



## Communicating Marketing and Advocacy Research to Practice

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### Abstract:

*This paper reports on a study that explored the role of library associations in the communication of marketing and advocacy research to practice. Support for making research information accessible to practitioners through library associations' publications can be found in previous studies which examined the relationship between LIS practitioners and research. Using content analysis and literature searches, the current study expands on these findings to determine the extent and nature of marketing and advocacy research available to practitioners. The results indicate that marketing and advocacy research is rarely communicated to practitioners through two associations' publications. However, marketing research information for nonprofit service organisations, generally, is not widely available. Drawing on the study's findings and research communication strategies used in other contexts, the paper concludes by making recommendations for future initiatives to improve practitioner access to advocacy and marketing research information.*

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### Background

Research publication, reading and use has received a great deal of attention in the library and information science (LIS) literature over many years. Concerns have been raised that the nature of LIS research is less scholarly and the proportion of research in LIS publications is low compared to other disciplines (Fisher 1999; Harvey 2001; Peritz 1981; Stephenson 1990; Swigger 1985). Some commentators note that there is a focus on pragmatic issues, rather than the development of theory from research

(Montanelli and Mak 1988; Robbins 1990; Saracevic and Perk 1973; Williamson 1999). This in turn has led to the notion of a communication gap between research and practice in LIS (Blick 1984; Clayton 1992; Haddow and Klobas 2004; Lynam, Slater, and Walker 1982) and associated suggestions about how to bridge this gap. However, many of these suggestions do not account for the time-poor and operations-focused environment in which LIS practitioners work. One suggested strategy to improve the communication of research findings is to make research more accessible to practitioners, in terms of both the language and the channels of communication used. In relation to the first aspect, researchers have been encouraged to report their study findings in a way that is comprehensible to practitioners (Clayton 1992; Turner 2002; Waldhart 1975), which involves reducing the amount of technical terminology and including implications for practice (McKechnie, Julien, and Genuis 2008). In relation to the second aspect of accessibility, the attention is on the publications in which research is reported, and this is the primary focus of this paper.

A number of authors comment on the different reading habits of practitioners and researchers (Clayton 1992; Haddow and Klobas 2004; Robbins 1990) and studies have found that practitioners are more likely to read professional journals and newsletters, many of which are the publications of library associations. The most popular publications read by practitioners include: *American Libraries* (Ali 1986; Weaver 2002) and the *Library Journal* (Powell, Baker, and Mika 2002) in US studies; *inCite* in an Australian study (Haddow 2001); and *Bibliotheksdienst* in a German research project (Schlogl and Stock 2008). With the exception of the *Library Journal*, these are publications distributed as part of membership entitlements by library associations. As these publications reach a wide practitioner audience, it follows that they are potentially the most useful medium for the communication of research information. Moreover, it is the professional associations responsible for their publishing that have the opportunity to develop an evidence base for marketing and advocacy of library and information services.

It is important to consider the implications of failing to improve research communication to practitioners. Library services are not under the same pressure as the health industry, for instance, where evidence based practice has a resonance that professionals and clients can appreciate. As Cullen (cited by Powell, Baker & Mika, 2002, p. 51) posits, there are “no matters of life and death” to motivate higher use of research by LIS practitioners. However, there is abundant professional literature to suggest that measuring services and providing value for money is an increasingly significant aspect of managing library services, and both governments and library organisations are involved (see for example, American Library Association 2010; Department for Culture Media and Sport 2010; Library Council of New South Wales 2008). To meet these demands library practitioners will need to provide reliable information; information that should be drawn from systematic data collection methods – research. Without access to information about how this can be accomplished LIS practitioners face the prospect of developing their own projects on a one-by-one basis.

A significant component of evaluating services is the degree to which a library's community is aware of and utilizes those services. In this, marketing and advocacy activities are imperative. Libraries are, for the most part, nonprofit service organisations and as such require a different marketing approach to those undertaken for profit and product-based organisations. Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1985) describe services as a 'performance' and characterise service organisations and associated marketing challenges as:

- Intangibility - it is difficult to display or communicate a service
- Inseparability - clients are involved in the service, a service is consumed at the same time it is produced
- Heterogeneity –variation occurs between the service provided
- Perishability – unused services cannot be saved for high demand periods.

