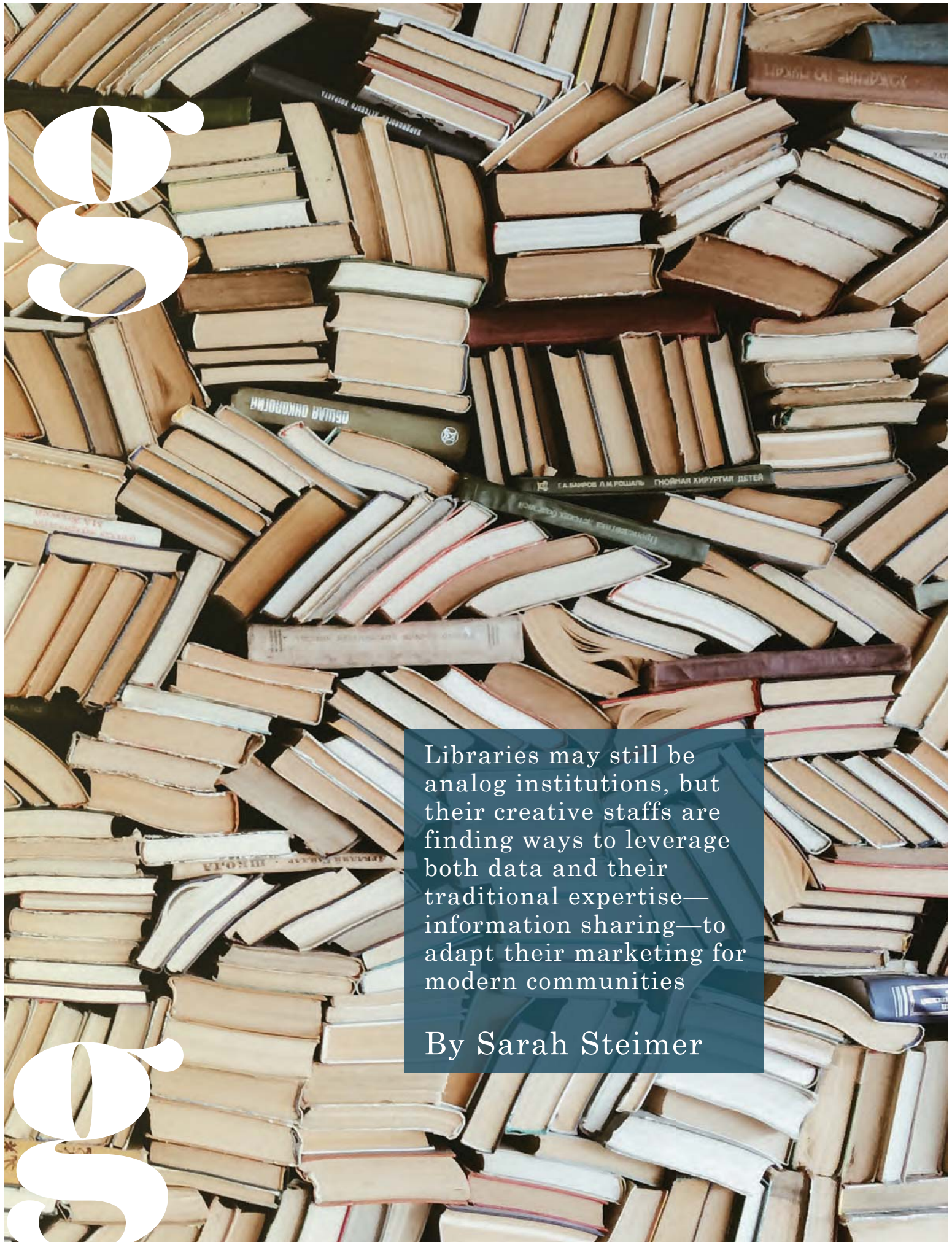# Bustir
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Libraries may still be analog institutions, but their creative staffs are finding ways to leverage both data and their traditional expertise—information sharing—to adapt their marketing for modern communities

By Sarah Steimer

"Spoiler Alert!

