	Date : 11/10/2007 **Marketing strategies for visibility and indispensability** **Linda Ashcroft** Reader of Information Management Liverpool John Moores University, UK L.S.Ashcroft@ljmu.ac.uk
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Abstract

In order to 'anchor' its relevance and indispensability in the minds of a wide variety of audiences, any organisation must build a good reputation and image. Many commercial organisations maximise opportunities to raise favourable awareness about what they do - and their techniques and approaches can be applied to libraries. Examples from organisations, such as supermarkets, charities and tourism, demonstrate how they have taken an opportunity to draw national and international media attention and to promote themselves favourably to a wide audience. Techniques demonstrating the significance of the right timing, the importance of having the right resources in place and using the right means of communication to reach the various audiences involved relate in the same way to libraries as to other organisations. For example, Hampshire Public Libraries employed an innovative communication approach by running a dedicated market stall on market day taking information about library services to the public. This applies also to academic libraries, for example Leeds Metropolitan University Library took a stall with a fun novelty theme at the Freshers Fair to promote their library. Sponsorship is now big business, going beyond the commercial sector as some libraries are now negotiating effective sponsorship deals and attracting favourable media coverage in doing so. For example, Yorkshire Public Libraries struck an excellent financial deal with a major sponsor, influencing secondary sponsors to join, which attracted national media coverage. Ongoing evaluation informs marketing techniques to build on success and maximise publicity.

Relevance

In order to anchor its relevance and indispensability in the minds of a variety of audiences, any organisation must build a good reputation and image. Alongside any marketing plan, public relations (PR) involves building and maintaining a good reputation and image for an organisation. The core strategic role of PR is to change people's attitudes and behaviour (Bacot, 2006). Many commercial organisations maximise opportunities to raise favourable awareness about what they do and to embed relevance about what they offer within the minds of both internal and external audiences. Their techniques and approaches apply equally to libraries (and other not-for-profit organisations). (Ashcroft, 2007)

Marketing strategy

For any commercial organisation marketing is a strategy. It is not a task. This applies also to libraries - "marketing information services is … a strategic activity" (Robinson, 2006a). Nothing stands still in the commercial world and, with constant technological developments and frequent restructuring, nothing stands still in the information world. This means that, like commercial organisations, libraries and information services face a moving target. Market research underpins planning. This involves market segmentation, which is the breaking down of consumers into homogeneous groups or market segments, then identifying target audiences and their particular needs. No commercial organisation would expect 100% of the population to buy into a product or service, which is designed for a particular segment of the market. Similarly libraries should break down the user community into groups according to their user needs and requirements. Market research also identifies any gap in the market for a particular product or service and identifies competitors. Library and information services need to have an objective picture and understanding of what is unique in what they offer and its value in the marketplace. In 2001, North Yorkshire Library and Information Service, UK seemed to be in some decline, and an external market research company was commissioned to survey a number of lapsed library users throughout the county. The results showed that

> "the general perception of libraries was that they were unwelcoming; buildings were thought to be drab and uncomfortable; there was an impression that families and children were not welcome and that opening hours were unsuitable for those at work or with families: respondents believed that customer care wasn't given a high enough priority, and the items in stock were not what people wanted to borrow". (Blaisdale, Fay & Garbacz, 2006, p.43)

This might seem like a grim downward trend, but markets change and as they change opportunities also change. Clearly a new marketing strategy was required.

Developing a strategy involves affirming the current position (what you are currently offering in terms of customer requirements), affirming where you want to be and what you want to be doing at a particular time in the future, determining priorities and working out how you get to that position. The next stage is the setting of targets/objectives at the outset. For example, commercial firms might set sales targets whereas libraries might set usage targets for particular resources. Then a strategy is required for achieving those targets. This involves setting an action plan, which includes the 'what', 'who' and

‘when’ – and the ‘how’ if necessary. What actions are required to achieve those targets? Who will be responsible for each action? When will each action be carried out? A timescale for the strategy is required and a timetable within that. This also incorporates the ‘how’ element. What resources are required to achieve those targets? This involves ascertaining what is already available, what else is needed (including human resources required) and preparing a budget for those requirements. Feasibility must come into every stage of planning. Is the plan over-ambitious? For example, are you trying to achieve too much within the timescale or are you trying to achieve too much with the resources available? Or could more be achieved with what is available? To summarize, “the marketing plan is a strategic document that will identify market position, state objectives, and outline how they will be achieved, resources required and results expected.” (de Saez, 2002, p.203)

