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Communicating the Library's Value



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INTRODUCTION

Throughout 2016 Taylor & Francis has been gathering information on how librarians communicate the value of their library, engage with faculty, and promote their collections. We've held focus groups, conducted telephone interviews, surveyed librarians, and hosted events to learn more about what works, what doesn't and how we could share some of those insights.

Through our research we found out what's being done, what creative solutions can look like and how some librarians are cleverly re-working resources they already have at their disposal. Library resources are the key to new academic discoveries, new theories and ground-breaking research, and there are ways that publishers and librarians can work together to make sure that the library is able to provide as much value as possible to the important work of its patrons.

This Taylor & Francis White Paper explores the innovative ways that libraries are communicating their value to a range of stakeholders. The tactics we'll explore include key elements of digital marketing, engaging with faculty, hosting successful events and making the time for these activities by adopting lean practices. With concrete, low cost examples that librarians can implement in their own institutions, this paper introduces a shifted perspective on the value of the library that goes beyond marketing new content. We've included stories from librarians who are keeping their libraries relevant by coming up with inventive ways to appeal to students, getting creative in the ways they communicate with key members of faculty, and being tenacious when it comes to establishing and continuing new projects.

One thing successful libraries had in common was an updated view of the patron as a customer. Customers have choices and the library should position itself to be the first choice for students and faculty alike. Libraries have a unique, cross faculty perspective, one that puts them in a perfect position to see and understand what happens within an institution. They also manage key external relationships and are deeply involved in the conversation about developments in scholarly communication. Librarians are in a position to make a meaningful impact within their institutions, especially as they consider the importance of their responsibilities within the context of wider institutional goals.

■ NURTURING CONNECTIONS

The power of real world relationships



There are a lot of technological challenges that librarians and publishers alike are working through including metadata, usage tracking and discoverability. These are important, but rather than looking at these larger issues, our research and this paper set out to explore what can be done with the tools librarians already have, and to find out the interesting and different ways that librarians are able to make an impact even with the limitations they may face.

Many common digital tools and tactics have become deeply entrenched within regular library communication practices – and are a crucial part of the library’s survival. But not surprisingly, many of the most interesting and effective success stories in our research came not from digital communication, but through human interaction.

Through connecting, conversing and collaborating with faculty members, and involving them as key constituents, librarians are able to consistently demonstrate the wider value of the library and become a trusted partner for a variety of different initiatives.

When librarians listen, without any fixed idea of which project comes next, and pay attention to their key stakeholders, they create the space to rethink their value proposition – to see new opportunities. Interesting new projects can flourish when a librarian just listens:

‘The physics department had all this equipment that they would loan out to high school teachers, to help them do enquiry based instruction, but they found it hard to keep track of. Well, the library has a card catalogue, an online catalogue – we can catalogue everything. We can give it a location and check it out. Before teachers come to campus they can search our catalogue and see we have 15 beakers for their class. We hadn’t done this before, but why not catalogue more than just books? The physics faculty member was thrilled; we solved a problem for him.’

This approach allows a department head to explain challenges that a librarian may not have been aware of, and would not necessarily arise as a topic of discussion during a conversation that was centred on library services. A conversation like this puts the listener, the librarian, in an ideal position to spot opportunities and to make creative connections between the resources at their disposal and their customer’s needs. For many of the librarians in our research, this approach helped them to move faculty from *customers* to *clients*; repeat customers who trust and value their service provider.

When libraries can help solve these problems, they become a valuable asset, rather than an overhead that can potentially be cut. Opportunities may not be apparent straight away, but if librarians can get back to departmental heads later with possible solutions, conversations can turn into meaningful connections.