Dumbledore dies on page 596."

This message, which appeared on a billboard in Arkansas, wasn't really a surprise (the Harry Potter books and movies had been out for years), but the messenger provided the shock value: It was an advertisement for the local public library.

Once upon a time, libraries never had to market themselves. If you wanted to know something, they were the only game in town. They had a monopoly on knowledge that lasted for centuries or longer; however, it was a trust busted by the advent of Google, Amazon and numerous other internet resources. Suddenly this well-known entity was tasked with doing something that was once entirely unnecessary: It had to vie for our attention.

"Libraries realized they had to transition the way they were functioning in their communities because the world was changing around them," says Ben Bizzle,

CEO of Library Market, a solutions firm for libraries. "It's impressive to see an industry this large, that has been what it's been for so long, embrace that and make that transition."

Librarians themselves have two enormously important marketing skills working to their advantage: They're data-driven and creative. But there are obstacles that limit them, be it time, money or professional expertise. Plus their audience is no longer on site. The old ways of marketing the library, such as a pamphlet located at the check-out desk or a bookmark slipped inside a paperback, won't reach the desired customer anymore.

When Google and Amazon Inc. debuted in the mid-1990s, it was time for the library to move out from behind the desk and into people's lives. If libraries were going to spend their funding on collections, events and other resources, the audience needed to know they existed.

"As funding has become tighter, people have realized that it's really important to have good data usage and users who feel like the library is meeting their needs," says Mary Mackay, marketing director at the American Library Association. "It's no longer just a question of libraries pushing out information about the programs they're offering, it's more [about] community engagement."

A poster from the Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library advertising an event.

COMMUNITY STATISTICS

A public library's audience is its community, and that community can vary widely. Mary Beth Mulholland, director of marketing at the Chicago Public Library, can attest to just how varied and dynamic that group can be. Her library system has about 80 locations, one in every Chicago neighborhood, and each neighborhood's needs can be completely different. In addition, each patron within those neighborhoods requires different outreach.

CPL was looking to launch a campaign for its digital skill-building program for those with limited or no technological skills. The library typically aims to incorporate a digital element in its marketing efforts, such as social media or e-newsletters; however, those lacking digital skills weren't likely to see such ads.

"We backpedaled from that and couldn't do any digital advertising," Mulholland says. "We focused that campaign around the [Chicago Transit Authority] and print advertisement, which we hadn't done in a really long time."

Some of the most objective data sets libraries have at their disposal are basic demographics, which can be free and easy to access. Kathy Dempsey, conference chair for the Library Marketing and Communications Conference and founder of Libraries Are Essential says she often advises libraries to use U.S. Census data.

"Everything is free at census.gov," Dempsey says. "A very simple start that a library can do is look at their population area, get all the addresses within it and check their patron database against those addresses to see what percentage of people in their service area actually do have library cards."

Public libraries are often under city or county management, and those associations have a slew of geographic and demographic data that's free for the libraries to access. While the specifics of what cardholders check out remains private, libraries can track how much patrons check out and what type of media they access. A March 2016 report funded by the Institute of Museum and Library Services used 2014 patron and checkout data to group top library users by lifestyle, interest, preference and behavior. The report, "Core Customer Intelligence: Public Library Reach, Relevance, and Resilience," pulled this market segmentation data from 10 public library systems across the U.S.—a tactic often used by major corporations. One of the study's unexpected results, according to Library Journal, was the number of single-adult households that are core customers, which included both middle-class and so-called struggling households. The study also found Latino households to be one of the fastest-growing population groups among library users.

Should a library's budget allow, there are also products that provide a snapshot of specific communities. Analytics On Demand (AOD), a data solution from Gale, part of Cengage Learning, is intended to help libraries quickly and easily learn more about their users and communities. The platform allows libraries to upload their existing data—such as number of checkouts per household—and combine it with some other information from the U.S. Census Bureau and Experian, which specializes in consumer and business credit reporting and marketing services. The user chooses the geographic area to view, which can be narrowed by zip code, city or even driving distance from the library.

