Academic Library and Information Services: Communicating your brand and Marketing your services strategically.

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University of Sheffield

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About me

- University teacher – MA Librarianship, MA Library and Information Services Management
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- Director of Library Services – Goldsmiths, University of London
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- Editor-in-Chief – New Review of Academic Libraries

Outline

- Brand and Branding
- Strategies, Plans and Campaigns
- Marketing Library and Information Services Well

Marketing Libraries – the issue

- We spend 99% of our time assembling collections and developing services and facilities and only 1% of our time telling people about them

- Too much of our marketing focuses onthree groups, all of which are low value (in marketing terms):
  - The superfans
  - The actively hostile
  - Other librarians

- A lot of library marketing lacks focus, and sufficient ambition

(Ned Potter, 2024)

Marketing definitions

- “The process or technique of promoting, selling or distributing a product or service” (Merriam-Webster, 2019)
- The science and art of exploring, creating and delivering value to satisfy the needs of a target market at a profit.” (Kotler, 2012)
- “Marketing goes beyond trying to get people to use your library. It is a concerted effort to articulate your value.” (Dowd, 2010)
- “Selling focuses on the needs of the seller….. Marketing on the needs of the buyer” (Levitt, 1960)

Or in other words….

“Telling the right people at the right time in the right way about what we have that they need”

(Leo Appleton, 2025)

To be clear….

Marketing isn't:

- Just logos
- Just promotion
- Just advertising
- Posters on wall
- Posting to Instagram
- A press release

Marketing is…..

- Marketing **is** *“an ongoing conversation with your target audience, which combines promotion, publicity, PR and advertising in an ongoing, strategic way.”* (Potter, 2012, p.xiv)

- *“To put it simply, marketing is the act of letting others know what you do and why it should matter to them.”* (Velasquez, 2019, p.119)

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Brand and Branding

And then there’s library brand and branding

- What is the difference between a library brand and library branding?
- Your **brand** is the perception of institution, and its products and services, in people’s minds. It’s how people think and feel about who you are as an organisation, and what you do.
- **Branding** is the process of trying to influence people's perceptions of the organisation and way they think about your brand.
- Your brand is what people say about you when you’re not in the room
- You can never **control** the brand

What is it that these logos say to you?

