

BOOK REVIEW / CRITIQUE DE LIVRE

Marketing for special and academic libraries: A planning and best practices sourcebook. Valarie S. Gordon and Patricia C. Higginbottom. Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield; 2016. Softcover: 157p. ISBN 978-1-4422-6270-6. Price: USD\$38.00, Hardcover: \$75.00. Available from: <https://rowman.com>.

My first job out of college was in the marketing department at a large financial services company. It was thankless work, but what kept me there for five years was a keen interest in marketing strategies. Then I went to library school, but my interest in marketing never waned. It was my hope that reading this book and reviewing it might inspire other librarians to explore potential marketing initiatives and engage in new projects. *Marketing for Special and Academic Libraries: A Planning and Best Practices Sourcebook* is a must-have resource for any library (not just special and (or) academic libraries).

The authors of this book, Valerie S. Gordon and Patricia C. Higginbottom, write from extensive experience as academic librarians. They assert their intent for this book is to “help librarians narrow the gap between what users think librarians can do and what we have to offer” (p. xv). The book is divided into 10 chapters and includes tables, figures, and case studies. The case studies are particularly useful because they give first-hand accounts of the material that was covered in the chapter. For example, the first chapter is entitled “Strategic Planning” and it explores why strategic planning matters and how to create a strategic plan. So, the case study describes the activities of one institution’s strategic planning process and how they used their strategic plan in the years since they developed it. This chapter structure illustrates for the reader how one can put the concepts into action.

The next chapter covers the marketing plan and directs the reader through common barriers to creating and following through on a marketing plan. Then it gives the reader tips on overcoming each barrier. For example, one barrier is “no skills” and it offers three concrete action steps to overcome the barrier of lack of skills:

1. Learn: See if there are classes on tools like Photoshop available through your organization or online via a massive open online course such as Coursera. Or look for something simpler such as Canva.
2. Practice: Try using a personal account first in a social media tool to become comfortable before you start using it for your library.
3. Borrow. Look at what others are doing, both those you admire and those you don’t want to emulate. Find something you like and see if you can use the same general style or tone.

This approach to tackling issues that pop-up during the planning process is neither expensive nor complicated. The authors offer tangible advice stemming from their expertise

and real-life examples. They are positive and encouraging in their tone and writing style. One example of this approach is in the same section on lack of skills where they pose the question, “What if you don’t know how to do all of the things required to market your library?” and their answer is useful if not a little tongue-in-cheek, “Reading this book is a good start! Learn as you go, as we did.”

Another highlight of this book is the list of references at the end of each chapter. I taught the students in my research strategies class that looking to the list of references of useful articles is a great way to find additional useful resources and to gain deeper knowledge on the topic you are researching. Aside from the case studies at the end of each chapter, the authors also provide the reader with real world examples of existing marketing activities. They lend examples of various marketing plan components which is useful in helping the reader get started on their own marketing plan by using the examples provided. This leg-up helps the reader not get overwhelmed by the amount of work that is associated with creating, implementing, and evaluating marketing plans, brand campaigns, digital publications, social media posts, events, and marketing materials.

To say I was simply inspired by this book is an understatement. A more accurate expression of my reaction to this book was energized. Some of the fun ideas presented were having an afternoon tea, hosting author events, and drawings for prizes such as a chalkboard mug. I also was impressed by how they explain how to develop a social media marketing strategy. This was particularly interesting to me because I have been struggling with the necessity of a social media presence for my library. I’ve often wondered why libraries should have Twitter accounts because I have not been impressed by the majority of library Twitter feeds I’ve seen. This book discusses making the best use of Twitter. It explores how Twitter can often work better than Facebook in terms of providing visibility and engaging users through Twitter chats, which they explain as “scheduled conversations on a specific topic usually run by a host and one or more special guests” (p. 93).

This book was written for varying levels of experience with marketing libraries. They assert that “Library marketing is outreach. It is making people aware of what we can do for them, in a language they can understand” (p. 15). I think this book uses this principle by making the concepts easy to understand and by giving step-by-step instructions and advice backed-up by real-life examples. I would highly recommend this book to anyone interested in having their library’s message delivered to its core audience by building the library’s brand. The authors assert, “Although the library as place still remains relevant for some users and libraries, many organizations are shifting their focus from what the library has within its four walls to what the library and library professionals can provide” (p. 50). The focus of

the brand becomes personal, they state that “a successful brand creates an emotional connection between users and services” (p. 50). Libraries need to evolve into a place that not only disseminates ideas but also a place that awakens the creative sides of its staff and its patrons. We can endear ourselves to our users by being places where unique inspirations are powered by shared ideas. Historically information distribution has been our signature dish, but it is my belief that by adding creative new side dishes we may revive our dulled palates.

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