

MARKETING TRENDS TO WATCH

By Alison Circle

LJ's Bubble Room blogger identifies 13 cultural shifts that libraries can turn into opportunities to reach patrons

Five years ago, when I first came to Libraryland, I felt a strong, wary, and mistrustful vibe attached to marketing. It was perceived as irrelevant, a flash in the pan, without intrinsic value. Libraries had managed long enough without marketing, thank you very much, and things are fine the way they are.

Since then, however, I've sensed a shift, a curiosity around the edges as libraries have awakened to the sea change in our culture regarding information and technology and the expansion of our global reach. Even the

most skeptical among us are starting to see that marketing can help libraries compound their relevance and add new value.

One bad habit in Libraryland is that too often we look exclusively at libraries for ideas and trends. For example, when redesigning web sites, we look at other libraries, not trendsetting retailers or innovative nonprofits. We're guilty of a little too much me-too-ism. As a marketing professional, I see trends everywhere, ideas ripe for libraries to pluck and make their own in order to demonstrate that we are still here and better than ever. All I see is opportunity.

In no particular order, here is a baker's dozen of trends I'm watching.

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1 Twitter

How many times have your friends (or you!) scoffed at Twitter and said something like, "I just don't care that much about the stupid details of other people's lives." Guess what? I don't either, but pay attention to Twitter. Here's why:

- **YOU CAN SPEAK DIRECTLY TO YOUR CUSTOMERS** Tell them what you want them to know about you.
- **INSTANT POLLING** Twitter provides a free and immediate ability to find out what your customers think about decisions you make as an organization.
- **LOYALTY** If people are interested enough in your brand per-

sonality to follow the library on Twitter, these are your über-advocates, and they are your new best friends.

Astonishingly, in the six months between January and June 2009, the Dell Computers Outlet earned \$1 million in sales from customers who came to the site only from Twitter. Dur-

ing Ohio's recent budget debacle that slashed state funding for libraries, Twitter functioned as the engine driving the public to voice outrage and opposition. Word on the budget hit the Twitter world

even before libraries had a chance to formulate a coordinated response.



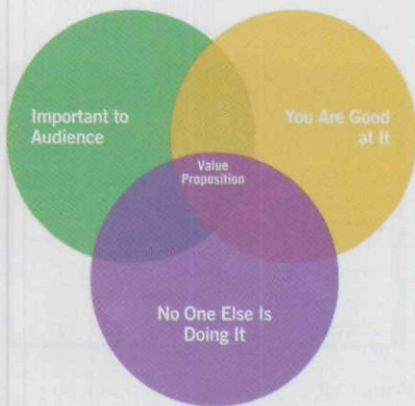
2 Value. Value. Value

Move over “location.” The optimal word today is *value*. Value used to be a code word for the skanky remainder bin of slightly damaged products at the outlet store. Today, sure, everyone is looking for a good deal. But businesses and organizations are turning key information and knowledge into actions that generate an enhanced customer relationship.

Historically, libraries understood their value proposition clearly: books (information and knowledge). But today, that is not enough.

For many years, CARE, the preeminent humanitarian organization, positioned itself as working to end poverty. But guess what? That is too broad, incredibly vague, and, thankfully, there are hundreds of other organizations with the same goal. Assessing the marketplace—and it is a marketplace because they compete for donors—CARE sharpened its focus to the plight of women and girls. Recognizing that women and girls suffer disproportionately from poverty, CARE markets that distinction in order to be heard above the din.

It isn't hard to figure out your value. Conduct this exercise. Think about where you fit in each of the three circles above. Where they intersect is your value proposition. Tell people this story over and over. Then over again. You'll get tired of it long before it penetrates public consciousness.



3 Online Reputation Management

In today's world, organizations must spend as much effort managing their online brands as they do the physical one. Without diligence, the online brand may fall out of sync with your offline marketing messages. User-generated content, blogs, and online forums all mean that the flow of information and messages about an organization is no longer controllable.

This can seem overwhelming, but there are many aggregator tools out there that are cheap (read, free) and easy: MonitorThis and Google Alerts, for example. And trust me, many organizations are masquerading behind the scenes influencing, correcting, and adding to the conversation. You have to.

