



## MARKETING - your strategy matters

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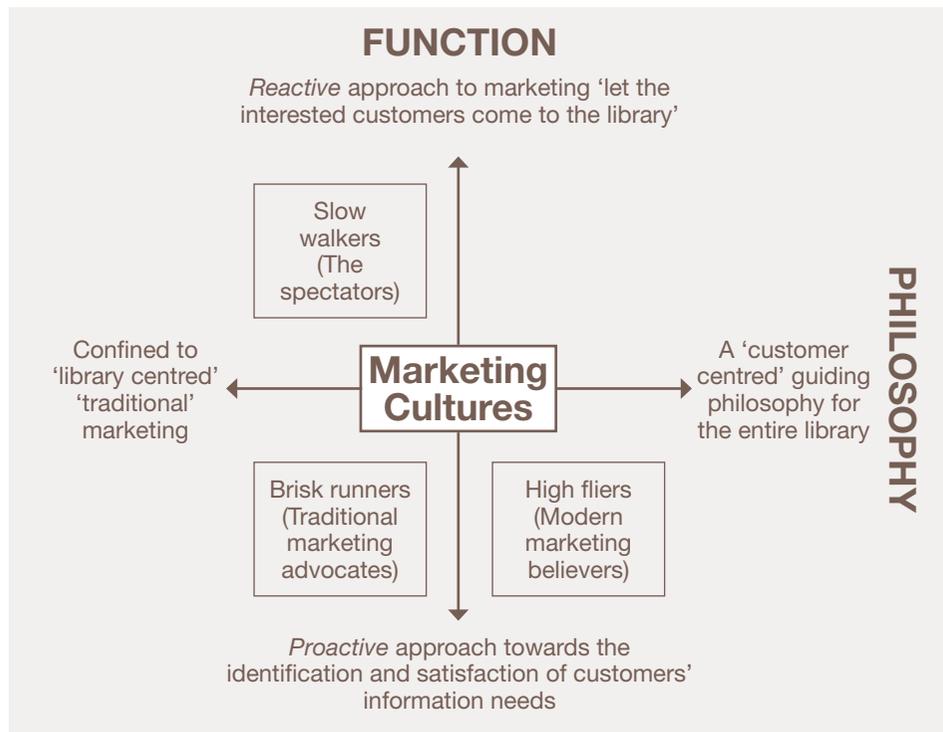
### Abstract

The wide body of literature available on the subject of marketing in libraries is evidence of the growing importance of this discipline as a core strategic focus for all libraries. The recent *Public Libraries Strategy 2018-2022* draft outline further highlights this need, listing marketing as a suggested element toward progression of the overall thematic programmes. While written from an academic library perspective, this article aims to provide a brief overview of marketing concepts that are relevant to all in our profession while also discussing personal learnings gained from completion of a library marketing plan while attending a Diploma in Marketing and Digital Strategy.

**Keywords:** *Marketing, Libraries, Planning*

## Introduction

The term 'marketing' often has Libraries operate in a landscape of uncertainty in which the need to prove relevancy and worth continue to be important. The potential of the role that marketing can play in creating awareness and most vitally, advocacy among customers should not be ignored. As illustrated below, Singh (2009) presents a succinct illustration and useful metric of various marketing cultures found in libraries.



Source: (Singh, 2009)

In today's increasingly technological environment, how many libraries can truly claim to be what Singh has described as 'high fliers'? Having just created a marketing plan for my own library, I think the concept of marketing in libraries needs to be discussed in a much more pro-active way. To this end, I thought it worthwhile to share my observations.

## Marketing Plan

My current role as an Assistant Librarian involves both a corporate and executive educational perspective. This, combined with my participation on an IMI Diploma in Marketing and Digital Strategy, required that my library marketing plan would have a strong business perspective and influence. It has been suggested that to successfully develop a marketing strategy any organisation must initially have a strategic orientation (production, sales, market or customer). Any attempt to undertake marketing analysis cannot begin without first knowing what it is the organisation wishes to achieve at a strategic level. Talk of strategic orientations may seem rather high-level, or relevant only to business organisations, however recent research has shown that these principles can be applied to any type of library (Sen, 2010).

Some consider that libraries' primary function is to be market or customer orientated. This can be defined as 'an ability to balance company profits, consumer wants, satisfaction, and public interests' (Arachchige, 2002, p. 2) where company profits are understood to be rational and considered budgetary spending to improve overall customer experience. The purpose of my marketing plan was to examine what this means for the Irish Management Institute Knowledge Centre Library and propose how these practices can be integrated into our everyday marketing and promotion to build relationships and service awareness. My approach mirrored that of Potter (2012):

• <b>decide on your overall goals to be achieved</b>	• <b>promotional activities</b>
• <b>research your market</b>	• <b>measurement</b>
• <b>segment your market</b>	• <b>evaluation</b>
• <b>set objectives</b>	• <b>modification</b>

For the purposes of this article, I will now focus on some of these elements.