Brand and Branding

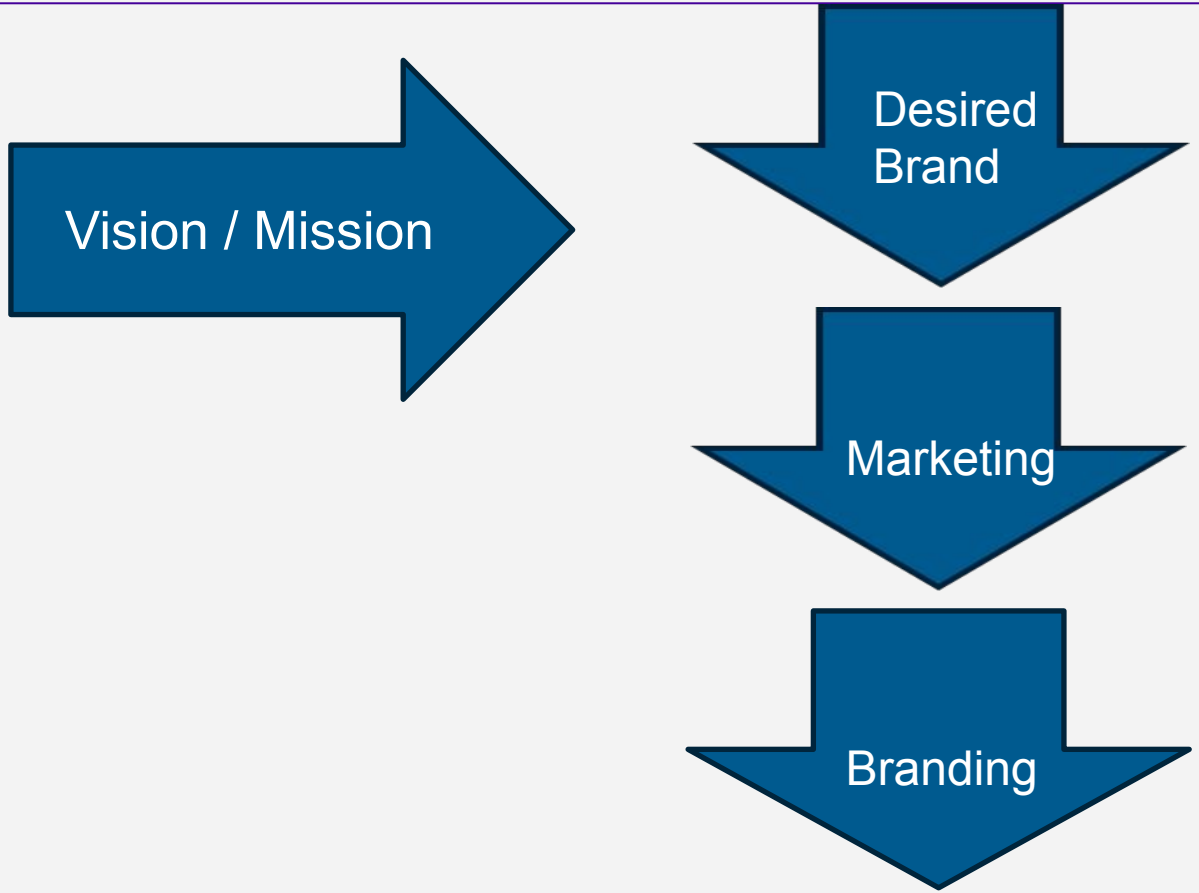
Your **brand** is the perception of the organisation and its products and services, in people's minds. It is how people think and feel about who your are as an organisation, and what you do.

Branding is the process of trying to influence people's perceptions of the organisation and the way they think about your brand.

What do you want your library users to think about you?

- Helpful
- Useful
- Accessible
- Organised
- Friendly
- Trustworthy
- Welcoming
- Professional
- Exciting
- Innovative
- Creative

So what is marketing?



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Strategies, Plans and Campaigns

Strategies and Plans

- Once we decide what we want to be (i.e. our brand…. Which remember we cannot really control)…. How do we communicate this to our audience? How do we establish those distinct patterns of association?
- **Through Strategic Marketing!**

Marketing Strategy vs Marketing Plans

- The **Marketing Strategy** is the umbrella – it sets out where you want to go overall
- The **Marketing Plan** consists of the steps that help you get there (**Marketing Cycle**)
- The **Marketing Campaign** is a short-term focus on a specific goal (of the strategy)

The Marketing Cycle

Figure 2.1 *The marketing cycle*

Marketing strategy

"The goal of the marketing strategy is to ensure each part of the cycle is planned properly, and addressed properly. It's about coming up with a plan that knits together all your activities, links them to wider strategic goals, allows you to analyse what works and what doesn't and improve things on an ongoing basis." (Potter, 2012, p.11)

1) Mission and goals
2) Market analysis
3) Target audience
4) Brand and key messages
5) Tactics, campaigns and timelines
6) Evaluation and measurement

Research your market

- Having decided your goals, or which of your strategic marketing goals you are setting out to achieve you then need to do some market research….

- “The way a library ascertains its market is through undertaking *market research* to gauge exactly how the client base of the library sees the service, and what their awareness of the services offered are.” (Chowdhury, 2008, p.269)

- “A big difference between this type of investigation and other types of library research is that assessment questions center around the user instead of the library.” (Harrow and Hill, 2020)

Segmentation

- It is about creating different offers for different groups of library users and would-be users.
- One way is to begin with users and non-users and then further delineate who in which category through further sub-categories.
- At the end of the process of segmentation, the aim should be to have several distinct groups to which you'll market the library.

