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# Digital Marketing in an Outreach Context

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## Digital marketing in an outreach context

### I. Introduction

Marketing or Public Relations has a chequered history in libraries. For cautious administrators, it represents a perilous minefield of potential legal challenges to the university's brand and image. For others, it is one step closer to the corporatization of libraries, on a level with coffee shops and outsourcing cataloging. Even for libraries that have set up a Facebook page, marketing can often be seen as slightly creepy or slightly inane; a waste of time that diverts staff and resources from the library's decreasing budget. Notwithstanding, a "library's collection and services are relevant only to the extent that they are used by their intended audience." (Smith, 2011, 333) In an increasingly complex information environment, marketing, or the promotion of products and services, is key.

Digital marketing, which refers to the use of digital technology for promotion and outreach, has often been seen as adapted to new undergraduate internet lifestyles and a way to promote the library's higher quality online information resources. (Smith, 2011, 334) However, just as "smartphones are not just miniature PCs" but possess their own ecosystem, digital marketing cannot be seen as a direct extension of traditional library marketing activities. (Aldrich, 2010) Instead, it is important that libraries examine the wider social and cultural effects of technological change as well as new tools in order to design authentic and effective outreach and marketing strategies.

Accordingly this chapter will provide an overview of digital marketing and outreach in the LIS context, looking in particular at the experiences of academic libraries. Drawing on the work of David Lankes, it will take a broad approach to the library's role in the changing information landscape, effectively situating new tools and techniques within the movement towards user-centred librarianship. Within this framework, the chapter will highlight overarching themes from new outreach models while also focusing on examples of general tools such as Twitter; mobile or location based tools such as Foursquare; and visual tools such as Pinterest. The bulk of the chapter will consider the benefits, issues and impact of this process and will provide

examples from the aforementioned tools to illustrate major points. The chapter will finish with a series of questions designed to help the planning process.

## **II From Marketing to Outreach**

In 1999, a simple website called the Cluetrain Manifesto exploded onto the scene. (Locke et al.,) Published just before the dotcom bubble burst, its 95 theses, or manifesto provided an early and prescient glimpse of how the internet could affect people and organizations. Over a decade later, its central premise that the internet has enabled a “powerful global conversation” remains key. As the authors predicted, the rise of networked media has facilitated much broader two-way communication, which, in turn, has required a radically new response from organizations. It took over ten years for this vision to be translated into the context of librarianship, but in 2011, David Lankes published the Atlas of New Librarianship. Just like in the Cluetrain Manifesto, Lankes’ vision of libraries and librarians of the future understands the need to focus on these conversations. For him, librarians have become overly focused on the products or the artifacts of knowledge such as books. Instead, he makes the case that librarians need to concentrate on facilitating the conversations that are at the heart of knowledge creation. As such, his vision focuses on the need for librarians to understand and engage with the local community, a return to the core principles of librarianship.

By subtly challenging the purpose and focus of libraries, Lankes opens the door to re-examining the objectives of many library activities and services, as well as librarian attitudes and actions. The concept of marketing proves to be no exception. If librarianship is about facilitating knowledge creation in the community, then it is clear that unlike traditional marketing, online engagement is not just a vehicle for delivering services or promoting a product. Instead, the purpose of digital marketing must be to reach out and engage this community, to understand their needs and to create an environment that will facilitate and connect patrons to knowledge creating conversations. By focusing on the relationships in a community rather than the transactions, digital marketing brings the library to the user, thereby enabling a true sense of participation and ownership of the knowledge creation process. (Lankes, 2012)

It is not just the goals of digital marketing that are adjusting to a networked world. Libraries have a great deal of expertise as well as valuable collections and services to offer online communities; credibility is one of our biggest assets. (Lankes, 2011, 92) Yet none of this matters if a library cannot connect with people online and become

part of their community and conversation. Therefore, libraries must also change the way that they communicate in online settings. This can be summed up as the need to listen, both to what users want, as well as listening for feedback; to be authentic, or to respond to user needs in a human or genuine manner, rather than sounding soulless or defensive; and to share or to participate in online communities, ensuring librarians form part of changing digital spaces and habits. (King, 2012) David Lee King refers to this as sounding human on the web, and it is a vital part of digital marketing. (King, 2012, 1)

In sum, digital marketing is not just about translating traditional marketing online, or keeping up with new online tools. Instead, it involves engaging authentically with the new spaces, tools and voices that form the community's online conversations, focusing on the way that the librarian can engage, understand and build relationships with community members. For many, the change in focus has been so wide reaching that even the term marketing appears inadequate to describe the additional advocacy, outreach, community engagement, promotion and advertising involved. (Ford, 2009) While a broader discussion about terminology does not fall within the scope of this chapter, what is key is that librarians are talking about the importance of digital marketing and outreach within their communities, a process that should be widespread and ongoing.