The authors go on to identify a number of strategies that service organisations can implement to reduce the affects of these challenges, including: using "tangible cues"; creating a "strong organizational image"; "customize service"; and adjust "to achieve a closer match between" demand and supply (p. 35).

Marketing a nonprofit service organisation adds another dimension to marketing strategies due to the non-economic nature of the transaction between client and service. In this case relationship marketing is considered a viable alternative (Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003). The most important aspect of relationship marketing is that it is based on the concept of social exchange in which "participants can be expected to derive complex, personal, noneconomic satisfactions" (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh as cited by Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003, p. 91).

The issues discussed above about marketing nonprofit service organisations reveal some familiar problems for libraries and the manner in which they approach marketing their services. The image of a library is often bound closely with the community it serves and customisation is a feature. However, these factors then result in a wide variety of approaches creating barriers to the development of a body of research which can promote shared and reliable strategies. It is in the attempt to gauge the nature of marketing information and research for LIS practitioners that this paper was conceived.

## **Methods**

The research undertaken commenced with an examination of the extent and nature of research information published in two profession association newsletters over the period of one publishing year (2008); *update* from the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP) and *inCite* from the Australian Library and Information Association (ALIA). Particular attention was paid to articles, both research and non-research about marketing. Print copies of the publications were examined and the analysis excluded calls for papers, conference announcements, upcoming activities, book reviews and advertisements. The 'Media watch' column in *update* was also excluded. As well as short pieces and articles, editorials, letters to the editor, and awareness columns (for example, useful websites) were included. Content relating to awards of an international, national or local nature were also

included as indicators of exposure and evidence of libraries promoting their services, collections, and programs.

Content was firstly determined to be:

1. mentions of research of any kind, and
2. marketing or advocacy with no mention of research.

The content that mentioned research was then identified as belonging to one of three categories:

1. Brief mention only - for example, a sentence that noted a report had been published
2. Substantive mention – for example, the aims or very brief findings of research were discussed
3. Expanded discussion – for example, an entire article was about a research study or provided extensive information about how a study was conducted.

Any articles that discussed marketing research were also identified within these categories.

The content about marketing or advocacy with no mention of research was examined for evidence of national strategies. These were identified by the involvement of the associations or other agencies, such as a national library or government funded organisation, in marketing strategies on a national scale. Mentions of petitions to government and members of parliament, and international marketing and advocacy activities were also counted as instances of national marketing strategies.

It is logically and literally impossible to comment on the degree to which professional literature about marketing is based on research if that research does not exist in the first place. To provide this context, the Library and Information Services Abstracts (LISA) database was searched to identify research papers about marketing. In addition, to gain an understanding of the marketing research available outside LIS, the business database Business Source Premier (BSP) was searched to identify research about national marketing strategies for nonprofit organisations. Finally, a search of the newspaper and magazine database, Factiva, was conducted to identify content about libraries in the popular press in the United Kingdom and Australia for the year 2008. This last search was undertaken to determine the exposure of libraries in each country's press as evidence of libraries creating awareness in their communities.

## Results

### ***Marketing and research content of update and inCite***

Findings for the content that included mentions of research of any kind and content about marketing or advocacy with no mention of research are presented in the table below.

Table 1. Content of *update* and *inCite*

Title	Research content		Marketing (non-research) content	
	No.	%	No.	%
<i>update</i>	82	16	117	23
<i>inCite</i>	38	9	67	16

CILIP's *update* has a higher number of items with research content and marketing content than ALIA's *inCite*, but this needs to be viewed in context. *Update* is published with more pages than *inCite* and over the year the total pages numbered 510, compared with 418 for *inCite*. Expressed as a percentage of the total pages, the research content of *update* is double the amount found in *inCite*, and marketing non-research content of *update* is also much higher.

When the marketing non-research content was analysed for evidence of national strategies, *update* included 27 items (23%) and *inCite* had 12 items (18%) of the marketing non-research content. Many of these mentions were brief and related to the associations' aims; others related to a nation-wide activity that was associated with another initiative, for example World Book Day and reading programs. The proportion of items about marketing public libraries was high in both publications: *Update* included 51 (43%) items and *incite* included 26 (39%) items about public libraries in the marketing non-research content.