"What we wanted to do was take a look at the data any given library has access to," says David
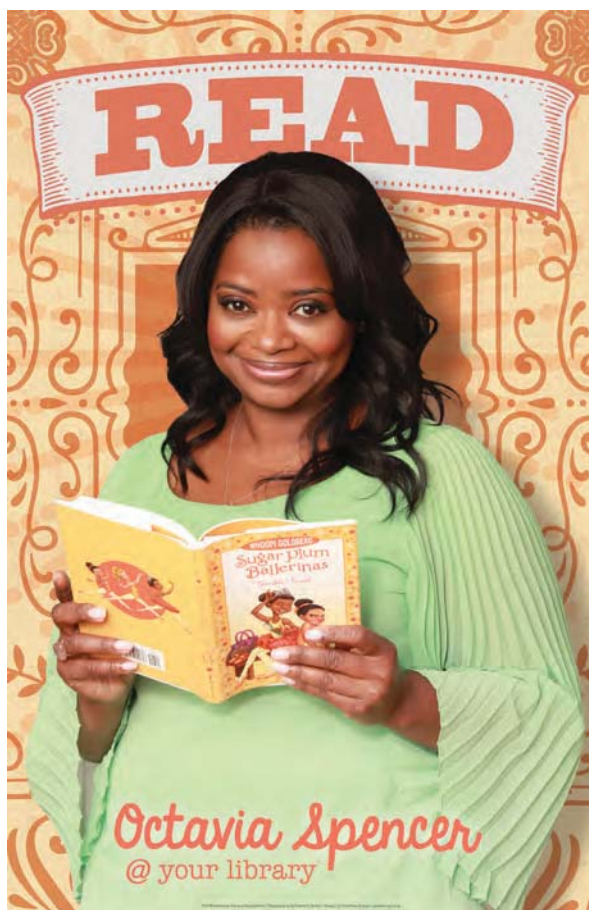
Ziembiec, western region district manager at Gale and co-founder of AOD. "Once we were able to find that out, we then asked the question: How can we turn that data into an actionable insight? It's really no different than how a business would do this."

Ziembiec says the Patron Profiles app is the cornerstone app on the service with 99% of AOD customers using it. The app provides libraries with a report that details where their patrons live, average household incomes and other details, such as Mosaic groups, a segmentation created by Experian that describes lifestyle information. With this report, marketers can anticipate the behavior, attitudes and preferences of various customers.

Sacramento Public Library was an early adopter of AOD. Amy Calhoun, communications and virtual services manager at SPL, says one of the most notable improvements in the library's marketing efforts since using AOD has been the open rate of its e-mails. Anyone who opens a library card or opts into the e-mail list receives newsletters from the library. When the library sent out e-mails to this general list detailing summer reading programs or other services, the open rate was about 12%.

SPL then decided to use the Mosaic profiles from the Patron Profiles app to sort its e-mail addresses. To promote tech classes or the library's e-book collection, SPL only e-mailed those considered tech-savvy or early adopters. The result was an open rate of 30% to 40%.

"We've learned that, rather than just going by zip code or even blasting the whole list, we want people to find the e-mail relevant and open it," Calhoun says. "Even if it's a segmented list, the higher open rate is important to us. Not only is it serving us better, but it's serving them better. They're finding the e-mail more relevant."

COMING UP SHORT

There may be data aplenty at the disposal of a given library, but from there, the momentum can often slow. Nancy Dowd, project lead for LibraryAware at NoveList EBSCO Publishing and co-author of *Bite-Sized Marketing: Realistic Solutions for the Overworked Librarian*, says the next step can often take a very sophisticated marketing strategy. Talking about community profiles means creating unique content for those groups and finding the appropriate communication channels to reach them.

Librarians receive little, if any, formal marketing education. The onus to gain marketing expertise falls on the librarian.

"Data is a first step," Dowd says. "Developing the mindset that your library is really going to respond to the needs of your community is something else."

