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# Goodbye, Patrons ... Hello, Customers

Fred E. Goodman

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What has marketing to do with libraries? Almost a contradiction of terms. Library marketing! Library marketing, if there is such a thing, is in the bailiwick of the big shots. The top people who make the decisions. Right? You're librarians, not hucksters! Right? Most of you are down at the information level, not the policy level. So why should you become concerned about marketing? Your job is to keep the books moving and help people find what they need. Not to figure out ways to get more people to come and use the library. You're in the information business, not the recruitment business. Right?? Wrong!!! Wrong!!! Wrong!!! You're not only in the information business, you're in the people business. You're in the marketing business. That's right ... marketing!!!

Marketing is the process used by an organization to relate creatively and productively to the environment in which it sells its products and services. Effective marketing requires the talent to speak in a language that the market place understands, the insight and skills to find solutions to customer problems, and the commitment to give value. To accomplish this, a company must be willing and able to use all its resources. Remember, that while selling tries to get the customer to want what you have, marketing tries to have what the customer wants. There is a fundamental difference between these two perspectives.

Most business people often confuse the distinction between marketing and selling.

In *selling*, the emphasis is on the product or service that you already have, on convincing the necessary party to purchase.

In *marketing*, the emphasis is on what the customer wants. It is up to you to develop the product or service that will satisfy that want.

To repeat this definition—a marketing concept is a philosophy of how to market a product or service. It means developing a product or service around the needs and desires of the customer.

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Fred E. Goodman made this presentation as part of the Reference and Adult Services Conference Program, "Do We Serve Patrons or Customers: How Entrepreneurs Sell Books and Information."

To a successful company, marketing is a source of pride and joy. It's the vehicle upon which the company moves its goods, and it provides a voice which articulates what the company is, what it believes in, and what it hopes to accomplish and contribute. Librarians should treat their marketing efforts with no less pride and joy.

The zeal with which the library industry is pursuing the "subject of marketing" is indicative of the widespread interest within the profession. Over the last ten years, we have seen an evolution in the library world. When I first began talking about marketing the public library—merchandising, visibility and reaching out to promote—I stared down at a lot of librarians who thought I was off the wall. When I dared to say "Goodbye Patrons, Hello Customers ...," they booed and hissed. Today librarians have realized that what the city fathers, the budget analysts, and the county, city, and town managers have wanted us to do is to "walk softly." That is to their advantage. But what we need to do is to "carry a big stick."

However, the industry is not devoid of those who are marketing critics. John Berry, Editor of *The Library Journal*, questions the basic premise that librarians need to market themselves. He argues that libraries should continue to treat information as a free resource, which should not be subject to the laws of the market place. John Dessauer, who wrote an article entitled "Are Librarians Failing Their Patrons?" questions a library which buys materials readily found in bookstores and on newstands. He would prefer that libraries serve the patrons whose needs cannot easily be met through these channels.

Critics of marketing would have us believe that offering patrons Louis L'Amour is marketing, whereas offering Plato and Voltaire is professional collection development. Tony Leisner, vice president of Quality Books, a professor of marketing, and a proponent of library marketing, believes that libraries for too long have attempted to satisfy market segments whose needs closely parallel their own. While some libraries may think their mission is to continue the tradition of "cultural uplift," many others believe their mission is

to be responsive to the public needs, even if those needs are not for the kind of information and reading material librarians think appropriate.

I have the pleasure of traveling throughout this nation of ours and visiting library systems on an almost weekly basis. Without question, where I find an aggressive library director, I find a smiling and helpful staff. Where I find a confident leader, I find a library system that is achieving its goals. I find a system that has or is writing the specs for an automated circulation system, is planning porta-structures to reach out to new market areas, is looking into fiberoptics and laser discs, and may have microcomputers for its patrons. I see librarians who realize that they must reach out beyond the walls of their own library each and every day to better the library's lot in life. Whether it's meeting with the friends or trustees, or having lunch with a council person or speaking to the local Kiwanis Club, we have learned that we must reach out and touch someone.

The great misnomer in any business or library is that not everyone is involved with the marketing effort. You must create a totally supportive marketing environment. Everybody sells! Everybody offers services! Everybody must be trained to think that the customer comes first! From the director to the receptionist, to the telephone operator, to the public service people, to the adult services and children's librarians, to the business managers and the technical service people.

