Review

Marketing the 21st Century Library: The Time is Now


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Debra Lucas-Alfieri’s Marketing the 21st Century Library: The Time is Now can serve as a guide for librarians to develop their own marketing plans. The author frames the marketing of modern libraries in the context of the common-held belief that libraries and librarians are vanishing. She argues that unless we properly market and advocate for our professions and institutions, they could go the way of the telephone operator (p. 95).

Lucas-Alfieri’s goal is to give readers the tools to make their libraries thrive, not just survive, and to take a user-centric approach to guide libraries’ development and missions in the years to come. She stresses that much of our current marketing focuses on the students and users that we already have, and that understanding who doesn’t use the library and why they don’t can help us to develop our market base.

The initial chapters of the book lay the foundations of the 21st century library. Lucas-Alfieri describes in-depth how libraries evolved to their present state and profiles some of the most important figures who helped to shape modern library marketing in the 19th and 20th centuries.
The book then moves through a logical sequence of chapters on creating and implementing a marketing plan, beginning with using qualitative and quantitative data to research and develop a plan. The author includes a section on avoiding the challenges of assessment, including using convenient surveys to gather only convenient data and gathering information that researchers want to find. She stresses that understanding the needs and expectations of our constituents (in this case, the students and faculty of a campus) is just as important as promoting and raising awareness of our services and resources. The library’s mission and vision statements must work hand in hand with the marketing plan, and the plan must be a living document that changes as our technologies and users’ needs do.

Chapter six describes partnership opportunities and constituencies (POC). By forming partnerships across campus, the library creates a larger marketing pool and a larger group of supporters to help spread its message and mission.

Throughout the book, Lucas-Alfieri stresses the difference between promotion and marketing. Chapters seven and eight focus on promotion and how to embed library services into campus life. Using technologies including social media, websites, and apps, libraries can spread their message to a population that is almost constantly plugged in and connected.

Each chapter ends with a series of discussion questions, exercises, or practical case study questions intended to help the reader form conclusions and connect the content to their own experiences. While these questions may help guide discussion if the book is assigned reading in a library information science course, some of the questions are simply reviewing the information from the preceding chapter. Some questions, however, challenge the reader to think more deeply about the topics and to try to apply them to their own library.

While many of the ideas in the book are taught in library information science education, the text will still be useful to librarians who are looking to change or develop a new or innovative marketing plan for their library. Because the author urges the reader to think of problems, issues, or programming ideas that don’t already exist, the concepts from the book can be applied to any library at any point in its marketing pursuits.

This book is recommended for academic librarians and staff who are tasked with marketing, whether they are experienced or not. Because the author focuses on assessing and developing the marketing plan, it can be useful even to those libraries who believe they are already doing a good job marketing and invaluable to those who are just beginning this endeavor.

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