

That's Not My Job: Marketing in Indiana Libraries

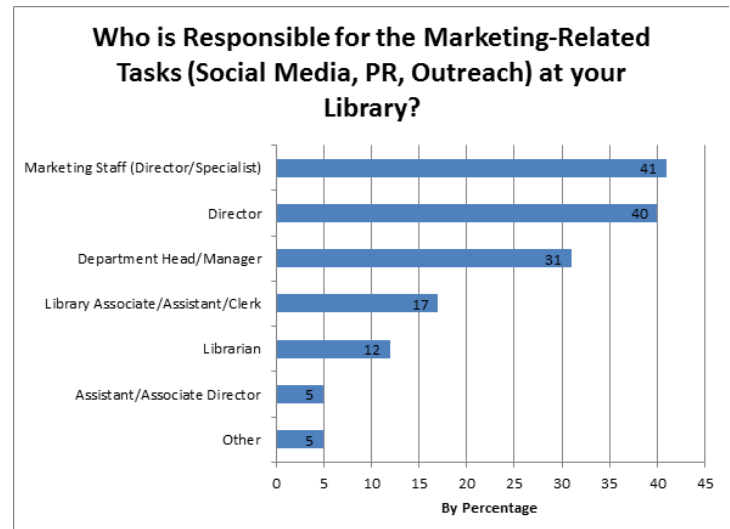
By Timothy McClelland

It is well documented that public libraries must reach outside the library and into the community to be relevant and effective in an increasingly digital world (Robinson, 2012; Gupta, 2006). Social Media, mobile content, outreach, and other marketing-related methods can be effective tools to reach and interact with potential users in the community or online. The use of mobile technology has grown exponentially, and libraries of all sizes must accommodate this growing demand through new marketing strategies (Hofschire & Wanucha, 2014). As these new marketing strategies are added, each library must decide who handles these responsibilities and what sort of training they need to successfully accomplish these tasks. Do most libraries have a marketing plan that guides staff and the marketing activities towards the library's mission statement or annual goals?

Kathy Dempsey (2009) found that in many libraries, marketing-related job duties are often delegated to library staff with various positions and “end up being afterthoughts tacked onto an already-full job description.” Once these job duties have been handed out, it is often left to the employee to figure out a plan for marketing (creating publicity and managing social media posts) with little training or direction from management.

A national research study of job listings completed by the author in 2014 found librarians (Subject, Reference, and Instruction Librarians) are most often responsible for the marketing duties at their library (35 percent), while library directors only accounted for 11 percent of the positions responsible for these duties. In order to better understand the marketing practices of Indiana libraries, the author conducted an online survey of 100 Indiana librarians. The survey found that library directors are responsible for marketing-related tasks in 40 percent of responding libraries. Marketing staff (marketing directors, assistants, etc.) are responsible for the marketing-related tasks at 41 percent of libraries and department head/managers handle the marketing tasks at 31 percent of responding libraries (see Figure 1). Note: some libraries have a combination of employees responsible for marketing-related tasks (e.g. director and librarian).

Figure 1:



These findings conflict with the data from a previous nationwide study, but could be explained by the high number of very small libraries represented on the survey (25 percent of respondents) or could be a result of the prevalence of small libraries in Indiana compared to states with more county-wide library systems. By definition, small libraries have fewer resources than larger library systems and may not have the financial resources to support a marketing professional and/or department, leaving more tasks for directors and department heads. Sixty-eight percent of the small libraries (serving populations under 10,000) in the survey reported that the library director is responsible for the marketing-related tasks while only one director (three percent) in a library serving more than 50,000 residents works on marketing-related tasks. The survey shows 71 percent of libraries serving over 50,000 residents have a dedicated marketing staff to handle marketing tasks for the library while only 28 percent of libraries serving populations less than 50,000 have a marketing professional/department.

The data suggests a variety of positions handle the marketing-related tasks in Indiana libraries, but what level of training do these employees receive in order to successfully market the library?

A recent study found that 37 percent of library jobs include a marketing component, but only 11 percent of those job listings required previous experience with marketing (McClelland, 2014). This illustrates a disparity between the marketing tasks employees are expected to complete in their position and the experience or background they have to be successful in this area. This need can be addressed through trainings and

conferences, but if marketing tasks are not their main priority, training in this area will likely not be a priority either. A library manager would not expect staff to complete cataloging tasks without essential training, but in many libraries there is little or no training or support for completing marketing-related job duties. The same online survey of 100 Indiana libraries found that 53 percent of libraries provide no formal, in-house marketing training. The majority of these libraries (77 percent) allow employees to attend conferences and webinars on the topic. This is important, but would require the employee responsible for the marketing tasks to seek out these opportunities for improvement on their own and may not be a priority for them with their various job duties.