Successful sales people understand the importance of long term customer connections. Their paycheck is determined to a large extent by their ability to develop sound, lasting relationships with enough customers. The library staff must understand that there's plenty of competition for the public's attention. Their paychecks are also dependant upon their ability to develop long term relationships with their users. (Doing business with a company that is not sales oriented is usually an unpleasant experience. There is no way to quantify the loss of business that is incurred by this kind of tunnel vision.)

We all know about *Public Relations*, but what I'm talking about now is really "Internal" Relations. In other words, what do you believe your job really is? And more importantly, what does the public believe you believe your job really is? It may have nothing to do with what your job really is. It's all a belief structure. It's all an image!!

As library staff, we need to recognize the fact that public library patrons, particularly infrequent users, come back to the library not only because the book is there, but because they were helped by professional staff. And when I use the

term "professional" I'm not *just* talking about master's degree librarians. I mean, how many patrons walk up and say, "Before you help me ... before you make an impression on me ... let me see your sheepskin!!!!"? Professionalism is not just technical skills, but it is also the manner in which you positively influence the people you are serving.

Remember ... you get only one chance to make a first impression. That impression can be enhanced when you know how your appearance adds to the perception of the patron. How many of you would go to a doctor with a malady if he drove around town in a beat-up clunker ... with baggy suits and stains on his tie. I mean, you aren't going to put your tender little body in the hands of a guy who looks so unsuccessful ... give me a guy in a Mercedes with tailored suits. At least I know he hasn't been sued in malpractice court. Since perception often supplants reality, the librarian whose appearance is professional is usually regarded as being more professional, and the library in which he or she works can take its rightful place among the vast array of information providers.

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### **... successful marketing is the key to our future ...**

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*The Chicago Tribune* recently wrote, "Stylish Marion, the librarian, certainly captured the eye and heart of Professor Harold Hill in *The Music Man* but librarians in general don't have a reputation for sartorial splendor." Well, I sure wish the author of those words could be here today to see this attractive crowd. There is no phoniness in caring about one's appearance and being aware of the image one projects. Dynamic, flourishing, even legendary, public libraries are great because of their staffs, people who look well, feel well, do well, and care about themselves.

Everyone who works in your library must be made to understand his part in the library's marketing effort. We are all familiar with people and companies who should take a course in creating a totally sales- and service-oriented environment, emphasizing good old-fashioned courtesy. It doesn't make any sense to invest in marketing a product or service in your library, or to build an advertising or promotional campaign designed to project a caring attitude, and then have all your good work sabotaged by someone in the library.

And what effect will all of this marketing have on your library and your future? Successful libraries involved in consistent, well-planned

marketing efforts have new technologies. Those libraries not in the forefront in their communities do not. And they plead . . . "budget," "we don't have any money," or "the officials won't give us what we need." Baloney. People do whatever they believe is important. Politicians do whatever they believe is important. It is up to you to motivate them. Here we approach a most basic subject in marketing activity—how to motivate prospects to become consumers of what you are selling. Cynics say the two most powerful motivators are fear and greed. All successful selling, according to this philosophy, results from persuading prospects that what the seller offers will either enrich the buyer or will enable the buyer to avoid some disaster. This may seem oversimplified but there is, I believe, a basic truth in it.

Truly, all customers become customers because they believe that something desirable will result from the purchase. That may well be the simple avoidance of some potential disaster or the ability to cope with it better.

For example, the Atlanta Fulton Public Library just completed one of the most successful marketing campaigns in the history of the library industry. They sought approval of a thirty-eight million dollar bond referendum from the voters in the city and county. Their trustees raised \$250,000 from outside sources to launch a paid advertising and public relations campaign on local television. They employed the services of a local advertising agency to write, produce and purchase the time for a thirty second commercial.

The spot caused consumers to believe that something desirable would result from their voting for the library referendum. They got the idea that they would avoid a perceived potential disaster, and the bond issue passed by seventy-four per cent of the vote.

Suppose everyone, the public as well as those involved with your funding, believes that having a training ground like a library where the kids can go and where you can learn all about information and so forth, is one of the most important things to society and its future. Then when Proposition 13's come along, they wouldn't just keep cops and firemen; they'd keep cops and firemen and librarians. Do you see what I am getting at? You must escalate your visibility in the public mind.

Today we have Gramm-Rudman staring us in the face. Are they going to cut library budgets? Is this a cause for concern? You bet it is, if your response is wringing your hands and shrugging your shoulders.