Table 2 presents the results for the analyses of research content categorized as brief mention, substantive mention, expanded discussion, and marketing research. Note that marketing research is not mutually exclusive of the other categories. The percentages shown are calculated to indicate the category's proportion of the total research content in the publications.

Table 2. Categories of research content of *update* and *inCite*

Title	Brief mention		Substantive mention		Expanded discussion		Marketing research	
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
<i>update</i>	39	47	34	41	9	11	1	1
<i>inCite</i>	17	44	18	47	3	8	2	5

% calculated as a proportion of total research content

These results suggest that although *inCite* has a much lower level of research content than *update* overall, the proportion of content in the different categories is

similar. That is with the exception of the marketing research category; for which, it may be argued, the content is so low that the percentage calculation is potentially misleading. On this finding, it is useful to consider what research topics are being published in *update* and *inCite*. The most popular research topic in both publications was the library profession, followed by library users. Digital information and IT/internet-related research was also well represented in the topics covered in the content.

The marketing research discussed in *update* was a brief mention relating to assessment of strategies through monitoring and analysis of the media. In *inCite* an action research project to encourage community engagement was discussed in a substantive mention and the other instance was a brief mention about an IFLA marketing award for a program based on research.

### **Marketing research in LIS and business literature**

To establish the extent of marketing research available to LIS professionals, particularly research relating to national marketing strategies, a search of the LISA database was conducted. Members of CILIP have been provided with access to the LISA database as part of their membership entitlements since at least 2002. ALIA members can link to the ProQuest LIS journal subset, however this initiative commenced in 2008; the same period covered by the content analysis of the associations' publications. Access to LISA would be available to a number of ALIA members working in the university sector.

The LISA search was refined several times to ensure the most relevant items were identified. 'Advocacy' was not available as a descriptor term, but 'marketing' was and a separate search using 'advocacy' as a keyword indicated that using the descriptor 'marketing' would capture the most relevant records. The search strategies and number of results are listed below.

**S1 Marketing =DE (as Descriptor)**

All publication types = 1765

Peer reviewed journals = 583

**S2 Marketing = DE AND (research or study = AB) (in abstract)**

All publication types = 326

Peer reviewed journals = 159

**S3 #2 AND public libraries=DE**

Peer reviewed journals = 49

**S4 #2 AND university libraries=DE**

Peer reviewed journals = 46

**S5 #2 and nation\* = AB**

All publication types = 27

Peer reviewed journals = 13

Nearly 1800 articles about marketing were located in the first search of LISA. While this is a large body of literature it is low compared to other topics. For example, a search for 'information literacy' as a descriptor retrieved over 2,300 items, and when refined to 'research or study' in abstract there were 688 peer reviewed journal articles listed.

The peer reviewed journals results from S2 were examined to determine the nature of the articles. A large proportion of the results were case studies of single libraries or specific user groups. Recent research has focused on the use of Web 2.0 tools, such as Facebook, to market library services, and the attitudes of the LIS profession is another repeated topic. E-commerce, marketing of product-based organisations and charity groups are also well represented. Searches S3 and S4 were conducted to identify the extent of marketing research information about specific library types. As the results show, there is a small body of research which might be useful in developing an evidence base for marketing public and university libraries.

S5 narrowed the search further by adding a truncated term to locate items about national marketing research, with only 13 peer reviewed journal articles found. The full set of 27 abstracts were saved and examined for content. Of the twelve articles published from 2000 onwards, only four are potentially relevant to national marketing strategies for libraries. The two most recent articles discuss projects aiming to encourage citizens to participate in e-government using marketing campaigns to raise awareness. One of the earlier articles is about the Croatian Library Association's strategy to market its services to the profession and the other discusses the marketing strategy of the National Library of the Netherlands. It is possible that the recent e-government research could provide useful information for national strategies to market libraries, but overall the results are not promising.