Another important factor that could indicate how effective a library's marketing strategies will be is a marketing plan. A marketing plan will organize all the marketing efforts to ensure that each strategy works toward the overall mission and yearly goals for the library instead of simply reacting to a problem when time and resources are available. Developing a marketing plan with specific goals and targets in mind allows the library to match those with the appropriate marketing channels and deliver a consistent message to the community (Fichter & Wisniewski, 2014). Internally, a marketing plan allows more input from employees and management on what is important and what defines the goal of the marketing plan. Libraries have found that involving staff at all levels and finding the appropriate way to implement a plan is essential to the success of any marketing plan (Metz-Wiseman & Rodgers, 2007).

From the survey of 100 Indiana librarians, only 22 percent of libraries have a formal (written) marketing plan (see figure 2). When this data is analyzed by library size it shows a wide disparity between the percentage of small libraries (service population under 10,000) and the largest libraries in the state (service population over 100,000).

Figure 2:

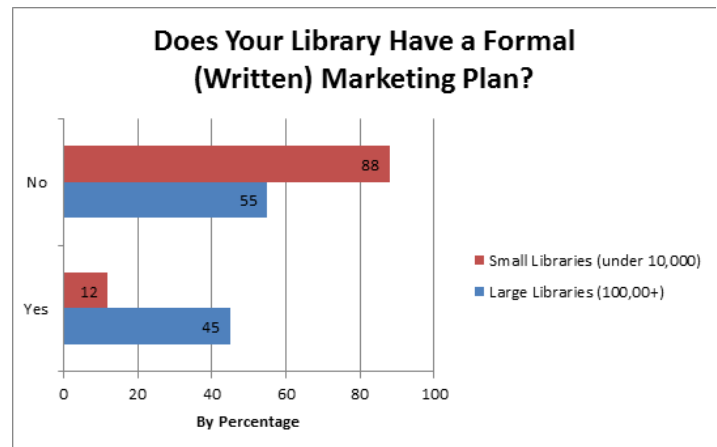
Does Your Library Have a Formal (Written) Marketing Plan?

Yes	No	I Don't Know
22%	65%	13%

Forty-five percent of the largest libraries in the state have formal (written) marketing plans compared with only 12 percent of libraries serving under 10,000 residents (see figure 3).

This category of the largest libraries in the state (over 100,000 residents) was the outlier compared with the state mean of 22 percent when it came to marketing plans. Fewer than 20 percent of libraries in every other size category of library had formal marketing plans.

Figure 3:



Although smaller libraries are at a resource disadvantage when it comes to marketing, creating a marketing plan and organizing the process is essential for libraries of all sizes. Libraries without a marketing department (or someone with a marketing background) still need a strategic plan for their marketing content to ensure the marketing activities drive the organization towards the mission, goals, and objectives of the library. Being strategic about marketing content also means making sure all content creators are aware of the library's marketing plan and are committed to it (Fichter & Wisniewski, 2014). It is difficult to be strategic if the plan is not formalized and/or agreed upon by all employees involved in the marketing process. Creating a marketing plan with input from all levels of the organization and buy-in from the staff responsible for the marketing-related tasks will not only improve the output of marketing activities, it will help the Indiana libraries make progress towards organizational goals and objectives.

References:

Dempsey, K. (2009). *The Accidental Library Marketer*. Medford, NJ: Information Today, Inc.

Fichter, D., & Wisniewski, J. (2014). Content Marketing and Strategy for Libraries. *Online Searcher*, 38(6), 74-76.

Gupta, D. K. (2006). *Marketing Library and Information Services: International Perspectives*. München: K. G. Saur.

Hofschire, L., & Wanucha, M. (2014). Public Library Websites and Social Media. *Computers In Libraries*, 34(8), 4-9.

McClelland, T. (2014). What Exactly Do You Do Here? Marketing-Related Jobs in Public and Academic Libraries. *Journal Of Library Administration*, 54(5), 347-367.

Metz-Wiseman, M., & Rodgers, S. L. (2007). Thinking outside of the library box: The library communication manager. *Serials Librarian*, 53(3), 17-39.

Robinson, C. K. (2012). Peter Drucker on marketing: Application and implications for libraries. [Case Study]. *The Bottom Line: Managing Library Finances*, 25(1), 4-12.

Bio:

Timothy McClelland is the Patron Services Supervisor at the Carbon Valley Regional Library of the High Plains Library District in Colorado. He completed his MLS at Indiana University and worked at the Plainfield-Guilford Township Public Library before relocating to Colorado. You can reach him at tmcclelland@highplains.us.