How might you segment library users within:

- An academic library
- A public library
- A secondary school library?
    - Demographics? Behaviours?

Campaigns

A campaign (the bit that everyone thins about when they think about marketing) is a focused short-term co-ordinated piece f marketing designed to achieve a specific goal

The purpose is usually to boost awareness or use of a particular aspect of the library service (you wouldn’t try to have a campaign [promoting the entire library)

Duration usually 2 – 6 weeks

CAPE Method of planning campaigns

CONTEXT
1) How does this campaign relate to the wider strategy?
2) What do we already know about our users, what can we find out?
3) What are our capabilities and resources?

AIMS
1) What do we want to achieve?
2) What are the specific objectives?
3) Which segments is this campaign aimed at?

PROMOTION
1) What are the key messages?
2) What are the platforms?
3) Who is doing what, when, and for how long?

EVALUATION
1) What are the outputs?
2) What are the outcomes?
3) What will we do differently next time?

CAMPAIGN EXAMPLE 1

Lancashire County Council

Aim: Increase footfall
Budget: £100

Theme: Escape, Explore, Discover.
Slogan: You are what you read

Duration: 1 month leading up to National Libraries Day
Tools: Twitter, In-Library Activities ("50 Things to do in the library" – note the strong call to action), Pinterest, website

RESULT: 32% INCREASE IN LIBRARY MEMBERSHIP

CAMPAIGN EXAMPLE 2

Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library

Aim: Increase foot traffic and online use

Theme: Edgy and provocative
Slogan: None

Duration: Long-term
Tools: Billboards, postcards, bookmarks, Facebook, but most of all Word of Mouth


Spoiler Alert!
Dumbledore dies on page 596.
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HALSEY
Super 8
Rooms at
$49.99 & UP
plus tax
Caraway Exit
EconoLodge
Rooms at
$44.95
Caraway Exit, Right on Phillips
HALSEY

We're stacked.

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Cheap date?...You get dinner, we've got the movie.

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Spoiler Alert!
Dumbledore dies on page 596.

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Romance novels –
cheaper than cats.

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Concerts on the Lawn, because what else are you doing on a Tuesday night.

Tuesday nights in June at 6:30 p.m.
Sponsored by Andy's Frozen Custard
www.libraryinjonesboro.org

Concerts on the Lawn... It's the closest you'll ever get to being a groupie.

Tuesday nights in June at **6:30 p.m.**
Sponsored by Andy's Frozen Custard
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Concerts on the Lawn, because the chairs kept falling off the roof.

Tuesday nights in June at **6:30 p.m.**
Sponsored by Andy's Frozen Custard
www.libraryinjonesboro.org