Business Source Premier is one of, if not the largest databases available for business and management information, of which marketing is a component. It was searched to identify national marketing strategies for nonprofit organisations. The search strategy included the use of subject headings (SU) for major terms and searching within the abstract (AB) for other terms, as illustrated below:

- S1 (Marketing or marketing strategies=SU) AND nonprofit organizations = SU  
AND research = SU**  
All publication types = 82  
Academic journals = 45
- S2 Advocacy=AB AND research=SU AND nonprofit organizations=SU**  
All publication types = 3
- S3 Libraries=SU AND ('national marketing' AND (strateg\* or campaign\*)=AB)**  
All publication types = 3

The abstracts of academic journals from searches S1 and all results from S2 were saved to examine content for relevance. Results from S3 were examined during the

search and none were research articles. Again, the number of research articles about nonprofit organisations' marketing strategies is relatively low. Using the term 'advocacy' did not improve the results. An examination of the abstracts revealed very few research articles that are relevant to national marketing strategies for libraries. One paper was a discussion piece about OCLC's advocacy programs, and several papers were concerned with charities competing for donors and the use of branding. A research article made the pertinent point:

the use of marketing concepts and tools in the nonprofit sector is much lower, and it offers explanations rooted in cultural and organizational differences. (Andreasen, Goodstein, and Wilson 2005)

The authors go on to recommend the "cross-sector transfer of marketing knowledge".

Also of interest was a 1998 paper comparing the not-for-profit (NFP) marketing literature from the United States and United Kingdom. The author notes: "The UK literature is still largely concerned with the appropriateness and applicability" of marketing nonprofit organisations and suggests "a) develop suitable courses for NFP managers and b) explore the use of the newer service concepts of relationship, service quality and internal marketing (Rees 1998).

With the exception of perhaps five papers, the marketing research information retrieved from Business Source Premier offered very little in the way of an evidence base for marketing strategies for libraries.

### ***Coverage of libraries in the popular press***

The final search, of the Factiva database, was performed to test the notion that libraries are not adequately marketing their services. An important aspect of marketing is awareness raising and the popular press is one channel in which this can be achieved. Factiva indexes and provides full text of articles from newspapers and magazines across the globe. National, regional and local newspapers and magazines are indexed by the database. The search was designed to determine the extent of coverage of library-related news during the same year as selected for the content analyses of the associations' publications. Limiting the search to UK sources in one search and Australian sources in a second search, the strategy was:

**Librar\* AND (service\* or award\* or exhibit\* or program\* or open\*)  
Limited by 'in headline or lead paragraph'  
Limited by year of publication = 2008**

In 2008, UK sources published 3507 items and the Australian sources published 1393 items. These results indicate that on average nearly 10 items are published about libraries every day in the UK. In Australia, with a much smaller publishing base, nearly 4 items on average are published each day about libraries.



## **Discussion**

The findings of this study indicate that the marketing research base for LIS is low. Libraries in both countries engage in and publish items about marketing activities, evident in the number of mentions of non-research marketing information in the associations' newsletters. The amount of marketing research information in these publications however is negligible and does not include extended discussion about marketing research studies. In these terms, library associations' are not contributing to LIS practitioners' knowledge about marketing strategies for their library. Nor are national strategies, in which the associations' have an important role, discussed in relation to research.

Turning the focus onto research content in general, the associations' publications include only a small proportion of research-related content. *Update*, with 16% of research content, includes twice the amount of research content as *inCite*, with 9%. However, brief mentions of research provide no real guidance for readers as this content is typically a sentence or two at most about a project, publication or the importance of research. When the substantive and expanded mentions of research are combined and calculated as a percentage of the entire publications' content; *update* included 8.4% and *inCite* included 5% of more detailed research information. This is an area in which associations could improve the communication of research to practitioners.

The searches of LISA and Business Source Premier suggest that the extent of relevant marketing research information available within the LIS and the broader literature is low. Most of the peer reviewed papers located in the LISA database discussed marketing activities of a single library which, taken as individual studies, may be of limited use. An alternative approach is available and that is through the use of systematic reviews to identify common findings in the papers. It would appear that recent research relating to participation in e-government may provide some useful information and that the LIS community needs to consider how to draw on marketing knowledge in other service-based nonprofit organisations.

