

Marketing your library's electronic resources: a how-to-do-it manual, Marie R. Kennedy, Cheryl LaGuardia. Facet Publishing, London, UK (2013), 177pp., ISBN: 9781856049429

A chance meeting at a conference led to this excellent, practical book. Marie Kennedy was presenting a paper and Cheryl LaGuardia was in the audience. Despite the advent of discovery systems, librarians are still finding that many of their electronic resources are not being used as widely as they should be. In the current economic climate it is incumbent on services to demonstrate return on investment, that the resources for which there has been a considerable cost are being used. Librarians know their patrons really well so are in a good position to market their resources better.

The major thrust of the book is that to effectively market electronic resources the library must first come up with a marketing plan. There is lots of information on how to do this. Each page has a wide margin and this is used effectively to include a summary of the chapter at the start, links to further information and other useful snippets including mini case studies.

In the very first chapter a marketing plan is likened to a shopping list. The authors argue that a plan helps maintain focus, ensure there is a consistent message across the whole organisation and empower the library users to find the most effective resources. The more work that goes into creating the plan the more benefits will follow. The first task is to work out what you want to achieve and this is the focus of this chapter. Usage statistics show how well used are the various electronic resources. Trends in use show if something is being used more or falling out of favour. Combining use with cost gives the cost per use. If something is not being used then is it because users don't know it exists, don't like the interface or don't find it useful. This can then determine what problem to address. The marketing plan should be a collective effort as it is important to speak with one message. There are very different ways to promote electronic resources compared to print. For example a "new book shelf" doesn't make much sense in an electronic environment.

Having decided what to market and why, the authors say the next stage is to create the marketing plan. Again there are lots of practical tips how to go about this. They suggest a SWOT analysis is a good place to start. From this it is possible to identify the internal and external factors. The next area to consider is the target groups. There may be a distinct group of users who are not using electronic resources to their full potential or who would benefit from the particular resources being pushed. When thinking about the actual strategy there will be many ways to communicate the message. In the original conference paper Kennedy had identified an average of 12.6 different marketing techniques used in a medical library. The plan itself should identify a timeline, staff involved and a budget.

The third chapter shows how to make the plan a reality. In a way this chapter is a bit of a repetition of the previous chapter but it goes into more detail. It is also a lot more practical and includes lots of examples from the literature of libraries that have already created a marketing plan. Chapter 2 is more about the thought processes required in creating the plan and this chapter the actual content. For example it lists all 43 different marketing techniques Kennedy (2010) had identified in her original conference paper, drawn from 23 relevant journal articles. There are examples of how to measure that the plan is successful.

Of course it is quite likely that a marketing plan will need to be “sold” to senior management before it can be implemented. This is covered in the fourth chapter. From the points it is most essential to get across in the executive summary to the other sections of the report this chapter has it covered. At the end of the book four example plans are reproduced and this chapter highlights the best features to help anyone wanting to write their own.

There is a danger in thinking that once implemented everything will fall into place. The last two chapters go through the next stages. Continually assess the plan and revise and update it as things change.

Overall this is a very readable and certainly practical book. It contains lots of tips and examples of things that work well and things that don't. It is set out so that someone creating a marketing plan doesn't necessarily have to read it cover to cover but rather can keep it on their desk to be dipped into through all the stages of the process. If they are still unsure there are some real life examples at the end to show what a plan might look like.

Kennedy, M. (2010) Cycling through: paths libraries take to marketing electronic resources. Paper presented at the Library Assessment Conference, Baltimore MD, 27 October [Online]  
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