-packed room and had lots of buzz afterward, so the topic was apparently well-received. A duo presented What About Me? Bringing Diversity and Inclusion Into Your Library Marketing, peppering their session with statistics and thought-provoking questions. Shelly Black and Kenya Johnson, both from the University of Arizona Libraries, began by revealing that, in the latest U.S. census, 39.3% of respondents identified as people of color. They defined "inclusion" as making all sorts of people feel welcome, valued, and respected. Then they discussed how to be sure your marketing is inclusive of diverse audiences.

First, they counseled, audit your print materials and social posts, especially the images you use. Who's missing? Are you using gender-neutral language ("they," "Latinx," etc.)? To make your promotions welcoming, add a line such as, "For questions about accessibility, contact _____." Black encouraged us to ask ourselves, "Whose story are you telling? Whose story are you hiding?"

Shelly Black (L) and Kenya Johnson gave a thought-provoking presentation on making marketing materials more inclusive.

Since there's lots of work to be done in this area, the speakers recommended choosing one action to do within 30 days. Their suggestions: Review web and social media materials. Walk through spaces and check signage. Look at the language in your internal style guides. Identify project partners. Start captioning your promo videos. Make your own community more diverse to build better understanding.

For my last session of LMCC 2018, I chose Navigating Community Partnerships, which delved into an initiative between the St. Louis County Library (SLCL) and Operation Food Search (OFS), a hunger-relief organization. The panel talked about food pantry clients, hungry kids, and food deserts—areas where you can find orange soda, but no oranges.

Sunny Schaefer from OFS spoke to how her nonprofit works to distribute food, and Kristen Sorth, director of SLCL, explained how the library is a location where lunches are delivered for children in the summer. "We can feed their bodies and their minds," Sorth said. Then Jennifer McBride, SLCL communications manager, talked about the promotional side. They used templates with branding for both organizations and created fliers in both English and Spanish. They employed email blasts and a meal page on the library's website. She also said media coverage was "vital" to spreading the word.

Awesome All Over Again

Having attended all four LMCC gatherings, I can assure *MLS* readers that they are consistently awesome, and you should attend if you can. The 2019 conference will be in the same St. Louis hotel on Nov. 13 and 14, and you'll want to register as early as possible to ensure yourself a seat. To know when it's time, go to www.librarymarketingconference.org/contact to sign up for the email list and to find links to social media accounts. See you in St. Louis! MLS

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Three Tools for Road Maps

Here are three tools I have used to create the road map for communicating the value of our SERs using library data.

1. A Data Audit will help you think through what data you collect, who collects it, where it's stored, and what data you're missing. This will help you get clear on which data is usable, who has it, and whether you need a new plan for collecting it. It might show you that you don't have time to collect what you need, so you will have to seek outside sources or help.

2. A Stakeholder Audit will help you think through various stakeholders. If you have "regulars" you promote to, think about these populations as a group or as individuals. Who are they, what SERs do they regularly need, which SERs could benefit them, and how do they like to communicate? Tools such as customer relationship management (CRM) software (for instance, LibCRM; www.springshare.com/libcrm) can help you track interactions with specific people and allow you to build profiles of similar people. (One thing to note here is the potential for bias—racial and ethnic, gender, sexual orientation, etc.—to enter the profile. Getting to know people and interacting with them on an individual level, which you may be doing already, will help you build better relationships than making assumptions will.)

3. A Communication Plan Template can serve as a guide for building your messages. Start with your desired communication outcome—what you want to happen as a result of telling a specific stakeholder about a specific SER. Then, for that audience, identify the data you'll use and the message you'll create with it. Based on what you know about the stakeholder from your audit, you can decide what medium to use and what type of message will be most effective. Indicate the time frame this should be delivered within, and include the amount of time and money it will take to complete it. Finally, decide who is responsible for delivering the message.

How I've Done This Myself

When I was a distance learning librarian at Kennesaw State University, I was able to leverage evidence from a needs assessment to communicate the value of library SERs to the distance learning faculty. By asking them about their needs, I was able to build a profile of the faculty and align library SERs with their needs and pain points. I understood how they communicated and what messages would be most effective. This allowed me to better serve the distance learning population.

Now, at Washington University Libraries, I have been successful in using this strategy to communicate with my external stakeholders. My primary example is the College Writing Program. After sending out the biannual survey, I am able to communicate with the administration and faculty about the library. By closing the feedback loop, we discuss what SERs are most beneficial and how the library is having an impact on student learning. We're able to deepen our partnership by making decisions based on my data.

Assessment and communication are activities that I have planned into all of my projects and workflows. It's important to me to continually communicate the value of library SERs in all of my conversations because it allows me to build a reputation and brand for my department while deepening my relationships with stakeholders and helping them see us as a reliable, effective partner. MLS

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