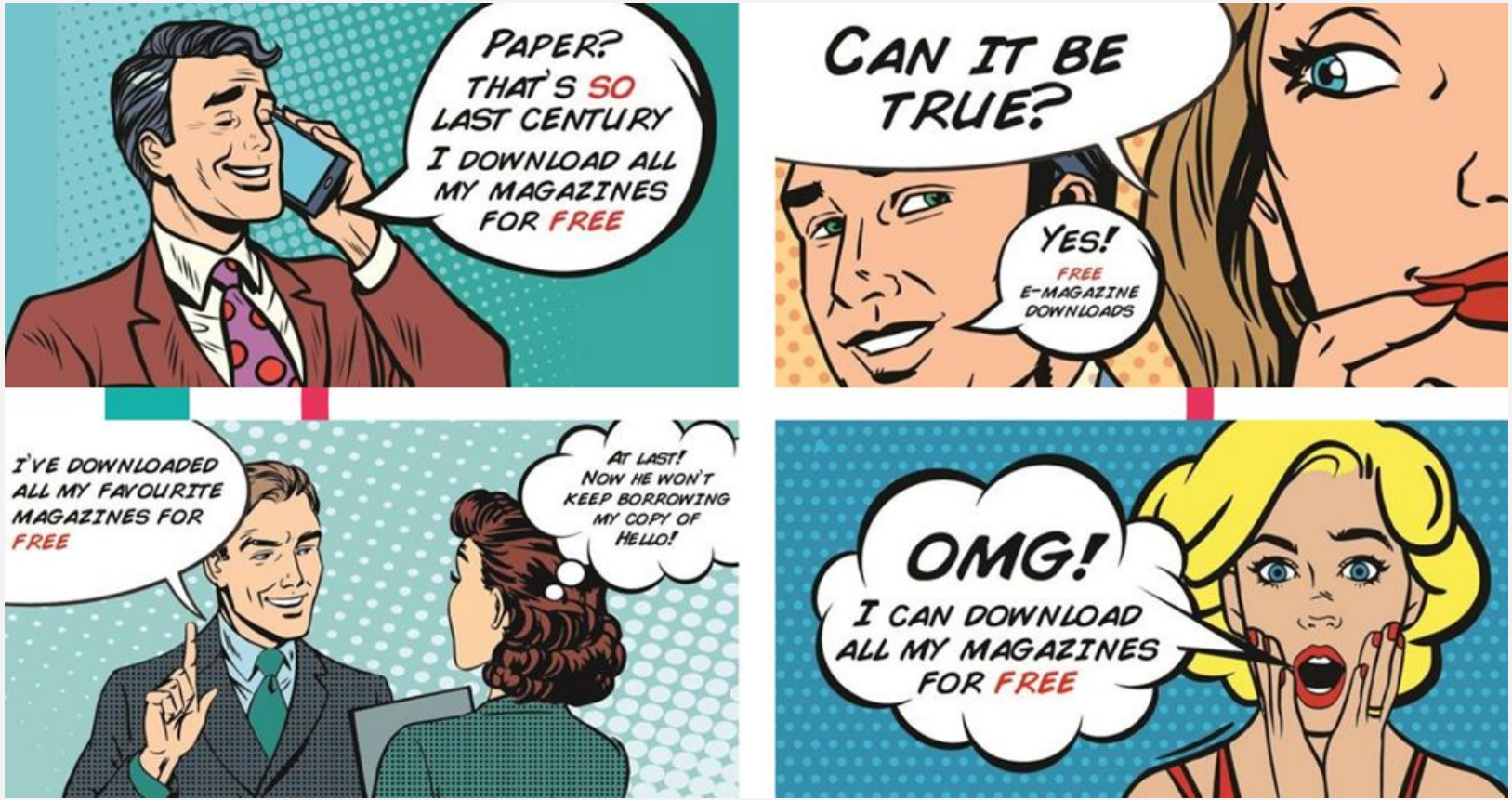
CAMPAIGN EXAMPLE 2

Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library

RESULTS:

- 40% increase in library cards issued
- 50% increase in children's summer reading registrations
- Doubled concert attendance
- Doubled foot traffic to the library
- 110% more website traffic
- 150% increase in Overdrive checkouts