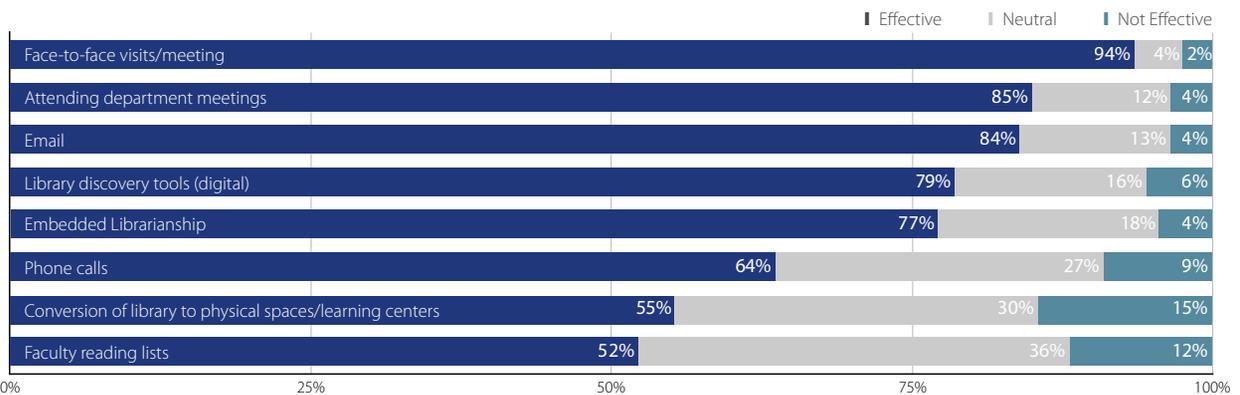
‘About every 2 years or 3 years I go to the Chair of the Department and I say ‘So I just want to hear what you are doing in the department?’ And I just listen.’

Establishing a network

Communication isn't always made easy. Some Deans and Heads of Faculty restrict departmental meetings to teaching staff only, in an effort to make sure the most important priorities are addressed. This is an understandable tactic, but one that unintentionally excludes librarians. However, there are many smaller, less formal meetings among members of the faculty. At these meetings, shorter agendas mean more time for a subject librarian to provide library information. Often, despite being smaller, these meetings have a narrower focus, and librarians have found them more effective to attend.

The key to great networking is to put in the face time; many leads and ideas don't happen in that networking moment or as a direct or immediate result of the contacts librarians made at that time – although for a lucky few, they certainly do. Many opportunities materialize later because a seed was planted. Later on, during a new conversation about an issue, problem or new initiative, that's when a past conversation may come to mind. A great networker may have an administrator thinking of them, remembering 'that librarian' who attended the meeting.

While digital communication allows librarians to communicate with large numbers of people, face to face meetings were found to be *effective* by an overwhelming 94% of respondents to the Taylor & Francis 2016 library communications survey.



Taylor & Francis Group, LLC. (2016). Survey: "Marketing What You've Purchased". Unpublished raw data drawn from 209 librarian respondents.

The best time to meet with faculty is when they arrive at an institution. Ensuring that a session in the library is part of the induction process for all new faculty members is another way that librarians can forge new and useful relationships with them; because the library is there at the very beginning, when a new faculty member is finding their feet.

Hosting events in the library has proven to work for many of the librarians we have included in our research, and they've hosted everything from orientation sessions, to evening events and career development days, to social parties complete with games and giveaways.

A candid, direct approach to these relationships yielded the best results for the librarians who shared their stories for this paper. Their conversations will sometimes be about *demonstrating* how the library can be of value to a customer, and sometimes conversations will be about *understanding and discovering* different ways the librarian can be of value to the customer. Nurturing relationships with the library's customers is a continuous and cyclical endeavour.

GO OUT THERE AND ENGAGE

The most innocuous meetings can be fruitful:

'I was taking yoga classes at the gym and realized that there was a biology professor in the room.'

Introduce yourself to everyone in the room, sometimes just knowing there is a librarian around can spark ideas:

'They said, we used to have a math library committee but we haven't met in a couple of years. We should reconvene that.'

Be aware of departmental research interests, and be seen doing it:

'I go to as many departmental colloquiums as possible.'