Dowd says librarians tend to think in terms of creating programs and collections that they believe are good for the community. The missing piece is actually reaching out and connecting to that community. For example, while working at the Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library in Arkansas—of "Dumbledore dies" fame—Bizzle says he noticed a local bar and grill lacked drink coasters, so he asked if the library could make some for them. The coasters included spoofs of book titles (for example, "The Lion, the Witch and the Wardrobe Malfunction" or "The Girl with the Dragon Tattoo Parlor"), plus the library's web address. Bizzle figured people play on their smartphones while they wait for their food, so why not give them a website to visit?

Libraries can sometimes get overwhelmed with demographic information and other community statistics, and Dowd recommends starting simple. The Mamie Doud Eisenhower Public Library in Broomfield, Colorado, was an early adopter of AOD technology and has used it to better target those without library cards and focus its online marketing as well. There's still a lot more the data could be used for, says Kathryn Lynip, manager of collection and technology services at the library.

"We're basically still at the very start of this, and it would be beneficial for us to have someone that's dedicated to this," Lynip says. "It's a great tool, and we're just barely touching the surface of what we could be using it for if we were a little bit more targeted and more knowledgeable."

In November 2012, Library Journal surveyed library professionals from 471 public libraries and found 77% of respondents completely agree that library marketing increases overall community awareness of the library. Despite this, less than 20% of all libraries reported having a marketing plan in place, and only 11% of those were current and up-to-date. The survey also found 47% said they measure the effectiveness of their communications and 46% of respondents said evaluation/measurement is "a great idea, but we don't have time to do it." To Lynip's point, the need to market isn't lost on librarians, but their ability to do so is often the missing piece, whether because of a lack of time or expertise.

Librarians receive little, if any, formal marketing education. Dempsey says she performed a small survey of accredited library schools in the U.S. a few years ago, but of those 40 or 50 library schools, only one taught a full-semester marketing class as a core part of the curriculum. Another handful of them had a full-semester marketing class as an elective while many library schools cover marketing for a week or two under a management course. The onus to gain marketing expertise falls on the librarian.

"That's why [the Library Marketing and Communications Conference] has taken off so well,"

Campaign art from Chicago Public Library's 2015 summer learning challenge.

Dempsey says. "People get out of library school with all their knowledge of cataloging, technology, databases, information search and organization, but then they get into the day-to-day and they realize, we're doing all this great stuff and no one is using it."

Dempsey's book, *The Accidental Library Marketer*, describes the number of people who work in libraries

who never had that formal marketing class and suddenly need to catch up. To combat this gap, many libraries are starting to bring in an outside marketing perspective, those without a background in library science but expertise in fields such as information technology or public relations. These insights are adding value to the library and its programs and resources.
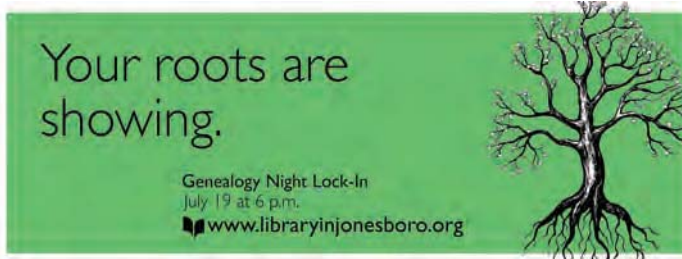
"These tools are great, but we still need to know how to use them," Lynip says. "Yes, librarians should be in libraries, but we could also be bringing in people from other professions to partner with us."

THE POWER OF PARTNERSHIPS

Libraries, at their core, specialize in the sharing of knowledge. Whether that means bringing in outsiders with new skill sets or sharing best practices among themselves, libraries have found ways to pull promotional concepts from a variety of communities.

The American Library Association has led a number of campaigns over the years, most notably the Celebrity READ Campaign and the @your library campaign. Its most recent effort is Libraries Transform, which just entered its second year. More than 3,700 libraries and supporters have joined the awareness program, many of which are small and rural libraries, Mackay says.