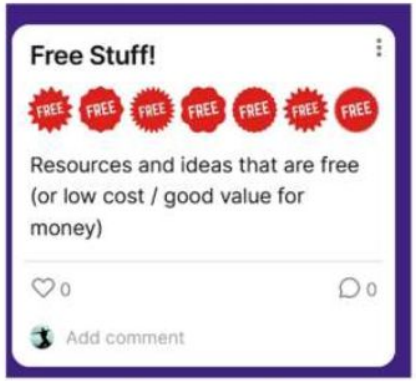
Campaign Example 3



CAMPAIGN EXAMPLE 4

UNIVERSITY of York

UoYLibrary

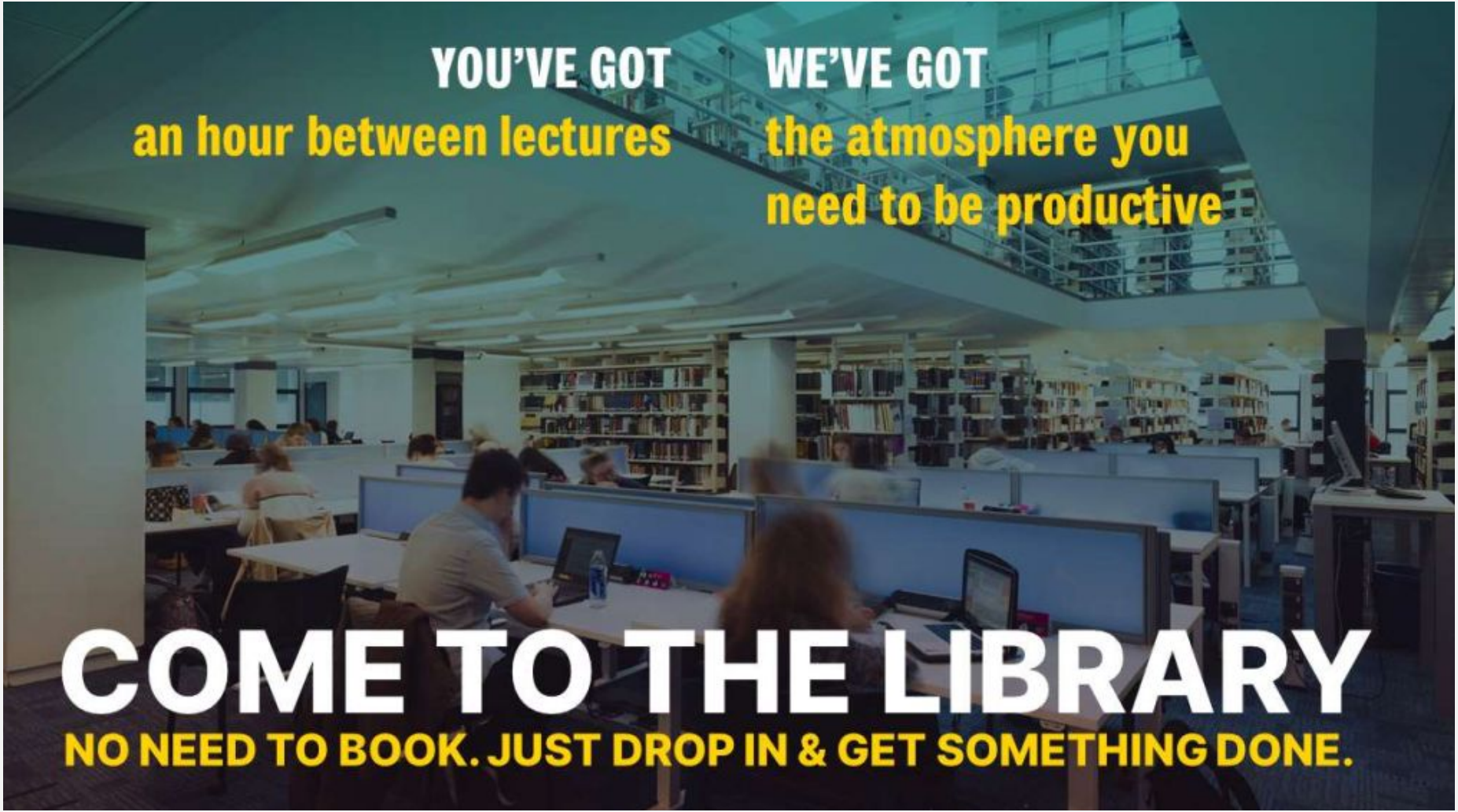


Aim: Increase in-building use of the library
Budget: None

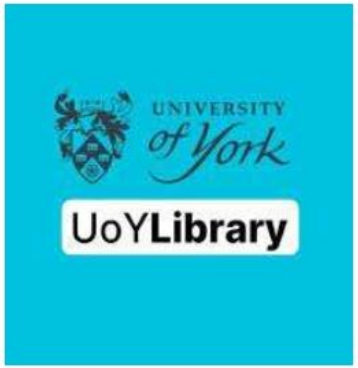
Theme: Working better in the library
Slogan: Feel scholarly