Finding a faculty member's blind spots can save them the trouble of coming to the library:

'We've had students come in with syllabi that have to be 20 years old. We say; there is much more current information available electronically, and you might mention to your professor that we could integrate this into your syllabi. And we have gotten a couple of older professors to approach us for classes that way.'

MAKE THE LIBRARY A DESTINATION

Meet and greets don't have to be traditional:

'We hosted a digital humanities open mic night and invited people to come and do readings.'

Turn students into library service advocates by teaching study skills:

'They came to a workshop about citation management, and wanted fellow students to also experience this amazing thing called citation management... it's about getting those lines of communication open between the reference librarians and other students and the faculty.'

If it's a library event, be an active host:

'I think events are more productive when librarians engage with people. Just introducing yourself and saying... what are you studying?'

A strong library identity means you define yourself, nobody does it for you:

'In certain areas like digital humanities, there is a lot of activity on campus but no real locus of events. We are building our reputation as the place for that.'

Demonstrating value to students

Now, more than ever, turning to the library for help is just one of the choices a researcher can make. They can also choose the web to search and find sources of content. Because they have choices, viewing them as a customer, rather than a patron, and asking why they would choose the library is an important element in making sure library services are valued and relevant.

The different customer groups will see this value and relevance in very different ways. Students, faculty, and other stakeholders each have their own distinctive characteristics and priorities when it comes to library acquisitions, but they are all part of the overall mission, and libraries must take each one of them into account when seeking to provide and demonstrate value.

Students are also a type of customer, but with a very different persona than the faculty customer. The large (in proportion to faculty), transient student population at any institution is much more difficult to convert to a client – and in fact it may not be worth the investment of time required to do so. Providing resources to students is one thing, making students aware of how these resources can be useful to them is quite another. Most of the librarians in this research found that the key to creating awareness was getting students into the library.

GETTING STUDENTS INTO THE LIBRARY

Help students to think critically:

‘I use Web of Science to answer the question; where should you apply to graduate school? I ask the students to give me what subject really interests them, because as a graduate student you are spending 24/7 on that subject – you can actually use the database at the library to find something as granular as the names of professors who have published at graduate schools that you’re interested in attending – and have a talking point for interviews and applications. The students didn’t know they could use the library to find out that information.’

Explore ways to use the library’s physical spaces to make them more useful for students:

‘We’ve created an Innovation Space within our library that accommodates group collaboration with movable furniture, white boards and more electrical outlets.’

Grant access to physical space:

‘Faculty members and grad students have card key access to the library after hours [and undergrads do not]. Every fall I announce to the juniors and seniors in physics and chemistry that if they come to a library orientation, they will also get after-hours access to the library for the next 12 months.’

Alleviate stress during exam season
(and increase patronage!):

‘During finals week we have local therapy dog teams come into the library. These sessions are very well attended with over 200 students. At my undergraduate school library they provided hot chocolate at midnight every night. I remember to this day how such a little gesture made a big impact.’

Break the mold by leveraging unusual resources:

‘We have a 3D printing service where we allow students to submit designs for free printing which can include experimental prototypes for their research.’

Teach students to make the most of new types of resources by using them for fun:

‘We are working on a Retro Game night where we will have several Raspberry Pi devices running arcade game emulators. We are hoping that this will open up our new Innovation Space and demonstrate to students that it is a talking point of the library. We also want to promote the availability to check out Raspberry Pis from the collection for use in projects.’

■ MAINTAINING CONNECTION WHILE EXPANDING REACH

A closer look at common digital tools and tactics



Many libraries face a complex communications environment, and with a number of competing priorities. Every year new students arrive, and need to be trained in information literacy if they are to make the most of what the library has to offer. Librarians would like access to information from departments to feed into their collection development strategy, but Deans can be reluctant to share. We found that the most successful communications strategies were the ones that embraced these challenges and explored non-traditional ways of overcoming them.

So how do librarians use digital resources to make a meaningful connection with patrons? How can they expand their audience, and deal with the double-edged sword that is an expanded audience? Double-edged because if a communications strategy works then there is increased awareness of what the library offers. But this awareness may increase demand and it's important that libraries have the resources to effectively manage that demand.