There is a slogan in business: "Success plus complacency equals failure." Here are some

examples:

Thirty years ago, the American steel industry was rolling in money and success. The industry was sleeping on its laurels. And while it was sleeping, Japan and Germany were building a new, modernized steel industry. And as it continued to sleep, new plastics became substitutes for steel in product after product. The rest is history. The American steel industry is in deep trouble with antiquated plant after antiquated plant closing forever. Could it be the same with libraries?

Not too many years ago there was a very successful toy company called Marx. Then along came electronic games, and the Marx people viewed them as a passing fad. Marx went out of business. Is all that computer stuff with data bases a passing fad?

Here's a good example of pure marketing losing and winning.

Light beer is not new at all. Back in the early fifties, a light beer called Gablinger was promoted as a chic, intelligent beer to drink. It was the wrong market, wrong strategy, and Gablinger died. Along came the Miller folks and their marketing department said: "Now's the time . . . make it macho . . . associate it with sport figures." Using market research results, they let the public tell them how to sell their new product. Bingo, from nowhere to everywhere—and one of the most successful product introductions in the history of marketing.

Libraries have been around as long as the tavern industry. Light beer became the tavern industry's new technology after proper marketing. There is plenty of new technology out there for libraries that beg for proper marketing and merchandising.

Of course we're fighting an image problem. One word of description keeps surfacing, and I really hope it's a misnomer. The word is "antiquated." Many people tend to think of the public library as a place where little old ladies with buns on the backs of their heads serve old folks, kids do studies, and a few intellectuals read Rilke and Rimbaud.

What do you think your funding sources think about your libraries?—if they think about them at all! Are your libraries pleasant necessities with expenses that rank right up there with ordering toilet paper? You see, what these people think about the library, how these people perceive its importance and value, will decide your future. Sure, there'll always be libraries around . . . but what kind? Antiquated necessities or valued information centers? To a large degree, that depends on you.

Perhaps you think I am painting a grim picture. That's only true if you believe libraries should remain the same; or if you believe it's up to somebody higher to change and improve things; or if you believe your job is just to point people to information sources and settle trivia bets; or if you believe you can continue in the same quiet niche without being disturbed. The fact is that we are in an age when libraries should be growing in importance. An information age. Notice that I said an *information* age, not a *computer* age. Computers are only a means to information. And isn't that what libraries are all about?

You have an opportunity to provide inspiration for the others who work with you. I'm not talking about early morning Bible meetings with the staff. What I mean is enthusiasm. It's very catching. The smile, the happy bounce, the enjoyment that comes from selling yourself to the patrons or the Mayor, or the County Council. I've heard this technique called "EACH ONE—REACH ONE." "EACH ONE—REACH ONE." It works.

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### **... less than twenty per cent of the American population [uses] public libraries.**

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My belief is that librarians get tired. Because of the cutting of staff, because of the financial pressures, because they sense that libraries are not at the core of public priority, because of the tremendous time demands, because you never really get the job done, librarians get tired. Getting tired will not help. It shows in the face. If you are a leader, you should provide inspiration. If you can't rekindle that flame for members of your staff, for gosh sakes, put them in the back room licking stamps!!!

With less than twenty per cent of the American population using public libraries, I'm inclined to believe that we're not reaching as many as we could. Librarians have to proselytize. We must attract new users to our facilities. We must break down the barriers that exist between such a large segment of our population and our libraries. New users mean new voters—voters who can apply political pressure to help you receive increased funding.

Charlie Robinson wrote in the spring of 1983, "Although very difficult at times, there is a tendency to see that the real future of public libraries depends upon their support, and more important, their use by members of the community—and not upon the prescriptions of an elite band of self-appointed saviors."

You are here today because you are part of the new generation of librarians who, I hope, will believe that successful marketing is the key to our future. Lowell Martin, well known library consultant, recently said, "Librarians should respond to the changing needs of their clients and become the fountainheads, not the reservoirs, for their communities." Fred Glazer, state librarian of West Virginia, has a great line: "Promote or perish." Tiny little West Virginia has one of the highest per capita contributions for libraries in the nation.

We must look at what our community expects from its public libraries and whether or not we are supplying what they expect, need, and want. With your help, and with properly designed and executed marketing plans, I see a bright, happy future for libraries. Increased usage, increased book circulation, increased prestige, increased visibility, increased budgets to fill your shopping carts with the latest technology.

But you must remember ... you'll never get to first base if you don't swing the bat. Good-bye patrons ... hello customers. 

## Happy New Year



Pamela Pittman and Mary Youmans take a break from the stimulating programs held at the Benton Convention Center during the biennial conference.