Here's something easy you can do today: go to google.com/alerts and sign up your library. It takes less than a minute. You'll get a daily digest of who is saying what, and you can be part of the conversation about your organization. This is an easy way to gauge public reaction and head off issues before they blow up. Issues like changes in services or hours, privacy concerns, safety, even composition of your collections.



4 Video Marketing

These days, owing to budget cuts, many organizations have drastically reduced—even eliminated—advertising budgets. Thirty years ago, in an era of mass media dominance, that would have killed any company. It was a time when you could get 80 percent coverage in only three 60-second spots.

Today, advertising is flipped on its head—and can be had for a completely different cost equation. For example, take the story of YouTube sensation Lauren Luke, a self-styled makeup maven. She started selling cosmetics on eBay and soon was putting up videos on YouTube that she modestly taped from her bedroom. Her videos have logged more than 50 million views, and her YouTube channel has 250,000 subscribers. She never paid for a single ad.

For a great example of how libraries can use this channel, visit YouTube.com and search “Alberta Public Library Very Funny Ads.” It has developed 30-second spots for YouTube that are fresh and unexpected.

Next up will be interactive video technology, through which users can click on elements within the videos to be taken to associated content, microsites, and shopping carts. Fasten your seat belts!

Alberta Public Library Glue Sniffer very funny ads



5 Value-Added Content

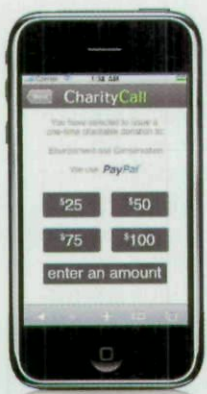
Everywhere you look today, businesses are finding ways to enhance the customer experience by pushing content onto customers. For example, measurement scales in grocery stores are now adding recipes and coupons when the product is weighed because 70 percent of grocery sales are impulse buys. Through this value-added content, the scales drive sales, boost customer loyalty, and enhance the customer experience.

A modest way for libraries to do this is to add an “If You Like” enhancement to the catalog, similar to what Amazon does. This pushes circulation and provides a core value enhancement for customers. Seattle Public Library offers searchers a “similar titles” feature as well as tags. Most of us, however, are still using the online catalog like a bookshelf.

6 Mobile Marketing

Think about whom you know over 12 and under 80. How many have cell phones? All of them? How many have—like me—even given up their landlines? In fact, there are now more mobile phone subscribers in the world (2.4 billion) than there are landline subscribers.

Mobile marketing, or marketing through a mobile channel, is one of the first new channels to arise in over 50 years and is quickly becoming a primary way to reach customers. Phones are now the one-stop shop for communication, digital services, email, photos, and navigation. Libraries can embrace this channel and quickly. At a minimum, web sites should be easy to navigate in a mobile browser. Provide the option to receive notices via phone (even my dentist does that) and develop



specific apps to enhance your presence on customer devices.

CharityCall is a great example that libraries can use. Nonprofits receive a free iPhone App to give supporters convenience and speed when making donations. Mobile donors can give right from their phone as well as receive RSS feeds directly to the iPhone App!

7 The Art of Being Real

In a recent AdweekMedia poll, respondents were asked about the impact of a celebrity in an ad. Just eight percent said seeing the celebrity makes them more likely to buy the product vs. 12 percent who said it makes them less likely. But a landslide 78 percent said it doesn't affect them one way or the other.

This tells me that people are looking for real people who speak from the heart. The popularity of Dove's breakthrough Campaign for Real Beauty, which features real women looking like real women using its products, is a prime example. U.S. sales of Dove products rose 700 percent.

You'll also hear this referred to as the trust economy. Libraries have this in spades. In fact, I can think of few others that have us beat. We have so many stories to tell about ourselves: successful job seekers, kids using Homework Help Centers to improve grades, childhood literacy through Ready To Read. We could own the trust economy and should be shouting those stories from the rooftops.