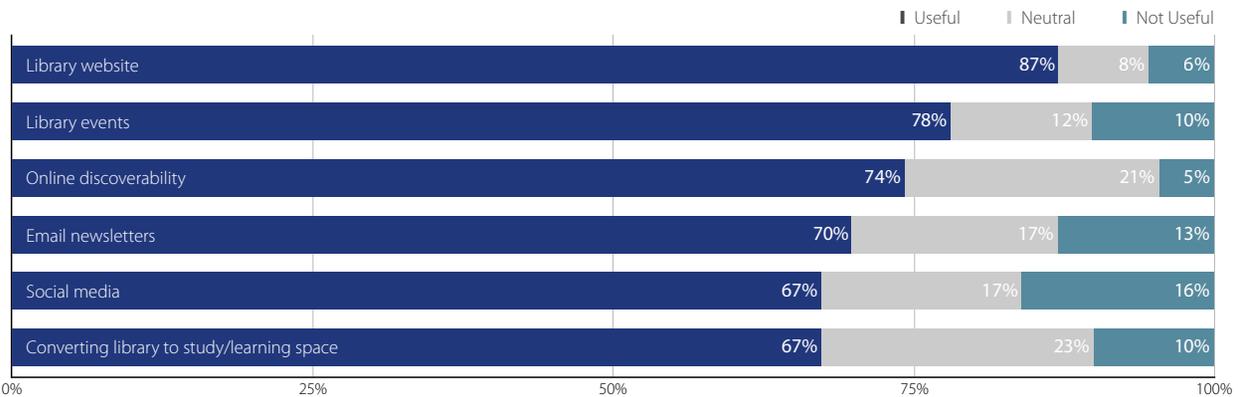
'People in libraries love to start things that are really wonderful but then we do a lousy job of letting the world know about it because we are afraid that if we let the world know about it, people actually use it and we'll be swamped and so we can't let anybody know about it, so we don't tell anybody about it.'

Fear of success didn't stop many of the librarians we spoke to from developing ambitious projects that demonstrated a greater value for the library than the provision of content. And lean practices, discussed later in this paper, are one tactic librarians can use to make the most of the time they have.

The advancement and accessibility of digital tools and tactics means there are now many more ways to engage with customers of any kind. Almost all libraries included in this research used email newsletters, social media and blogs to approach different audiences in different ways, with strategic planning, stylish execution and diligent tracking highlighting the pathways to success when engaging with their customers.

THE LIBRARY WEBSITE

The Taylor & Francis survey asked librarians to rate the usefulness of several promotional activities they had tried, including email newsletters, social media, library events and converting library to study/learning space. 87% of respondents found all listed promotional tactics to be *'useful'*, with a clear win for the library website as a way of promoting content.



Taylor & Francis Group, LLC. (2016). Survey: "Marketing What You've Purchased". Unpublished raw data drawn from 209 librarian respondents.

Whether a library has a stand-alone website or librarians manage a corner of the main university website, it's a very important communications area. Many now have graphics-driven carousels on the front page, showcasing recent institutional news. Working with publishers to obtain graphics that illustrate their collections and forwarding these to the university web team can give major new acquisitions a promotional push:

'A little image with some sample book covers on there to say... tah dah! We now have access to 3000 eBooks and 6000 more are coming in the next three years. As soon as the contract is officially signed, I have a graphic ready to put on there.'

SOCIAL MEDIA

Social Media is a powerful way of communicating, especially with younger 'digital native' students. One library had a dedicated librarian in charge of social media. Combined with her other responsibilities, this librarian encouraged her colleagues to help her by submitting ideas for posts:

'She encourages us to help her submit ideas. There is a spreadsheet that we can add to that she will pull from to post. ...that's helpful'.