An assumption made in the design of this study was that research about marketing strategies was important to improve the level of awareness of libraries and their services in the community. Based on the findings of the Factiva searches, that assumption was incorrect. Libraries receive a large amount of coverage in the popular press in both Australia and the UK and this coverage is included in national, regional and local publications. This finding is encouraging but it does not diminish the argument that access to marketing research information will provide LIS practitioners with an improved understanding of how to initiate their own marketing strategies and measure the outcomes.

## **Limitations**

The findings presented here must be treated as indicative only. Firstly, the content analysis included two library associations' newsletters and, secondly, it was for the period of one year, only. To establish whether these findings are repeated in other LIS associations' publications and over a longer period a much larger study is

required. Ideally, a content analysis should involve more than one researcher to cross-check reliability in relation to the categorization of content. While it was not feasible for this study, a larger study should involve two researchers in the analysis.

Limitations in relation to the searches must also be acknowledged. A decision was made to use the descriptor 'marketing' in the LISA searches and additional terms may have been used. For example, promotion, branding, and lobbying are available as descriptors. It is debatable whether use of the additional terms would have significantly improved the results as many items located in the searches listed the other descriptor terms also. However, a broader search of LISA and Business Source Premier may reveal that higher numbers of relevant papers are available.

### **Conclusion and Recommendations**

In conclusion, there is a role for library associations to make research information more widely available to LIS practitioners through the publications that are most frequently read by them, their association's newsletter. This study shows that the research information content of these publications is relatively low and generally presented as a brief mention only. The expanded discussions of research in the publications, of which there were few, were excellent and clearly targeted at a practitioner audience. It would be interesting to explore the perceptions of readers in relation to these articles.

Providing research information in a form that will be read and appreciated by LIS practitioners is dependent upon the availability of that research. In the case of marketing research there is evidence to suggest that the LIS community should increase their research efforts to create a larger body of literature. Even so, there are small collections of research about marketing public libraries and university libraries and these papers could form the basis of systematic reviews. There is also an opportunity to borrow from the wider literature about marketing strategies for nonprofit service organisations. Branding is raised as potentially useful and has been applied to nonprofit organisations, such as the Cancer Council in Australia, successfully. This approach may create the 'strong organizational image' suggested as a strategy by Zeithaml, Parasuraman and Berry (1985). In addition, libraries need to consider using relationship marketing strategies to meet and measure the 'noneconomic satisfactions' of their clients (Dwyer, Schurr, and Oh as cited by Arnett, German, and Hunt 2003, p. 91).

Library services receive a high level of popular press coverage in Australian and the UK, however this alone is probably not sufficient to maintain funding and support for libraries. The organisations responsible for providing library funding are under increasing pressure themselves, which means library services require sound measures of success. Basing their marketing strategies on previously validated evidence should improve libraries' marketing activities success and reduce the effort required to develop individual and one-off marketing campaigns. If funding is limited, it is imperative that practitioners are enabled in this way to make informed decisions when developing marketing strategies for their library.

### **Recommendations**

Library associations should consider including more research information in the form of substantive or expanded discussion in their publications. Strategies that have been adopted in other areas could be effective. For example, in the newsletter publication of the Royal College of Nursing Australia, two pages are regularly given over to an article that discusses the latest evidence available on a specific topic.

Sources for these types of pieces can be the original researchers or the evidence based information that is becoming available across a range of disciplines, including LIS with the journal *Evidence Based Library & Information Practice*. Evidence based management is represented online (at <http://www.evidence-basedmanagement.com/>) and includes pieces about all aspects of management, including marketing. These sources provide a shortcut to research information that has been selected on the basis of its importance to practitioners in the community.

Further research into effective marketing strategies is required on a sector-wide scale. Individual studies focusing on a single library service are ultimately of limited use. A concerted effort by a large group of libraries to measure the effectiveness of a marketing strategy will provide more reliable findings and reduce the work required by each library.

Finally, an investigation by library associations into the issue of branding may be useful. Branding has been an effective marketing strategy for nonprofit organisations but it is not clear if branding can be applied with the same success to a large group of differently presented organisations each providing slightly different services to different target groups, such as libraries.

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