### **III. In Practice**

Accordingly, together, both Lankes and the Cluetrain Manifesto provide a firm theoretical basis and model for digital marketing and outreach in the academic library. On a more practical note, however, it is important to realise that digital marketing presents its own set of challenges as well as benefits to the community. It also has a wide impact on users, staff and library services. As such, the following section will attempt to explore these areas while referring to three types of outreach tools; general tools such as Twitter, mobile or location based tools such as Foursquare and visual tools such as Pinterest. Recognising that digital marketing is not defined by technology, (as well as understanding the fluctuating nature of the social media environment) this chapter will not give a step by step introduction to individual tools. Instead, a basic overview of major categories or types of tools and their affordances will be provided to situate the reader, while the recommendations for further reading will provide examples of practical tips.

#### *Tools*

There are a variety of different tools that can greatly expand and streamline the digital marketing process. Tools that will be referred to in this chapter include:

*General outreach tools, e.g. Twitter*

Comprising well known and established tools that already have many functions in community and individuals' lives such as socialising, networking, information sharing etc. Twitter and Facebook are the major tools in this category, though Google Plus is also gaining ground as more universities adopt Google Apps for Education. Already embedded in many people's lives, these tools are indispensable for a wide variety of functions in the library, for example; sharing practical or real time information such as hours changes or closures, asking opinions through polls, sharing photos of new services, books or librarians, hosting virtual book groups and more. For more ideas see: Sump Crethar, 2012; Phillips, 2011 and Forrestal, 2010.

*Mobile or location based tools, e.g. Foursquare*

Drawing on the ubiquity and popularity of mobile devices as well as social gaming, these tools develop the concept of library as place, as well as helping to studying library usage. One of the biggest tools in this category is Foursquare, a mobile application that allows users to "check in" to places that they visit, thereby informing friends of their location and providing recommendations of local amenities. Well used on US campuses, users can often claim prizes when checking in to a place, including badges, or the title of "Mayor" if they are the person who checks in most frequently at a specific location. As such, Foursquare can be extremely useful as a type of loyalty card, offering special deals for the Mayor or users who check in a certain number of times as well as highlighting library services via tips and to-do lists. For more ideas see Vecchione and Mellinger, 2012.

*Visual tools e.g. Pinterest.*

The newest category of digital outreach tools, visual content curation tools are ideal for promoting library collections, particularly images of physical or digitised collections. Pinterest, which is similar to HistoryPin, is a way of gathering images from the web in one place to create an online scrapbook or inspiration board. Users can then see or re-share these images with friends and contacts. Forming part of the move towards online content curation, or the gathering and the presentation of content around a specific topic, these tools can be used to provide a visual promotion of library collections, for example, new book covers or reading lists, or to enable wider

use and sharing of library images, such as digitised photos of local collections. For more ideas see Dudenhoffer, 2012 and Thornton, 2012.

#### **IV. Benefits**

What are the identified gains to a library that engages with digital marketing? This section will look at four of the major benefits to libraries and librarians, which can be summed up as building relationships, gaining feedback, widening the impact of the library and staff professional development.

##### *a. Build relationships*

As David Lankes points out, the ability to build relationships with local community members is one of the major benefits of digital marketing. For Phillips, this is because establishing relationships with students not only increases the possibilities of regular library interaction, but also establishes the library as a trusted resource that goes beyond a provider of books. (2011) In addition, she believes academic libraries are ideally positioned to bond with these students because “the university context creates a strong foundation of shared experiences, history, and culture for academic libraries and students” which the library can reinforce via digital marketing. (Phillips, 2011, 519) Notwithstanding, these relationships are not automatic. In online social networks, interpersonal relationships must be built on trust and credibility to build rapport between students and organizations. To build the user’s trust though, the library must be perceived as relevant and approachable. As such, digital marketing must be used to tell the story of the library’s multifaceted identity. Not only will this improve the library’s social capital, but it will also expand user knowledge of library services (improve relevance) as well as demonstrating library support for the community, including the shared local contexts (improve approachability). It is only then that users can see the library as a credible resource in their network, and feel safe exploring the research environment.