EMAIL NEWSLETTERS

Email communication is at the heart of many libraries' efforts to communicate with their patrons. But librarians admitted they don't always manage their newsletters as effectively as they could. Planning communications ahead can deliver real results:

‘For faculty workshops, I had a committee and we picked different topics, for instance something to help workflow, and we had it all planned out a year ahead. Which had never been done before. And then we would market each one individually with news and a separate invitation. And we did track all that. And we increased attendance over 300 percent – in one year.’

Librarians differed on how often they thought it was reasonable to email faculty – one librarian would only announce substantial new purchases, but not send out reminder emails. Some would argue that repetition is a key part of communication – if emails aren’t getting through, it may be worth saying the same thing two or three times at different points throughout the year.

All organisations want to know more about their customers, and one of the simplest ways to do this is by looking at email data. Various insights are available through all of the most common mass email mailing systems, many of which are free or fairly inexpensive. A lot can be learned by looking at who has opened emails, how many people reacted to them by clicking or taking action, when emails were sent, what kind of subject lines generate the most opens and many other useful parameters.

Using a library newsletter to highlight content that has extremely low usage can create a way to remind faculty that they must ‘use it or lose it’, helping librarians to identify content that they can reasonably stop stocking, or move to remote storage. This tactic allows librarians to use email newsletters to fulfil more than one objective. They can remind faculty members of titles that may have been forgotten. If faculty members don’t respond to an email on a particular title, librarians can use that lack of response to inform collection development as well as future email newsletter sends.

LEAN PRACTICES

Making time for the things that work



Most of the tools, tactics, and approaches laid out through the stories in this paper are creative solutions to problems that utilize resources libraries likely already have. There is one important resource however that every professional – librarians included – often finds in limited supply: time. The research in this paper points to the nurturing of relationships as being the most useful and successful approach to creating and proving the library's value, but for this approach to work it requires a substantial investment of time. Below is a brief glimpse at some practices that when used can improve efficiencies and in turn, increase the amount of time left to invest in nurturing relationships and discovering creative solutions. Below is a brief glimpse, written by author William K. Balzer.

Lean principles and practices, which emphasize continuous improvement and respect for employees as key to delivering great service to customers, have been embraced worldwide in public and private sector organizations, including higher education. Libraries have successfully used Lean Higher Education (LHE) to improve book stack management, sales of used books, virtual referencing, and inter-library loan services. Studies typically assemble a small (5-8 person) project team to take part in a multi-day workshop following an established set of steps to improve the underperforming or unsatisfying process that has been chosen for improvement:

- 1 Identifying the various constituents (e.g., students, faculty, guest patrons, library staff) who may benefit, and what they value.*
- 2 Applying LHE tools and techniques (e.g., visual mapping of the entire process) to analyze the current process to surface unnecessary steps, wasted effort, and inefficient flow among the process steps.*
- 3 Redesigning the process using LHE tools and techniques that eliminate waste, improve flow, and better meet constituents' needs.*
- 4 Implementing, and regularly evaluating, the updated process using metrics that reflect what the constituents have told us they expect from the process.*
- 5 Making sure the library staff who are part of the improved process have both the LHE skills and responsibility to continually improve the process with the ultimate goal of achieving perfection in the eyes of all constituents.*

For example, at the University of St. Andrews in Scotland, the library staff recognized that the time to re-shelve an item after its return took a significant amount of time, ranging from 21 to 210 hours, delaying its availability to the next patron (e.g., for research by a faculty member or the course needs of a student). The library staff conducted a Lean HE project to understand and improve the shelving process, with an outcome that led to a consistent 'return to shelve' process that resulted in virtually all items being re-shelved in four hours or less – with no increase in staffing, to the great satisfaction of the patrons, and with great pride by the library staff.

standrewslean.com/about/case-studies/universityofstandrews/library-reshelving/

Overall, whether LHE is implemented university-wide or more locally by visionary leaders in university libraries, the potential to add more value to every library service and process is possible, which will result in more satisfied constituents, more engaged library employees, and the opportunity to reinvest limited library resources that are freed up through improved and efficient library processes.