Duration: 6 weeks in the Spring Term
Tools: Digital Screens (both in the library and around campus), Twitter / X, Website, Instagram, Catalogue banners, SU

Target: We aimed for an approx. 10% increase on our previous year's Spring Term 2021/22 figures of 109,712 visits


YOU'VE GOT
an hour between lectures
WE'VE GOT
the atmosphere you need to be productive
COME TO THE LIBRARY
NO NEED TO BOOK. JUST DROP IN & GET SOMETHING DONE.

CAMPAIGN EXAMPLE 4



Aim: Increase in-building use of the library
Budget: None

Theme: Working better in the library
Slogan: Feel scholarly

Duration: 6 weeks in the Spring Term
Tools: Digital Screens (both in the library and around campus), Twitter / X, Website, Instagram, catalogue banners, SU

Target: We aimed for an approx. 9% increase on our previous year's Spring Term 2021/22 figures of 109,712 visits

RESULT: 179,933 VISITS

– A 60% INCREASE ON THE PREVIOUS YEAR.

SOME THINGS ALL THESE CAMPAIGNS HAD IN COMMON

1. Specific aims, which could be measured
2. A theme which provided their focus
3. Framing around the benefits of the Library, not the features
4. A specific period of time for the campaign
5. The same messages tailored across several different platforms, so people would see them more than once

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Marketing Library and Information Services Well

Four tips for marketing libraries well

1) Keep it simple
2) Segment and tailor
3) Frame the message
4) Market in campaigns

Underpinning concept: we are trying to convince our users (or potential users) to potentially change their behaviour or do something that they hadn't planned to do. Ask yourself what would it take to have this effect on you yourself!

Keep it simple – We have all this stuff!!!

Facilities

- Learning spaces
- Bookable rooms
- Social learning spaces
- Wellbeing / sensory room
- Access / opening hours

Collections

- E-books, e-journals, databases
- Special collections
- Archives
- Online newspapers
- Institutional records
- Local history

Support

- Academic skills sessions
- Information literacy
- Digital literacy
- Wellbeing support
- Clubs and social events
- Performances and events

Keep it simple

- The library offer is complex (facilities, spaces, resources, support, digital, etc.), but your communications around this cannot afford to be!
- The key to successful library marketing is to market just one thing at a time
- The message has to be clear enough (and simple enough) to catch your users' attention
- Some questions to ask yourself:
  - Do we actually need to send this message at all?
  - Can we get rid of anything extraneous?
  - Can we make the language easier to understand?
  - Does the message need to be cascaded?

Keep it simple – We have all this stuff!!!

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Keep it simple!

Collections

- E-books, e-journals, databases

Keep it simple!