Communication

Whilst the traditional marketing mix of the 4Ps (Product. Price, Place, Promotion) may be familiar, it is product led. The 4Cs model (Customer, Cost, Convenience, Communication) has greater customer focus. Communication is the final element of the 4Cs model, in which the customer comes first rather than the product. The value to the customer must be considered. Convenience replaces place, and cost (including time and energy) replaces price. Hence communication replaces promotion (Ashcroft, 2002, p.178). Any organisation needs to know its external audience – or needs to undertake market research to find out about that audience. In order for effective communication, it is necessary to know to which communications media the audience will respond: whether they read newspapers, magazines, leaflets, listen to radio or watch television - and what type or what programmes in particular. Which communications media will reach them? Supermarkets, for example, gain information about their customers through their loyalty card schemes, their magazines (usually different types, eg food club, family matters, healthy living, etc) and their websites. From the information gained, they target particular groups of shoppers. In addition, the way in which language is used is important. Dempsy says that there is one most important thing that librarians can do to market services better “Don’t think like a librarian, think like a patron … it’s about organizing and talking in a way that makes sense to patrons so they don’t feel like they needs a secret handshake to use the library” (cited in Rogers, 2007). This is equally important in the online environment. While blogs and wikis provide opportunities to speak to customers, an important aspect of any online voice is to be honest and genuine. A fake blog released by Mazda to appeal to Generation Y was supposedly written by a 22 year old Mazda M3 enthusiast. It was removed less than a week after publication following heavy criticism (Watson & Harper, 2006).

When Hampshire Libraries, UK, ran a lifelong learning project, this commenced at Gosport Library with a low budget ‘Change Your Life’ event. Gosport Library collaborated with other organisations and exploited links for maximum publicity. Publicity was organised via local radio stations, the distribution of flyers and posters through partner organisations, public notice boards, community centres, doctors’ surgeries, naval establishments, and even the Gosport to Portsmouth ferry. An effective approach was personal calling on businesses neighbouring the library. Yet the most

innovative example of marketing for this event was when the Information Specialist and Information and Advice worker ran a stall in the high street on market day to promote 'Change Your Life'. The aim was to get out into the community and challenge members of the public who were not library users to make the most of the event and to look afresh at what the library had to offer, and helium balloons and posters were used to attract the attention of passers-by (Denyer, Gill & Turner, 2003).

When Birmingham Libraries, UK launched a campaign to change their image and introduce new branding, one aim of the campaign was to reach non-users. Outdoor media was necessary and included billboards, street posters, internal bus posters, posters in leisure centres and radio advertising on two local channels that had high listenership amongst black and ethnic minority young people. Evaluation of previous leisure and culture campaigns showed that billboards and street posters have a high recall level. The locations were chosen to reach the target audience of young adults, black and ethnic minority groups, and the media display concentrated on the city centre, where plenty of people pass (Gambles & Schuster, 2003).

When Leeds Metropolitan University held a two week freshers' festival, stalls in the event were asked to be fun and interactive rather than just to hand out leaflets. Library staff held a brainstorming session, which brought the realisation that library staff were Friendly, Informative, Supportive and Helpful (FISH), and a 'fishy' fun theme was established. This was a lucky dip game (using a ball pool) to win fish related prizes, providing the opportunity to draw people in and give them information about the library and skills for learning resources to help with study needs. Every ball was a winner, even if just a 'fish' sweet and useful library 'tip of the day'. Stickers were given out and used to calculate that they engaged with at least 1800 people over the 2 days. An accompanying 'fishy' quiz with fish-related answers to be found using the catalogue and library website was available at the stall and in the libraries. The 'fish' novelty drew more crowds than competitors and raised plenty of smiles and helped in engaging with students who wanted to find out more about the library as well as having fun (Loughran & Peacock, 2006).

Visibility - Drawing media attention

Examples from other organisations, such as supermarkets, charities and tourism, demonstrate how they have taken an opportunity to draw national and international media attention and to promote themselves favourably to a wide audience. Techniques demonstrating the significance of the right timing, the importance of having the right resources in place and using the right means of communication to reach the various audiences involved relate in the same way to libraries as to other organisations (Ashcroft, 2002). Just as, for example, supermarkets encourage regular customers, image and environment are vital for any organisation, including libraries, not only to attract people in the first place but also to persuade them to return for more.