Therefore, while building relationships is important for increasing usage of librarian and library services, it is not an automatic process. Furthermore, it is highly dependent on librarian interactions. As such, it is important that librarians are not afraid to engage people online. As Sump Cretha says “users want to interact with people, not buildings” and accordingly, librarians should act as authentically as possible with patrons. (2012, 353)

##### *b. Feedback*

The second main advantages of using general or location based digital marketing is the ability to gain feedback on current services from library users. One way this can be achieved is through administering polls and surveys, for example to Twitter or Facebook followers. It can also be done by studying user data, such as the in depth Foursquare reports that detail use and demographic statistics among others. In turn, being able to analyze this feedback for insight into library or service usage enables librarians to become far more responsive to user needs. Ethnography, a research design that captures cultural habits, is becoming core for many libraries in their quest to design spaces and services that are based around users. Digital marketing tools that are used in an ethnographic manner can help build detailed pictures of user habits and ensure even basic decisions are user-driven. At the University of Colorado, Boulder (UCB), a series of polls about popular magazines helped librarians select new material for the Learning Commons. Equally, use statistics from Foursquare enabled librarians to make more informed judgements about opening hours.

Tools such as Twitter can also be used to find out what users are saying about a library or a service. At UCB, a proximity keyword search in Twitter for the library's name, or the word library used within a 15 mile radius of Boulder, caught many insightful comments about the library. These comments lead to greater insight into the problems users were experiencing with the library, for example a lack of outlets and study tables. It also lead to increased possibilities of interaction and relationship building within the community, for example by being able to reply to complaints and show patrons that the library was actively working to improve service.

### *c. Widen impact*

The third main advantage of digital marketing tools, is that by their very nature, they enable wide sharing among many different individuals and communities. This means that digital marketing can broaden the scope and impact of libraries among a much more disperse audience. One of the obvious examples is increased recognition and knowledge of small local or niche collections. By sharing local digitized collections on content curation tools such as Pinterest, for example, libraries can easily situate themselves as key hubs in certain areas of local history or genealogy, thereby helping to build more important relationships within their community. Libraries can also use these digital tools to tap into and take advantage of the wider network of interest on a topic. In 2008, for example, the Library of Congress allowed Flickr users to add tags and additional information to almost 5000 photos. Nearly 70,000 tags were added

(and only 25 were inappropriate) thereby greatly expanding the use and impact of their collections. (West, 2008)

Digital marketing can also help extend library services beyond traditional barriers, for example users who may not know about or use the physical library. This means digital marketing may introduce the concept of library services to new patrons or decrease library anxiety by repackaging traditional library content into a familiar environment, for example a Facebook page. (Dickson & Holley, 2010, 14) In this way, as the information landscape fragments even further, digital marketing enables librarians to bring the library to the user, even if they unaware of traditional library services offered. Digital marketing can also be used to join the physical and virtual library together. Many library communities will include people and groups that may only be active online, or that may not realise that the online library has a physical counterpart (and vice versa.) And, as Wisniewski points out, the separation between online and physical resources often leads to a lower quality user experience of the library. (2010, 55) For example, online help pages are rarely embedded at the point of need in the physical world. More poignantly, he argues that librarians spend a great deal of time, effort and money purchasing online resources such as databases, and that simple business sense indicates that librarians should maximise these expenditures in the physical world too. (Wisniewski, 2010, 55) Digital marketing can help bridge these worlds. Foursquare and other location tools (as well as other ideas such as QR codes) provides a good example of patrons using online games to find what the library has to offer physically as well as virtually.