"A lot of big urban library systems have programs in place and professional marketers, but small libraries with few people on staff are less likely to have a marketing professional, so they need support, resources and tools," Mackay says. Libraries can join the campaign for free and download various tools and materials related to the effort. "One of the most important things we provide is a chance for people to find others in similar situations whom they can network with and then share ideas, as well as using tools and resources. ALA is an important hub for that networking and connection."

Jeff Julian, director of the ALA Public Awareness Office, says much of the success the Libraries Transform effort has had is driven by how individual libraries have used the campaign locally. Julian says the ALA turns these ideas into items for the campaign toolkit so others can pull from their success.

"I always talk about the campaign in three ways: that it can be used for awareness, it can be used for impact and it can be used to illustrate value," Julian says. "This is a plug-and-play marketing campaign. If you don't have a marketing department, if you don't even have a marketing person, which is the reality for a lot of libraries, this campaign is ready to go."

PHOTO: COURTESY OF BEN BIZZLE

Libraries succeed in marketing when their data is humanized, when they review their insights and reach out to meet the subjects.

Julian says the ALA also wanted the campaign to be flexible so libraries with well-established brands or big marketing departments could use elements individually or to illustrate a program.

The trends section of the Libraries Transform website provides some general insights and data, and Julian says individual libraries have localized some of this national information. For example, more than a quarter of U.S. households don't have a computer with an internet connection, according to Libraries Transform. Some libraries localized this number to reflect their own communities and used it in their own campaigns.

Julian says the ALA considers what external partnerships make sense as well, and they look to organizations that have similar values, missions or goals that the ALA or local libraries can work with to spread and amplify their messaging.

The Chicago Public Library won the 2016 John Cotton Dana Library Public Relations Award for its 2015 program, "Rahm's Reader's Summer Learning Challenge: Explore and Soar," thanks in part to collaborations. The program was designed in cooperation with the Museum of Science and Industry and was promoted through a variety of channels, including social media and branch librarians visiting schools. CPL also receives nonprofit rates for advertising on public transit and has a pro-bono partner in marketing agency FCB Chicago.

"We have a private funding partner, the Chicago Public Library Foundation, and that public-private partnership allows us to not only leverage the programmatic dollars, but be a little more flexible with our marketing and outreach abilities," Mulholland says.

There are other examples of small and large partnerships at work across the country. The Louisville Free Public Library, for instance, wanted to reach out to patrons in their 20s. To do so, the library partnered with a coffeehouse and a brewery for its adult reading program.

"It's a perfect partnership," Dowd says. "They might not have the connection to their 20-somethings, but the bars and the coffee shops do."

Libraries often share their marketing success stories at events or via online platforms. AD/LIB, a Tumblr-esque website, is intended to spark inspiration and features advertising, marketing and branding efforts by libraries or campaigns. It includes posters and art from Banned Books Week, a library relocation flier and infographics.

FINDING SUCCESS STORIES

Finding the ROI for library marketing can be a puzzle because libraries don't sell anything, nor do they promote with coupons that can be automatically tabulated. The defining outcome is added value.

"Much of what librarians do is personal service and helping people with particular problems—be it employment, trying to fix their résumés or learning a new skill so they can get another job," Dempsey says. "You just can't measure that sort of stuff."

Libraries succeed in marketing when their data is humanized, when they review their insights and reach out to meet the subjects. Bizzle says libraries must have an understanding of the effect that marketing has on the value of the services they provide. He says ROI for libraries can be measured in increased utilization and increased value.

Guerilla marketing is an excellent example of insight and action meeting, as it pushes the librarian and their libraries into the community. "Outside The Lines" is a weeklong campaign that brings libraries out to the community. The 2016 event, which included 264 participating organizations, sent book bikes gliding through neighborhoods and books to the beach and block parties where neighbors had a chance to meet.

Dowd says what may scare many libraries away from marketing is trying to do extensive community profiles and being overwhelmed with information. She says libraries can start with small insights and move from there. It's much more important to get out and engage.

"Outreach is about going to the schools and participating or setting up interactive locations, putting books on a bike and riding out into the neighborhood and having people come and browse," Bizzle says. "It's more of fitting in rather than being behind a table and talking." m