8 A Deeper Shade of Green

Being green has left the Sierra Club's picnic table and now owns a seat in the corporate boardroom. In today's marketplace, being green—or at least talking green—is delivering on the green. Customers judge organizations based on their practices in the global community. Consider this:

Aberdeen Group, a market research company, reports that even modest green initiatives drive customer loyalty by 36 percent. But when companies operate at best-of-class levels, customer loyalty increases to 69 percent.

Saying you're green isn't enough. Look at Home Depot, which gives authenticity to its green commitment with a new sub-brand, Eco Options. Eco Options includes a product certification program covering over 3000 products, product labeling, in-store signage, and even a magazine. It has found ways to take a global brand and target to a market segment—those who seek sustainable alternatives—and delivered an innovative concept.

Some libraries are doing more to demonstrate their green commitment. Worthington Libraries, OH, for example, selected a green theme for its Teen Summer Reading Club in order to address this hot topic for teens.

9 Death of Email

Young people under 18 do not use email, ever. Instead, they text. (If you have a teen, you know what I'm talk-

ing about!) Libraries can jump into that space. Worldwide, over 350 billion text messages are sent every month, and 15 percent are considered marketing messages. (I swear, my teenager is responsible for a good ten percent of all those text messages.)

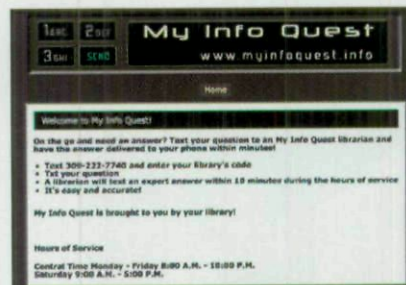
And consider this:

- As few as 20 percent of email messages are opened.
- Over 95 percent of text messages are opened.
- The average time for the recipient to view an email message is 6.4 hours.
- The average time for the recipient to view a text message is 14 minutes.

This is a subset of mobile marketing, but it is more specific because it deals only with the texting capability of phones. A consortium of international libraries has introduced My Info Quest (myinfoquest.

info), a text-messaging service that provides live reference services for the public. Users get the answer they need from a worldwide network of professionals, but it feels and sounds just like their local library. They never know the difference! Fifty U.S. libraries are participating in this free, librarian-vetted version of ChaCha (a free service that you can call/text from any cell phone for answers to any and all questions), which is nipping at the heels of reference librarians.

Obviously, the beauty of this is that it serves customers where and when they expect to be served. See Speed below.



10 Micromarketing

Until recent memory, marketing and advertising were driven through relatively few channels known as mass marketing—three major TV networks, major dailies, and high-profile magazines. We all know what has happened to that formula. It has fragmented, then fragmented again, as marketing has become nearly exclusively segmented—based on customer demographics, psychographics, and lifestyle behaviors. Marketers construct individual campaigns to appeal to the variables within each segment. And with the robust tool of our cardholder databases, libraries are a marketer's dream.

Libraries believe this approach can't be for us, because we are open to all and serve everyone. But reduced budgets and a clamoring marketplace mean we can no longer be the same thing for all people.

Take the car wash. You might assume that only people with dirty cars go there. But you'd be wrong. A national car wash company did a comprehensive study of its customers and found that they fall into six distinct clusters, with well-defined demographics and behaviors. Some customers (wealthy males) bring their expensive cars in once a week like clockwork and willingly pay full price. Others (younger working women) choose a car wash based on price. The company has email addresses for all its customers, which, matched with these customer clusters, allows it to offer the right promotional products to drive sales and motivate behavior: micromarketing. It avoids send-



ing coupons to customers who happily pay full price; it sends coupons to frugal customers for discounts on days it needs to build capacity, i.e., slow days.

The trick is not to lose control over your overall brand while appealing to target audiences.