Lastly, as more and more communities are creating knowledge uniquely or predominantly online, social media is playing a bigger role than ever in non-traditional spaces such as digital scholarship, or embedded librarianship. As the academic world starts to use Twitter, for example, for networking and information sharing practices, digital marketing provides a way for libraries to establish themselves as a hub or contact in the online network, thus ensuring that librarian expertise is still accessible even as scholarship starts moving from individual offices to collaborative online networks. Ellen Hampton Filgo provides a good example of this in practice when she embedded herself in a class twitter account, serving as a resource throughout the semester. (Young, 2011)

#### *d. Professional development*

Finally, digital marketing, especially using social media tools, is useful for librarian professional development. Librarians who use tools for outreach will also be improving

their own personal learning, networking and information sharing habits. The information world moves very quickly and familiarity with these tools is important to ensure that librarians remain connected and anticipate change. Furthermore, as social media plays an increasingly important role in digital scholarship, online engagement will be key for academic librarians. In this way, both the library and the library staff can benefit from increased familiarity with tools and the information environment.

## **V. Issues**

Despite the benefits, digital marketing is not without its issues or problems. These can be summed up as problems with authority, questions about the value of digital marketing, copyright and information storage.

### *a. Authority*

One of the biggest challenges to digital marketing may be overcoming internal or wider resistance to establishing a digital presence. Inside the library, staff may not see the benefits of social media, or be wary of “pandering” to non-traditional library use, especially as other demands on librarian time grow. Equally, managers and the IT department may not be keen to relinquish control of social media around the library, or may insist on rigid rules or limits. Marketing librarians may feel threatened by the need to give other members of the organization a voice. Outside the library, the university may have strict rules designed to protect the image of the college, especially in today’s brand-conscious environment.

While digital marketing can be affected by trolling or malicious online behaviour, and could leave the library open to attack or criticism, libraries with appropriate social media policies are well placed to deal maturely with any problems that may arise. Librarians have represented the library at the research desk for decades and should be trusted to make judgements for social media too. While staff should be aware of potential pitfalls, and the need for appropriate tone and actions, these potential problems should not be allowed to stop experimentation. The UCB Twitter account was initially established as a pilot, but after six months, a report detailing feedback and evidence of interactions more than demonstrated the importance of the account. UCB also participates in the campus wide social media group to ensure that the library accounts meet existing rules and to ensure that librarians can help craft appropriate new regulations.

### *b. Value*

For many, the value or “return-on-investment” of social media and digital outreach remains questionable, both in terms of mission creep and rates of usage, as well as the cost of staff time and library resources. Firstly, as library budgets decrease, social media marketing can be seen to sap a lot of valuable staff time. Even though tools are mostly free or have a very low cost, social media marketing must be proactive; responding to users must be timely, and both posting and monitoring for feedback needs daily attention. Libraries must also keep up to date with changes in the field, including checking for changes within tools (eg new privacy settings) or new tools completely. It also takes time and planning to keep track of where everything is posted and ensure that the library’s message remains consistent yet personalised across many different types of tools. Secondly, usage of social media may be low, or may be used primarily by users who are not members of the library’s community. For example, Abby Bedford estimated that on average, 48% of library Twitter followers are not affiliated with the primary library community. (2012) It may seem that a lot of effort is being expended in return for very little visible change, for example increased visits to the library. In addition, assessment information about digital marketing is often anecdotal or vague, and there has been little statistical analysis of effectiveness. (Dickson & Holley, 2012, 11) Lastly, for many librarians, digital media may seem superfluous to the library’s mission, taking time and energy away from traditional or more important library duties.

To meet these challenges, it is important that libraries assess their community needs and consider the purpose of their digital marketing before signing up for accounts. For a start, certain tools may not be right for every community; in a tightly knit community, for example, there may be less dependence on general social media tools. Adequate initial assessment can help ensure that staff time is not wasted. When UCB first started investigating location tools, the library opened accounts with Foursquare, Gowalla, Facebook Places and Google Places (some of which are now defunct). Careful examination revealed that Foursquare was by far the most popular, which led to a focus on that service. Similarly, it is important that digital marketing is assessed as part of the library’s wider marketing strategy rather than on its own.