## Market Segmentation

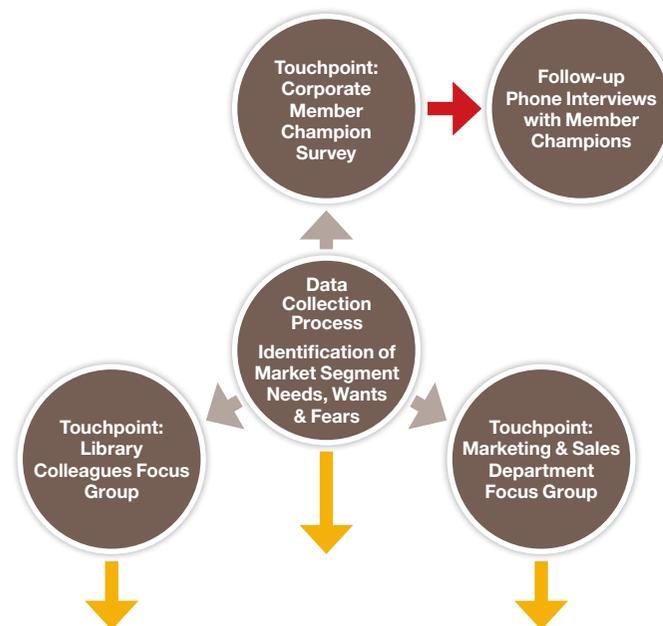
To accurately develop a targeted strategy it is necessary to identify clear segments. Market segmentation is an identification process that pinpoints the needs of particular customer demographics and then uses this information to

develop products and services to meet these needs (British Library, 2017). Possible segments relating to public libraries may include: children, parents, seniors, educational partners or cultural/religious populations. In my case, segmentation was achieved by consulting internal staff and creating a stakeholder map/power-interest grid (Ackerman and Eden, 2011) which illustrates a library's core patrons. For the purposes of my plan, I identified five clear market segments: master's programmes, diploma programmes, short programmes, tailored solutions and my chosen segment- corporate member organisations.

### Market Segment Identification

While each of the five segments had common requirements such as printing facilities, access to resources and interaction with a librarian, their requirements differed significantly in other ways. The use of the **Value Proposition Canvas** (Strategyzer, 2017), provided a simple method of clarifying corporate member wants, needs and fears while also determining ways that the library could address them; thereby creating value for member organisations. In order to correctly identify what these wants, needs and fears are, it is important to start not only with the customer, but in a segment that you can readily access (ARL, 2016). Speak to as many customer touchpoints as possible and treat the information gathering as an iterative process, not just a tick box exercise. As professionals we need to be aware that simply seeking feedback on a biannual basis via survey is not sufficient.

In conjunction with the IMI membership department, I distributed a survey to a specific contact (member champion) in each member organisation seeking opinions on the current library service, how relevant they considered it to be to their needs and what they might change or wish to see offered. While the survey certainly proved useful, it really acted as a platform for follow-up phone interviews. Additionally, I spoke to my immediate colleagues in the library and also to the marketing and sales departments who interact with member organisations on a daily basis. I have summarised this process opposite:



Sample Corporate Buyer Persona: Learning and Development Manager – Mary

<p><b>Personal Background</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Age: 35–45</li> <li>• Married</li> <li>• Education: Third Level including IMI</li> </ul>		<p><b>Company Information</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Industry: Transport</li> <li>• Revenue: €605 million</li> <li>• Employees: 500</li> <li>• Member: Yes</li> </ul>
<p><b>Role</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Duties: Design and deliver the learning and development strategy, support and direct talent management, identify skill gaps</li> <li>• Skills required: People management, employee engagement, communications skills, human resource management</li> <li>• Key decision maker in membership decision: Yes</li> <li>• Reports to: Head of Human Resources</li> </ul>		
<p><b>Goals and challenges</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Success means: employee retention and development, success talent management and succession strategy</li> <li>• Values most: employee development, retention and strategic project delivery</li> <li>• Biggest challenges: retention and engagement, budget approval, stakeholder buy-in, staying ahead of curve, time management</li> <li>• Key product needs: latest industry insights (guest speakers), ease of information dissemination to increase employee awareness</li> </ul>		

It is not possible to tailor your message or content and correctly serve your customers if you do not know who they are and what they want from the library service. In order to succinctly manage the gathered information and to understand my target segment better, I created a 'corporate member buyer persona'. Vaughan (2015), provides useful tips and questions to assist in this process. This ultimately made the actual marketing strategy planning process much easier as I constantly referred back to my buyer persona when considering marketing implementation.

## Marketing Persona

Once you have established a clear persona, setting objectives is vital. These are typically defined in terms of what you wish to achieve from planned marketing activities and should be expressed in clear terms and with an explicit timeframe for completion (Dibb et al, 2016). Each objective should be very specific, achievable and measurable. For example, I initially listed the following objective:

**'ways for the library to increase brand awareness among corporate members will be identified.'**

This was not specific or measurable, and I eventually reworded as follows:

**'Primarily utilising online channels, a minimum of three cost-effective ways for the library to increase brand awareness and reach among corporate members will be identified. Success will be measured via a notable increase in resource usage among members from August until November; and will be tracked via analytics on the library website and through bi-monthly telephone conversations with member champions.'**

The rationale behind the choice of online channels was due to feedback from the survey which indicated that the majority of our member champions felt that they did not have the time to physically visit the library and preferred instant and always accessible content to meet their needs.