LIBRARIANS & PUBLISHERS

We're in it together

Throughout 2016, conversations between Taylor & Francis and librarians have unearthed many stories of librarians thinking creatively to use the time and resources they already have to establish the library right at the heart of their institution. What began as a simple exercise to collect stories of best practice quickly became a far deeper conversation, about communicating the value of the library, about navigating the complexities of higher education institutions, and about the shared responsibility of publishers and librarians to connect the right content to the right readers.

At the core of the library's purpose is the mission to direct patrons to the right content; an important contribution to the development of their patrons and the work they do. Taylor & Francis initiated this research because it's vitally important that we support libraries in this goal. Propagating the learning of information worth knowing isn't solely the responsibility of the library – it's one that libraries and publishers share.

Both traditional and new marketing approaches, such as email newsletters, printed flyers, and social media enable librarians to broadcast simple, effective messages about collections and essential library information. But by listening to stakeholders, and initiating bold projects librarians can demonstrate that the value of the library is far greater than the content it holds.

CITATIONS & CONTRIBUTIONS

Throughout 2016 Taylor & Francis has been gathering information on how librarians communicate the value of their library, engage with faculty, and promote their collections. Below is a list of librarians who participated in our focus groups and interviews.

INTERVIEWS 2016

Thurston Miller, *Chemistry and Physics Librarian, University of Notre Dame*

Doug Way, *Associate University Librarian for Collections and Research Services, University of Wisconsin-Madison*

NEW YORK CITY FOCUS GROUP, AUGUST 2016

Linda Dickinson, *Head of Collection Management, Hunter College*

Rebecca Federman, *Electronic Resources Librarian, New York Public Library*

Denise Hibay, *Head of Collection Development, New York Public Library*

Heath Martin, *Associate Dean for Collection Strategy and Management, Stony Brook University*

Lynn Parliman, *Electronic Resources Librarian, Fordham University*

Ellie Ransom, *Research Services Coordinator, Columbia University*

Krystie Wilfong, *Collection Assessment & Analysis Librarian, Columbia University*

ALA CONFERENCE FOCUS GROUP, JUNE 2016

Susan Berkman, *Assistant Director of Collection Development & Technical Services, Nova Southeastern University*

Harold Colson, *eBook Coordinator and International Relations Librarian & U.S. History Librarian, UC San Diego*

Deborah A. Kegel, *Physical Sciences & Engineering Reference Coordinator Librarian for Computer Science, Electrical Engineering, Mathematics, Physics & Astronomy, UC San Diego*

Alyssa Koclanes, *Assistant Professor, Institutional Services/Technical Services, Eckerd College*

ER&L CONFERENCE FOCUS GROUP, APRIL 2016

Joanna Delvan, *Electronic Information Specialist, University of Arkansas for Medical Sciences*

Teo Doras, *Assistant Electronic Resources Librarian, Florida Atlantic University*

Marcus Fry, *Assistant Library Director, Concordia University Texas*

Bethany Goodwin, *Electronic Resources Supervisor, Trinity International University*

Rebecca Harrington, *Electronic Resources Librarian, Florida State University College of Medicine*

Katherine Hill, *Electronic Resource and Distance Education Librarian, University of North Carolina at Greensboro*

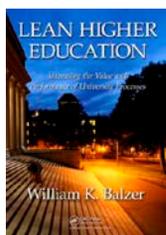
Helen Kula, *Librarian, Institute for Management & Innovation, University of Toronto Mississauga*

Scott Pope, *Acquisitions Librarian, Texas State University*

Dani Roach, *Head of Serials & Electronic Resource Acquisitions, University of St. Thomas*

Jahala Simuel, *Reference Librarian, Shaw University*

Sandy Srivastava, *Electronic Resource Librarian, Southern New Hampshire University*



LEAN PRACTICES

The Lean Practices section of this White Paper was contributed by William K. Balzer, author of [Lean Higher Education: Increasing the Value and Performance of University Processes](#), Productivity Press 2010.



A Taylor & Francis White Paper

Working in partnership to create an expanded perspective on our communities
– sharing trends and themes that broaden the discussion and inspire new ideas.



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