Lastly, a structure to support social media implementation will help ease many of these problems. For Troy Swanson, this is not a social media plan, which implies a rigidity that will not work in the organic, evolving social media landscape. (Swanson, 2012b) Instead, Swanson encourages libraries to create a safe environment where library staff can experiment with social media, as well as setting out basic policies,

workflows, guidelines, and best practices to encourage participation. Making social media an integral part of a staff member's job will help promote the value of this work. Participation from many voices in the library will help spread the workload, while allowing a variety of staff to experience how useful digital marketing can be. Planning will also help streamline the day to day processes, thereby saving time and energy. For example, at UCB, a thematic calendar is established each semester to make posting easier for the six librarians who staff the service. In addition, two librarians gather and collate feedback in a shared Google Doc for distribution to managers each semester. It is, however, important to strike a balance. While planning is key to overcome some objections, librarians should not overplan until they become paralysed by indecision or too many rules.

### *c. Copyright*

Copyright is a key consideration when using new online tools. Pinterest, especially, has been accused of not respecting copyright laws by linking to images without providing citation details. While measures have been put in place to try and enable more ethical use of online images (Dudenhoffer, 2012), it is important that staff are aware of basic image copyright and that all images that are re-pinned from the library's account are cited with a link back to the original image. In addition, it is important that the library makes clear what the copyright terms are for any images that the library makes available.

### *d. Information storage*

A final potential issue is that new information collected, for example, through tags or user comments on Historypin, or even interactions on Twitter or Facebook, is not easily captured or archived. As such, the information remains isolated and "separate from the formal systems supporting the organization's collection." (Burford, 2012, 232) Similarly, it may be hard to extract data from programs if the library decides to switch platforms. Many of these problems remain insoluble. However, libraries should read Terms of Conditions carefully and endeavour to choose software that makes clear reference to ownership and moving of data. If librarians think valuable data could be gathered on a specific project or topic then initial planning should establish norms and procedures for archiving.

## **VI. Impact**

Having studied the gains and the issues involved with digital marketing, what is the

impact on library users, on staff and on library services as a whole? This section will examine the effects of digital marketing on these groups or areas.

#### *a. Users*

Digital marketing is a field in flux, and as such, the impact on users is hard to gauge. Many early digital marketing studies were sceptical of library participation in social media, for example, worrying that librarians could be seen as imposing their academic authority into a student's personal online space. (Dickson & Holley, 2010, 11) The phrase "creepy treehouse" was even coined to describe this problem. (Feldstein, 2008) Even now, librarians still worry about the fine line between outreach and privacy; for example, if a student that the library does not follow mentions the library on Twitter is it appropriate to respond? As social media becomes more prevalent though, users have become more accepting of companies and professors using social media for marketing and educational purposes. In addition, most social media tools are public by default, meaning that users should be prepared for interventions. As long as the library's tone is professional and respectful, then it should not be too problematic. In fact, many people have praised the way that the UCB Libraries Twitter account has picked up on and responded to comments about the library.

#### *b Staff*

The impact of digital media on staff will likely be fairly high. Social media is timely and needs a proactive approach. As such, staff need to have time to be able to participate. Staff training may also be needed, depending on existing levels of comfort. In addition, marketing can no longer be considered one person or department's job. Everyone must be prepared to speak for the library, as it is the wide mix of voices that helps the library sound human and connect with more users. While an outreach or marketing coordinator may be needed to coordinate passwords, schedules, marketing materials, poll prizes and more, it is clear that outreach needs to be embedded in every librarian's job, which again, may take time or training. Subject specialists have a key role to play here, as the example of Ellen Hampton Filgo shows. Opportunities may exist for subject specialists to become even further embedded in their departments and communities of practice via social media and digital marketing. As such, additional conversations about the key goals and mission of the library may be needed as staff have to choose how to focus their time and energy. Lastly, the increased focus on local collections may require extra staffing or development of

digitization and preservation efforts.

### *c. Services*

Depending on the community needs and the number of the digital marketing strategies that a library decides to implement, the impact on services may vary. In some scenarios, digital marketing may enable the library to play a role in a completely new arena, for example digital scholarship, thereby expanding library service considerably. Digital marketing may also affect how librarians approach existing services, for example recognising the importance of incorporating assessment and feedback into the provision of service. As such, digital marketing may help libraries move towards more user-driven and user centred services, or understand the importance of ceding control to the community. The need to move quickly within the fluctuating social media environment may also contribute to creating more of a “beta” attitude, where librarians are free to experiment with new ideas quickly and in a low-stakes situation without having to overplan.