## Branding

Prior to undertaking this course, library branding is not something we had given consideration to, in effect the library did not have a unique brand. As pointed out by Tomcik (2015), your brand is not necessarily what you want it to be, instead your brand is a sum total of how people see and feel about you. In the case of the IMI Library, course participants are 'bought in' by virtue of course attendance and the need for material. But what about the corporate members who are entitled to use the same facilities but choose not to? A recurring theme that was never far from my thoughts was – 'is our brand strong enough to attract these members on a regular basis and are we projecting the right image toward them?'

To consider this in more detail, my library colleagues and I carried out an exercise in which we each provided five words that we hoped would come to mind when customers thought of the library. Once analysed, these words highlighted four main concepts that we as a library would like to project:

- **current and innovative;**
- **friendly and inviting,**
- **helpful and knowledgeable; and**
- **efficient and easy to use**

In order to ascertain what the current library brand was within the membership community, we asked member champions via survey, for three words that came to mind when thinking of the library. A word cloud was created based on the responses with the words, *excellent*, *accessible*, *helpful* and *efficient* achieving prominence. Significantly the word 'low-key' also appeared in the word cloud. This tied into other feedback received from the survey which suggests that our brand was not visible enough and that we were understating our importance. This worthwhile exercise allowed us to determine the gap between how we as staff see the library and our members' views. Moving forward, we will incorporate this exercise into each survey in order to gauge the perception of all customers and to provide continuous direction for our overall strategic aims.

## Marketing Mix

Also known as an action plan, the 'marketing mix' is the policy framework through which the marketing strategies will be accomplished (Garoufallou *et al*, 2013). Without this, no marketing plan will ever get off the ground.

**Product** – benefit(s) that the recommended changes off the target audience

**Price** – cost (time and effort) for the target audience of acquiring/obtaining the benefit

**Place** – distribution channels the organisation uses to convey their benefit to the target audience

**Promotion** – function used by organisation to communicate with the target audience in order to acknowledge the existence of the benefit

**People** – stakeholders responsible for delivery of the benefit in addition to consistent messaging and service interaction

**Physical Evidence** – tangible proof observed and experienced by target audience so that appearance and arrangement of benefit is considered real

**Process** – systems of the organisation affecting the delivery method of the benefit message

Source: (Garoufallou *et al*, 2013)

In addition to providing an up to date overview, I found the above mix allowed for a clear and structured approach to the actual marketing implementation. Utilising all of the research and data collected, I was able to create a comprehensive online and offline strategy which directly addressed the needs of the corporate members surveyed. To date, I have successfully implemented three of the strategies:

- a library brochure,
- newsletter and
- monthly subject campaigns

## Marketing Control/Evaluation

As noted by Ferrell and Hartline (2014, p. 270), marketing strategies tend to change depending on competing priorities. In order to reduce the possibility of the intended strategy not being implemented, regular marketing control and evaluation is necessary. Control can take two forms: formal and informal. Formal controls are those designed by the library and may include surveys, circulation and renewal statistics and other methods of data capture such as Google Analytics. Informal controls tend to be unwritten activities and focus on three areas: self, social and cultural control.

As I am chiefly responsible for implementation of my plan, self-control is hugely important. My job satisfaction, organisational commitment and level of effort are central to the success of the marketing plan. I would suggest that responsibility for implementation lies with more than one person in order to ensure maximum effort, commitment and momentum. This relates to social controls, which focus on the ability of a team to achieve objectives, collaboration and communication effectively. What are the social and behavioural norms in your work groups? Are they effective? Being part of a team of three, I am confident that we work well together and get things done when required. Understanding how teams can work successfully is an important consideration for libraries.

Lastly, cultural controls are based on organisational norms and expectations. Is support for a full marketing plan study and implementation a viable option in your library? Does support come from the top down? Do silos exist within departments that restrict the flow of information? Are you provided with the necessary tools, time and funding to implement the plan and achieve the objectives? The question about silos is particularly relevant. My ability to co-ordinate meetings with and obtain information from other departments has proved difficult and time-consuming. However, progress is being made and my hope is that in time the evaluation and control element will become part of the normal process.

## Conclusion

In the 21st century, marketing can play a vital role in the success of libraries. Strategic thinking and planning is an important part of this approach. Acting as a starting point for further discussion, this article aimed to provide a brief overview of marketing concepts and how they can be applied to libraries. By embracing and utilising relevant marketing frameworks, research methodologies and existing employee skills, libraries can uncover market segment wants and needs on both individual and collective levels. Marketing planning places the customer at the centre of service delivery and builds a truly innovative and relevant library service for the future. Furthermore, by delivering what customers want, a natural outcome is advocacy. This can ensure that the library stays visible in the mind of the customer while remaining central to the development of an educated, literate and innovative society.

## Let's get started!

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