As well as its role as a visitors' centre, the global nature of its conservation and research work means that Kew Gardens needs to reach out to a wide national and international audience. Kew Gardens took the opportunity of the flowering of 'Titan Arum' to attract

international media attention, so as to gain more publicity for the Gardens and to encourage more visitors. 'Titan Arum', also known as the 'smelly plant', is a spectacular tropical plant, standing about one metre high. It flowers rarely and, when it does, the flower emits a stench like rotting meat. This presented the opportunity to get a visual story into the media. A news release was prepared and sent to the Times Diary (which is widely read by other journalists). This resulted in worldwide media coverage. A platform was built for television crews, which was used by 30 crews, 13 of which were from overseas. There were 31 radio interviews, 22 national press stories and 30 regional press stories. As a result, visitors through the gate trebled, and many visitors were attracted who had never been to Kew Gardens previously (Robinson, 1996).

The charity Scope took the opportunity of a name change to promote the society. It was previously named 'The Spastics Society', but this name had become a term of abuse, hence the name change. The launch of the new name Scope was used to draw media attention. The Sunday Times made a comment about 'political correctness', but Scope turned this on its head by using it to create more media interest and coverage – thus addressing the comment and gaining more publicity. For visual impact, a flag was unfurled on the day of the launch of the new name in clear view of the House of Commons terrace. Not only was the new name promoted, but also the work of the society, and its survey report *Disabled Britain*. In total there was 2 hours and 30 minutes television coverage (national, regional, satellite) reaching 17.5 million people (New identity, 1995).

Internal communication is of equal importance. The executive board and/or budget holders need to be fully informed and in agreement with resource implications, priorities and approaches. However, most importantly, all staff need to be fully informed and involved. They are often on the front line – they are highly visible, and they need to be on board with any project so that they can communicate and promote effectively. Staff at Kew Gardens were involved and enthusiastic about 'the smelly plant' promotion (Robinson, 1996). They joined in with the media crews by providing amusing photo opportunities wearing gas masks and handkerchiefs over their noses to maximise the publicity shots. They also talked to visitors telling them about all the features that Kew Gardens has on offer. At Leeds Metropolitan University freshers' fair, library staff volunteered to help run the stall and donated 'props' to add to the display. They "had a great time running the stalls" and their enthusiasm clearly rubbed off on students (Loughran & Peacock, 2006).

Resources

If a PR campaign has been successful in increasing awareness and interest and in creating demand, it is essential to have sufficient resources to support that demand. Supermarkets use special offers to increase interest in products. Common tactics are BOGOF (Buy One Get One Free), other special offers and reduced prices. However, shoppers can find that the items on offer are out of stock (ie supply has not met demand). Disgruntled shoppers, including those new to the supermarket, can feel disappointed and/or annoyed, and may go to shop elsewhere – permanently. Some years ago, a major toy manufacturer created a huge demand at Christmas for their popular toy range with their promotional campaign.

Stocks did not meet demand, which resulted in angry shoppers complaining and children being disappointed. This resulted in bad publicity for the manufacturer.

If libraries are taking the opportunity to increase awareness and raise interest in what they have to offer by promoting such facilities as free Internet access, it is important to ensure that resources will meet demand. If visitors find that they have to wait, queue or book Internet facilities, and did not anticipate this, then they may be disappointed and never return.

Good PR does not require high expenditure. Financial resources do not have to be great for a promotional campaign; much can be done with little. Identifying an opportunity and taking advantage of it does not necessarily involve huge finances. Oxford Brookes University Library wanted to promote its newly re-launched library website. The library also took the opportunity to take a stall at the University's Freshers Fair, so as to promote the library generally, its subject support and enhanced induction tours. Taking the promotional theme of 'inspiration', the library used Newton's apple and gave away free apples and stickers (Brewerton, 2003). Clearly resources were in place to meet demand and there was a huge increase in hit rates on the library website. In this case, the financial investment was less than £400, demonstrating that much can be done with little.

Time is an important resource. The timing of promotional activity must be carefully considered. Any 'launch' time should be appropriate for promotional activity. For example, Hasbro launches new toys via a promotional campaign, including television advertisements strategically positioned during children's television programmes, during the run up to Christmas, when sales should be maximised. Similarly any library launches should be appropriately timed. For example, new buildings look better in the summer months when there is bright daylight and green foliage, which maximises photo opportunities – particularly for official openings or launches. Special events and celebrity visits should be staged at a time when it is convenient for the target audience to attend.

It is also important to consider when would be the best time to get maximum media coverage. For example, the summer months are quieter for the media when government offices are closed. There is room in the press for 'silly' stories at this time of year (known as the 'silly season') – and a better chance of getting a story covered. The 'smelly plant' flowered in July, and Kew Gardens was aware that this was a quieter time for the media and exploited the timing opportunity (Robinson, 1996). It is also important to consider staff availability. If your PR campaign is likely to result in a surge of people coming through your doors, this should not be the time when many staff members are taking holiday leave.