11 Value of Design

Libraries think about design in terms of the channel of its execution—i.e., graphic design, book design, or architectural design. But we've been slow to look across the broader threshold and see how design executes a brand through every touchpoint. The titan is Target. Its design/brand is consistent across all channels, and anyone who has ever seen a Target commercial, entered a store, purchased a product, bought online, heck, even applied for a job can pick the Target brand out of any lineup. Target never wavers from its single-minded commitment to providing customers with a familiar and branded experience. Want proof that it works? Take Walmart. Shopping there used to be a chore—crowded aisles, harsh lighting, and nasty design. Visited lately? Walmart has reshaped its design to steal Target's customers.

Libraries, in contrast, tend to focus on individual expression, allowing staff to execute the brand however it wants. Instead, standardize your library's brand through use of templates, consistent color palette and fonts, and development of (and adherence to) a brand book. We need to move beyond what is fun for our staff toward what is best for our brand.

12 Speed

I had the surprising pleasure of hearing a presentation by Katya Andresen, author of *Robin Hood Marketing* and a must-read blog, nonprofitmarketingblog.com. I say surprising because I reluctantly attend these kind of things because, predictably, they are so rudimentary that I wind up sketching portraits of other attendees out of boredom. But she was an inspiration. She introduced me to this quote by marketing author Seth Godin: "Everyone is lazy and in a hurry." Amen, brother!

As an example I cite my daughter's school report on Queen Nefertiti. She needed a date of birth and found multiple options. She just used the first Google entry she found and didn't care which was the right one—because she was lazy and in a hurry.

How is this a marketing trend? Marketing is all about asking customers what they want, then giving it to them. They want it easy and fast. Don't make us wait in line to check out. Don't make us wade through a web site to find what we want. And don't make us haul ourselves out of a car to get a cup of coffee!

Conduct a thorough evaluation from the customer's point

Steps To Make Your Marketing Stronger

- 1 Visit web sites of influential organizations: toporgs.notlong.com
- 2 Keep on top of trends: trendwatching.com/briefing
- 3 Ask your customers: where they go, what they like, why they like it, what their expectations are of you. And don't talk to the faithful.
- 4 Use Google analytics on your web site. Free and easy. It allows you to see where your customers are and what they are doing on your site. Make changes accordingly. Make what they want easy to access; eliminate what they don't use.
- 5 Follow the Retail Advertising Marketing Association: www.rama-nrf.org
- 6 Read these great blogs: www.nonprofitmarketingblog.com; sethgodin.typepad.com; changethis.com
- 7 Convene a Marketing Task Force of key marketers in your area and solicit their help.

of view to determine how service delivery can be streamlined and made easy for them. If people have to work at it, they'll walk away. Early on in my library career, a senior manager was proud that our library had "taught our customers well" how to follow our protocols. This kind of thinking just doesn't fly anymore.

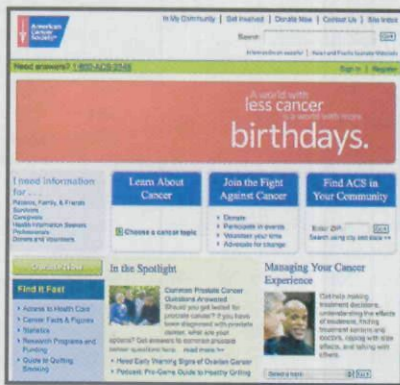
13 Emotional Connection

With a baker's dozen you get a bonus, one more than 12. So here it is. Nonprofits—and I put libraries in this category—suffer a common complaint: self-involvement. Symptoms include the presumption that "we are amazing" and "if only people knew what we offer, they would love us." I've worked in several nonprofits, and these are SOPs: standard operating presumptions.

Marketing today is all about making an emotional connection that establishes relevance to customers. Libraries want to be all about content. But now that content is everywhere (including contradictory dates for Queen Nefertiti's birthday), libraries—almost better than anything else—need to and can cement that emotional and personal connection.

Look at the difference between lancearmstrong.org (top left) and cancer.org (bottom left), the official site for the American Cancer Society (ACS). Both sites are cancer-information destinations. The first grabs you from the get-go with a slideshow of empowering images. The ACS site is about content. It is essential, surely, but missing an opportunity.

When we focus on our collections, electronic databases, or—heaven forbid—library FAQs, without first establishing an emotional connection, I worry about the future relevance of our great institutions.



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