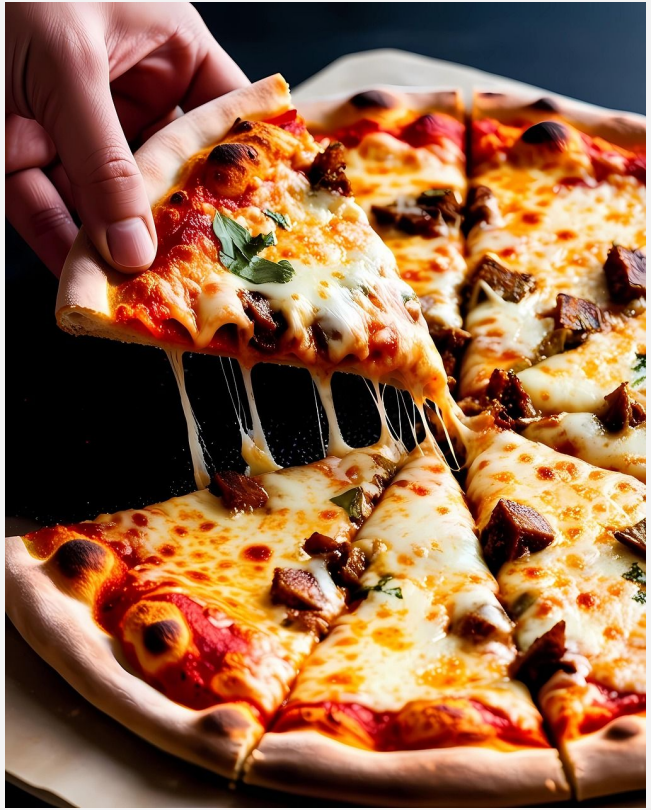
Segment and tailor

- Tailoring is essential to successful marketing. People need to know that you are speaking to them and we achieve this through segmentation.
- Segmentation is dividing your audience into smaller groups based on shared characteristics (this can be based on demographics, where they live, their role within the organisation, how they use the library, etc.)

https://pixabay.com/vectors/orange-fruit-food-sliced-juicy-42395/

Segments

- When you have your segments you can tailor the messages that you deliver to those segments so that they each get a different version of the same thing that feels personal to them
- Or you can create specific messages just for one or two of your segments



https://pixabay.com/illustrations/ai-generated-pizza-cheese-slice-8943359/

Examples

Browsers

Focused users

Digital users

Example – Natural History Museum

- Cultured Pleasure Seekers
- Learned Liberals
- Family Focused
- Older Outdoors
- Theme Park Purists
- TV Junkies

“While segments that have children will remain core to the museum –and we will continue to concentrate programming and communications towards these audiences –Cultured Pleasure Seekers and Learned Liberals without children offer the greatest opportunity for growth and we have developed a number of activities specifically towards these markets.”

(Sharon Ament, Director of Public Engagement, NHM)

Frame the message

- Focus on benefits not features
- If we only focus on features, no matter how good they are, there is a danger of it becoming ‘white noise’ and you might just ‘blend in’
- You don’t want to blend in!
- Use a strong ‘call to action’

A good call to action is

Simple

Exciting

But most of all

SPECIFIC

"Get the article you need in under 24 hours. Put in an interlending request at **library.com/interlending**"

Benefits not features

Market the service, not the product; market the benefits, not the features

- Market the services libraries offer, not just the content libraries have
- For example - don't just promote digital resources, promote the support we offer to use these resources and develop digital skills

Market what the impact is going to be, rather than what the library does

Moving from (feature):		To (benefit):
"We subscribe to 30 databases which you can access via the library catalogue"		"We provide you with information that Google cannot find"
Course title: "Developing Information Literacy"		Course title: "Finding high-quality credible information online, quickly and easily"

Timing matters

- The strength of the call to action also depends on the timing of the marketing:
- Time of day matters
- The timing of your other messages matters
- Marketing because you have something to say that your audience needs to hear, rather than because ‘it’s time to send out the newsletter’ matters

- Timing is all about empathy (knowing your segment)

Tips for framing your message

- Use an honest voice
- Use your personality (or your library's personality)
- Use humour (if appropriate – although difficult to achieve)
- Be unexpected (subvert people's expectation of what the library is, or how it communicates)
- Make people feel like insiders
- Focus on benefits rather than features
- Focus on feelings rather than function

Summary

- Brand and Branding
- Strategies, Plans and Campaigns
- Marketing Library and Information Services Well:

1) Keep it simple
2) Segment and tailor
3) Frame the message
4) Market in campaigns

References

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