Environment

Whilst an objective of a campaign might be to entice people to buy a product or to visit a library and use a resource, another objective will be to encourage people to buy, visit or use again, ie to become regular consumers. Thus any environment should be warm and welcoming. Supermarkets use careful lighting, strategic placing of facilities, attractive

displays and aromas, such as those from the bakery and coffee shop, to create a warm environment – and to maximise sales. St Mary's University Library, Nova Scotia, was built in the 1970s. By 1999 it was considered dark and uninviting, with dark brown walls and worn flooring, low lighting and few worn armchairs. It was not fulfilling its potential from the perspectives of congenial environment and student awareness. Following market research to establish student requirements and concerns, the library was refurbished to offer a more inviting, welcoming and comfortable environment. Artwork was used to cover the dark walls, composition tiles replaced the worn carpet, surfaces were laminated, seating was replaced or re-upholstered, and the vending machines were replaced with a café. The result was more students coming in to use the library and coming back frequently and also promoting the library by word of mouth (Lefebvre, 2002). It is important to remember that happy, delighted customers will promote/market on your behalf (Robinson, 2006b). Rizzo (2002, p.463) confirms that

> "It is within the interior that students and faculty will make their strongest connection to the library, and if sensitively designed they will proudly adopt it as their place."

Image

Image can, to some extent, reflect environment in terms of warmth and welcome, but an image can sometimes also need to convey efficiency – particularly in terms of customer care. First impressions are registered quickly, they stay registered, and bad impressions are hard to displace. The British Airways strikes in recent years have been PR disasters. With stranded customers, poor communication and information to front line staff, who were trying to deal with distraught customers, and poor compensation offers, there was substantial damage to British Airway's reputation (Strike threat, 2003). At the bottom line, an image of poor customer care was presented. In 1998, it was identified that some hip replacements from 3M Healthcare were faulty. 3M provided immediate and full information, offered to pay all costs and gave commitment to lifelong follow-ups for those affected. An image of good customer care was projected, and 3M used the media to their advantage. 3M was open and honest and quick to address the situation, which did not allow for any press speculation or sensationalism (Good crisis talk, 1998).

Who wants to engage with an organisation which does not demonstrate warmth in customer care? In 2006, Cadbury recalled 7 of its products in the UK – more than a million chocolate bars – following pressure from the Food Standards Agency, which revealed that a rare strain of salmonella had been discovered in one of it factories. Cadbury said the contamination occurred when a waste pipe leaked on a chocolate crumb production line. A decision was made by Cadbury managers to carry on production, alleging that the contamination levels were minimal and not a threat to consumers, and they produced contaminated chocolate bars for approximately 40 days until the recall. The Food Standards Agency said that any level of salmonella in ready-to-eat food, such as chocolate, was unacceptable and posed a health risk. There were concerns that the contaminated bars may have triggered food poisoning among more than 40 people (Vasager, 2006). This presented an image of cold lack of concern by Cadbury. Even the Cadbury sponsorship of a television soap opera was halted at the time if this issue, which implied that the sponsorees did not want to be associated with lack of customer care. A

warm and welcoming environment is the key to success, and this includes the personal environment. This highlights the importance of internal communication and the need for staff to be fully informed and involved, as they are often the first point of contact for the consumer.

The image of an organisation should be warm and welcoming. Who wants any dealings with an organisation that appears remote, silent and arrogant? When Barings Bank crashed in 1995, it remained silent, did not take any positive actions and tried to blame an employee, Nick Leeson. Because it had no proper communications strategy, it lost control of the story.

An article in a regional newspaper provided a good sized spread about a rare poster collection that had been acquired by a central public library. However, it seems that no opportunity was taken by that library to create a special exhibition of these posters (so as to take the opportunity to draw new consumers into that library). Comments in the article included "the rare collection will not be going on display", that they would be stored in boxes and people can look at them "but we have no plans to display them". Rather than warm and welcoming, the image conveyed was forbidding and remote (Neild, 1997).

Like commercial organisations, library and information services want their customers to keep returning for more, and the level of customer care plays an important part in any marketing strategy. Emberton (2006) discusses the insights that libraries could acquire from the fast food industry when marketing to children, suggesting that libraries should establish a relationship with children in early childhood, and deliver services consistently.

