
Bite-sized marketing: realistic solutions for the overworked librarian

by Nancy Dowd, Mary Evangeliste and Jonathan Silberman, London: Facet Publishing, 2010 (ISBN 978-1-85604-704-3; £32.95 (£26.36 to CILIP members))

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First appearances: this is a beautiful little book, with a waxy exterior, drawings of chocolates on the cover and lettering that is drawn and roughly shaded in to make it look like a mock-up or plan of a book cover. Nice – and certainly not your average librarianship textbook.

The next thing you notice is the title and sub-title. ‘Bite-sized marketing’ is pretty accurate. This is a small book of 140 pages, with mostly double-spaced text; big text on some pages; big, clear chapter dividers; and grey boxes with case studies, examples of good practice and quotations. In short, it is an easy read. ‘Realistic solutions for the overworked librarian’ is also encouraging. There are lots of practical tips that are easy to dip into for us overworked library and information science professionals. I’d even go so far as to say that anyone interested in marketing services – not necessarily LIS services – would find some useful nuggets here.

It is also contemporary, with sections on word-of-mouth marketing (set in the context of our populist, anti-authoritarian age (p 4)), guerrilla techniques and lots on web 2.0 tools. Although this may reduce the effective shelf-life of the work (chapter 7, with its descriptions of current technologies, is likely to date quickly) it does also contain enough information on more traditional

approaches (for example, print media and physical outreach) for this to be less of a worry.

This book is written by experienced marketers. Two are from a library background, the other has a foundation in design. All three are from the USA, and the lead author is director of marketing for the New Jersey State Library. This does (obviously) influence the tone and content of the work. There are lots of American concepts (‘public relations 101’, ‘public service announcements’) and the focus is largely on public libraries, with lots of references to marketing to ‘teens’ or ‘YAs’ – ‘young adults’. It is very clear that one of the authors is a designer ... or ‘your new best friend’ as the book puts it (p 111). There is a lot of detail about design rules, with technical notes on pixels per inch, vector images and printer bleed (pp 115–17) – probably more information than most librarians will need (e.g. ‘the amount of bleed is usually an eighth of an inch’ (p 117)).

I would argue it is written for those who already have some experience of marketing. It is not an introduction to marketing. It is not a thorough overview with a solid foundation in marketing theory. (For the librarian looking for that I would recommend Facet’s other books *Developing strategic marketing plans that really work*¹ and *Marketing concepts for libraries and information services*,² both advertised on the back cover.) Terms are mentioned without definition: the ‘marketing mix’ appears on page 80 with no explanation and when it is explained on page 88 with reference to the ‘4 Ps’, ‘4 Cs’ and ‘extended Ps’ (curiously, bringing us up to 6 rather than the usual 7) it is clear that some pre-knowledge is expected.

The book covers a wide range of marketing ideas. The contents include:

- word-of-mouth marketing
- bring your library to life with a story
- how to market electronic resources
- public relations 101
- outreach
- advocacy
- the new marketing tools
- design
- branding
- marketing best practices.

A strength of the book – providing bite-sized chunks – can also be its weakness. The ‘greatest hits’ approach to marketing sometimes means the book lacks coherence. Some of the chapters are quite substantial – 30 pages, sensibly, on the

host of web 2.0 tools available – but others are a bit thin. I know it is a particular interest of mine, but I think anyone would be disappointed to get only two pages on branding (when we have 23 on word-of-mouth marketing). As a result the advice can sometimes seem a bit misleading. Brand is not discussed in terms of personality but of appearance. We are offered ‘baby steps to branding’ (p 123) which include:

- 1 ‘Choose two fonts (one serif and one sans-serif) that you can use in all publications’ – Why? Why mix serif and sans-serif?
- 2 ‘Pick three colours and use them exclusively in all publications’ – Colour is very important in branding but why three colours? And which colours give which messages?

The chapter on advocacy races into web 2.0 tools without addressing what advocacy – one of the big issues for libraries today – is really all about. It is also only four pages long (pp 74–7). This compares with five pages on developing your microphone technique (pp 100–4).

Even the substantial chapters can feel a bit scattergun in their approach. The chapter on word-of-mouth marketing contains lots of ideas, but I would have liked a walk-through of how it really works after all the tips.

It would also have been nice to have more examples. From my experience, marketing librarians like to see lots of case studies of how others have done things. The discussion of attention-grabbing press releases (chapter 4) lacks examples of good practice and, after the provision of guidelines on attention-grabbing stands (chapter 5), it would have been good to see a few pictures.

By the time we get to chapter 10, ‘Marketing best practice’, it feels like the ‘greatest hits’ are on random play, so we get (in this order):

- repositioning [half a page]
- getting to know your audience [one page]
- be aware of marketing and design everywhere [quarter of a page]
- assessment [a page and a half]
- corporate sponsorship [ditto]
- internal marketing [3 pages]
- internal marketing ideas [a page and a half]
- succession planning [one page].

I must admit this felt like a chapter intended merely to capture (sometimes too briefly) all the ideas that didn’t fit anywhere else in the book.

Having said this, there is much to recommend about this book – and that (again!) is mostly the bite-sized chunks of advice. There really is a lot of practical advice, which is really what most of us want. There are pages and pages of useful ideas that I won’t attempt to describe here (especially when the book is such an easy read!).

So what are the best bite-sized chunks for me?

The tastiest morsels I found are:

- how to develop a ‘toolbox’ to help you get your message out there (p 13)
- the importance of a ‘good story’ for marketing and advocacy (p 26)
- how to construct effective stories (pp 27–30)
- the use of postcard testimonials (p 31)
- the need to develop story banks (pp 32–4)
- how to create ‘benefit statements’ (p 39)
- good practical tips on creating news releases (pp 48–58)
- how to get an effective return on freebies and not give away expensive marketing materials without getting a ‘conversation’ in return (pp 66–7)
- a reminder not to sit *behind* tables on outreach stands (a small personal bugbear) (p 68)
- a useful checklist on cheap (pp 69–70) and successful outreach (p 71)
- how to develop a casual – but not too casual – blog voice (p 86)
- useful thoughts on creating ‘funny’ videos (p 95)
- ideas for cheap and effective design (or – at least – pointers to inspiration) (p 110)
- alternatives to clip art (a huge personal bugbear!) (p 114)
- the role of a Brand Czar (p 122)
- a suggestion that you should show all your marketing materials on a display for staff ... to highlight inconsistencies in branding (p 123)
- the idea that every advert you see should add to your education as a marketer (pp 126–7).

As I said, this is not really a book for the novice marketing librarian, as a certain level of knowledge is expected. A very experienced library marketer will find that much of this is revision but will benefit from new ideas (especially relating to web 2.0 applications) and fresh perspectives. Perhaps the real audience, though, is the librarian who has got his or her teeth into the basics, has had a good feed on marketing theory and practice and now wants something more. As the cover

suggests, it is not a five-course meal but a box of chocolates such readers will enjoy dipping into.

REFERENCES

- 1 Terry Kendrick, *Developing strategic marketing plans that really work: a toolkit for public libraries*, London: Facet Publishing, 2006
- 2 Eileen Elliott de Saez, *Marketing concepts for libraries and information services* (2nd edn), London: Facet Publishing, 2002