Lastly, and perhaps slightly unexpectedly, digital marketing may enable greater clarity and focus on local or physical collections and services. As more general research moves online and digital marketing ensures the library plays a greater role in collaborative online scholarship networks, the role of the physical library can be more consistently defined as a hub for activities that are not always possible online, such as studying, face to face meetings, events or technical support; a makerspace. (Hamilton 2012) As such, the physical library becomes more of a destination, the centre of face to face support and collaborative activity that complements the online library, just like in the successful Apple stores. (Johnson, 2011) Digital marketing that establishes the library’s role in the online research world, as well as location based tools or QR codes that join the physical and virtual will help develop the different roles of the online and physical libraries as well as ensuring greater connection between the two, thereby creating a more useful and enriching research experience.

## **VII. Conclusion**

In conclusion, digital marketing is dynamic and essential for libraries today. As research communities migrate online, digital marketing will help a library establish a presence in these new spaces, while also widening the impact of librarian expertise and service. Digital marketing is also essential as the library redevelops physical services to meet changing research needs, and as a tool to gather feedback and assessment data during the process. While there are many stumbling blocks, both to

the establishment and maintenance of digital marketing, adequate planning should minimise the impact on overstretched library services. This is not to say that planning can anticipate every potential issue. In fact, the biggest challenge for librarians and libraries may be recognising that “disruption is a feature, not a bug.” (Naughton, 2012)

Libraries are key in today’s information landscape. By reexamining traditional practice within technological, societal and cultural shifts, it is evident that librarian critical expertise remains essential- and that digital marketing can help establish this role. These changes do not mean that libraries should forget their past though. For instance, even though librarians may borrow and adapt ideas from the corporate world of social media, it is vital that this is not at the expense of the library’s core social values. (Elmborg, 2010) In sum, forming part of the wider movement towards participatory librarianship that is centred around digital scholarship, user experience and ethnographic study, there is an “expanding universe” of opportunity for librarians today. (Gavia Libraria, 2012) In the case of digital marketing, this is the chance to use dynamic outreach opportunities to integrate core values into the changing information landscape. Let the conversation begin!

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## **Appendix: Planning**

Before any library undertakes digital marketing and outreach, it is important that appropriate planning is undertaken to guide implementation and maintenance of a service. The following questions may help guide this planning. Also see Swanson, 2012.

**Study Community:** What tools are already being used in your community? What are people doing online? Are there other salient characteristics, for example a high or low number of internet-enabled phones or devices? How could librarians or libraries help? What is missing from current online communities?

**Establish goals:** What does the service hope to achieve? In what timeframe? How will you know whether it is successful?

**Choose tools:** Which tools will you use? Who will keep the passwords? What do you need to get authorised as the "owner" or manager of a location or account name? Are there any wider university guidelines that are applicable for the library? How will you set up the "about us" page, including images, logos, brand? Will you push content from one central place? Or do you also need to set up other management tools such as Hootsuite or Tweetdeck? What about programmes to schedule tweets in advance, eg Twuffer? Which program will you use to shorten URLs? How will you maintain consistency across platforms?

**Staffing:** Who will post to the account? Will you do this all year or just during semester? What about holiday cover? What training does staff need? What about continuity if people leave or their jobs change? How will you encourage a wide range of people to post? How will you get dissenters on board?

**Posting:** Any guidelines for tone or type of material to be posted? How frequently will you post? Will you make a topical calendar or allocate people days of the week? Can you schedule certain tweets in advance?

**Community:** What is your policy on followers/friends?

**Dealing with feedback:** Who will monitor for feedback? Who will answer comments and suggestions? What will you do with this information? What search words could you set up to catch mentions of your library?

**Assessment:** How and when will you assess the service? What qualitative and quantitative data can you gather and how will you do this? What information do you need? What qualifies as success?

**Funding:** What prizes do you want for mayors, polls, surveys?

**Promotion:** How will this be integrated onto your webpage? (Share this button, embedded feed, promotion of activity) Will you promote around the library? Around

the university? In classes, posters, newspaper?