The market research commissioned for North Yorkshire Library and Information Service suggested a bleak image. However, they used this research as an opportunity to change and, armed with evidence of great success when a new library for Ripon was built, the Council set out to address the issues. £6.2m was invested in a programme of refurbishments to transform the overall look and feel of the libraries, opening hours were considered in consultation with the public – and most were extended and changed to reflect consumer demand, and every member of staff received customer care training (Blaisdale, Fay & Garbacz, 2006).

Sponsorship

Sponsorship is now big business, and it is a PR function. Companies exist to match organisations looking for sponsorship with those looking for sponsors. Sponsorship decisions are often made on a commercial basis. Rather than just making some kind of donation, the sponsor will want something in return. Sponsorship of library activities is nothing new. Over a decade ago McFarlane (1994, p.2) pointed out that "Sponsorship should be looked upon as the exchange of cash or services (by the company to the cultural organization) for some measurable business benefit." Sponsorship is now common with the broadcast media, where the sponsor's name is advertised as well as being seen as to sponsor a favourite programme. However, some sponsors want to be seen as supporting good causes. An example of this is the high profit Tesco supermarket chain, which offers customers vouchers for schools for sports and computers. Another

example is the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, which has provided IT facilities and training for public libraries in North America, UK and Chile. Through its Canadian Partnership program alone, the Foundation granted $18.2million to 1,466 libraries throughout the country, funding the purchase of over 4,000 computers, 27 training labs and 16 laptop training labs (Erickson, 2002). Sponsorship goes beyond the commercial sector as some libraries are now negotiating effective sponsorship deals and attracting favourable media coverage in doing so. For example, Yorkshire Public Libraries struck an excellent financial deal with a major sponsor, Tales of Robin Hood plc (a theme park), to organise a summer reading game and book activities for children (The Robin Hood Reading Game). Tales of Robin Hood plc contributed over £30,000 towards the cost of printing, promotion, prizes and activities – as well as free tickets and transport for the winners to the Tales of Robin Hood experience. It is not necessary to be restricted to one sponsor. In this case of Yorkshire Libraries, the support of a major sponsor created business confidence and convinced secondary sponsors that their financial support was worthwhile. The scheme worked well for both Yorkshire Libraries and Tales of Robin Hood plc, with local and national media following the development of the scheme and nearly 10,000 youngsters joining the scheme and an increase in issues and many new borrowers (The reading game, 1995). Sponsorship can provide opportunities, which might otherwise be unavailable, but value must be assessed at the start. What will the library get out of the sponsorship deal? How much needs to be input for what return? What are the sponsor's expectations – and can they be met? Does it work for both parties?

Evaluation

Any marketing/PR campaign incorporates ongoing evaluation to ensure correct future actions as this is not a one-off activity. Targets/objectives set should be capable of measurement so that there can be evaluation of whether targets have been met, exceeded or fallen short, and these should be incorporated into the plan. Whatever the result, it needs to be addressed or taken further.

- Was the initial feasibility incorrect?
- Were targets underestimated or overestimated?
- What is the feasible achievement in light of evaluation?
- Are new targets needed?
- Should the communication techniques be changed?
- Was the campaign over-ambitious?

Evaluation methods are linked to market research, and evaluation findings used as "a tool for improving effectiveness" (de Saez, 2002, p.216). Any poor response must be addressed by corrective action. If consumers were disappointed, this must be addressed immediately. The Oxford English Dictionary defines 'campaign' as an ongoing course of action to achieve a particular goal. The key word in this is 'ongoing'. A campaign is not a one-off activity, it is ongoing. If a campaign was successful, this is not the end – it could fall into the trap of the product lifecycle and demand could decline. There is need to assess how this could be developed. Constant evaluation is needed for development. Consider the 'product lifecycle' of introduction, growth, maturity and decline. In order to avoid decline, commercial organisations evaluate and 'develop' their products. Take, for example, a simple chocolate bar that has been on the market for a long time. During its

life cycle, it will probably have been repackaged, produced in different sizes (eg mini and mega-bars), and produced in 'special editions' (flavours) at different times, etc. Akin to the 'product lifecycle', there is a need for library services to evaluate, and develop (or repackage) so as to avoid decline.

Building on success

A successful result should be built upon and publicity maximised. For example, the success of the Oxford Brookes University Library's promotional campaign was publicised through a number of articles written for both the national and international professional press, and the national media followed the development of the Yorkshire Libraries scheme. If working with the media has been successful, this relationship should be developed. PR professionals and the media work from different angles, and it is necessary to build trust between the two parties, then to ascertain how this can be taken further, for example by discussing what story coverage works for both the organisation and the media. Sponsorship is not necessarily a one-off activity. If it has worked once (successfully), then there is no reason why it should not work again.

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