

## ***Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations.***

If you read only one management book this year, make it *Delivering Quality Service: Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations*. Your editor feels this book has so many important contributions to make to the marketing management of library/information services that it wasn't enough to write a short book review.

While other management books have dealt with "excellence" through example, the authors of this book have developed a research model to reveal the basic components of service excellence and how the components interact in the minds of customers, staff, and management. The result is a clearer understanding of how the balance between expectations and perceptions of service can be better managed.

While libraries do offer information products as tangibles, the major "product" of a library is service. The sign of a successful, healthy library business is its satisfied, repeat customers. But identifying the elements of a service that creates repeat customers can be tough. This is where the book can make a valuable contribution to a library's management and marketing strategy.

The authors begin their discussion by identifying 10 dimensions of service that customers typically use to evaluate service quality: tangibles, reliability, responsiveness, competence, courtesy, credibility, security, access, communication, and understanding the customer. The key to delivering high-quality service is to balance perceptions and expectations and close the gap between the two. The rest of the book is devoted to five important gaps in the perception/expectation equation that prevent the perfect balance.

**Gap 1. The discrepancy between what customers expect and what management perceives that they expect.** By taking the time to get out and talk with your customers – to find out what they need, what they think about your library's services, how they used the last information product the library sent them – you will be in a better position to close this gap. It's easy to find something to do in the library that seems to be more important, but nothing is more critical than finding out how your

library and its services are perceived by your current and potential customers. Don't wait for a user survey, start talking with customers today.

**Gap 2. The wrong service-quality standards.** Many times customer expectations are unrealistic or librarians use the wrong yardstick to measure performance. Unrealistic expectations can really hurt a library's image. An educated customer can be your best consumer. Use your library newsletter, orientation sessions, open houses, or other public forums to "educate" your target market on what can be expected from the library. If you are using circulation statistics to justify your library's existence, and your managers aren't responding, find out what they are using to measure productivity, and then change your yardstick accordingly.

**Gap 3. Service-performance gap: When employees are unable and/or unwilling to perform the service at the level desired by management.** This is where personnel management skills play a major role in empowering a staff to be marketing-oriented. Maybe a few pats on the back are needed, fewer restrictive rules, or improved morale. Maybe it will take an improved management strategy to get the needed technical or personal resources your staff needs to do the job your library is expected to provide. But if you don't do something, this service gap can come back to haunt you.

**Gap 4. When promises do not match delivery.** If you are concerned with what you promise in your advertising, personal sales, or public relations programs, you are dealing with this service gap problem. It is essential that you do not overpromise or misrepresent your library's services or products. Your editor has never noticed this to be a problem in libraries, but with the recent emphasis on promotion and cost recovery in some organizations, it is easy to fall into the trap.

**Gap 5. Customer expectations and perceptions of service quality do not match.** Together, the preceding four gaps form the ultimate hurdle to delivering quality service as defined and perceived by the library customer.

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## Pearls of Wisdom

Be careful not to put stationery with raised letters through your laser printer. Legal libraries in particular need to be careful, since most law firm stationery uses raised lettering on the letterhead. The chemicals used in the raised letter printing process (thermography) will not withstand the extreme heat produced by a laser printer. The result is a "melted" look. To overcome this problem, use flat printed stationery or letterhead that is genuinely engraved. If you don't know what printing process was used to produce the stationery, ask a printer for advice.

The latest issue of *Special Libraries* (Spring 1990) offers an interesting article by Betty Edison. "Strategies for Success (or Opportunities Galore)" reveals a number of ideas for successfully dealing with marketing challenges facing special libraries today.

Here's an idea from the Fort Frontenac Library in Kingston, Ontario. On the cover of their table of contents service they highlight excerpts and quotes from articles of interest. Makes you want to put everything else down and read what else is available from the library. Glenyss Turner, Head of Reader Services, says this and their pathfinder products are widely used. Notice what they named their pathfinders - *Research Road Maps* - an excellent title that conveys what the product is supposed to provide . . . and it's easy to remember.

Why use a magic marker to scrawl out your library hours or the days when your library is closed when you can get a complete set of "The Library Is Closed" posters for 13 nationally observed holidays? Each kit contains two 11" x 14" posters depicting various American historical events

and photographs of national sites. For order information write to: Identity Check Printers, Box 149-D, Park Ridge, IL 60068, or call 312/992-2051.

When you want to reveal information in stages during a presentation using overhead transparencies, consider putting each new "piece" of information on an overlay. Then when you want to "reveal" information, you can place the overlay on top of the original transparency. Using a piece of paper to prevent information from projecting, and then gradually moving the paper to reveal the information underneath can be awkward. Invariably the piece of paper slips, and the audience gets a peek at your hidden text. Most importantly the audience feels that information is being kept from them. When you use an overlay, they feel information is being given to them.

Norton Products makes a handy projection device that will project an image up to 27 times its size, so you can easily trace it. The "Easy Copy" Projector will also project objects or anything that you can sit the project on. It's portable (it resembles a large flashlight), which is nice for those times when you want to project just one image at a staff meeting or customer presentation, but don't want to fiddle with an overhead projector. The price is \$19.95 and there's a 30-day trial period. For more information, write to Norton Products, Dept. DC-54, 271 North Ave., New Rochelle, NY 10801.

Librarians who offer table of contents services, and who charge for the service or account for its cost, might be interested in a new service called Information Industry SCAN. For \$345 year a subscriber receives a publication every two weeks with the tables of contents from over 100 magazines in the information/communications industry. The price includes 10 copies of articles. Additional articles cost \$10 a piece. Your editor suggests looking at this new service for 1) price comparison to similar in-house library services, 2) packaging and promotion ideas for your own service, and 3) possible replacement of your library's own service, if justifiable. Write to Current Awareness Inc., 177 Main Street, Suite 235, Fort Lee, NJ 07024, or call 201/461-5136.

Just announced! The 1991 National Library Week Theme is "Read. Succeed.". Materials for the new campaign will be introduced at the National Library Week workshop on June 25th during the ALA conference in Chicago.

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Missing issues must be reported within 3 months of issue date. Missing issues requested after this time will be supplied at the regular back-issue price.

The Marketing Treasures office may be reached via fax at 301/647-0415.



## Profile: National Library Week

A number of *Marketing Treasures*' readers applied energy and imagination to their observances of National Library Week (NLW). Here are several brief accounts of observances by colleagues.

Carol Feder of Unisys Corporation (Plymouth, MI location) held an open house on the morning of April 26th. To announce NLW and the open house, she had an invitation created and enlarged as a full color poster for the main entrance of the building. She also had smaller versions of the poster placed on bulletin boards throughout the building. Just in case people blinked when then walked in the building or passed a bulletin board, Carol invited every employee via mail with a personal copy of the announcement.

**Plymouth**  
**INFO**  
**Center**

**UNISYS**

Plymouth Technical Information Center  
Plymouth Plant, Building 1  
41100 Plymouth Rd.  
Plymouth, MI 48170  
(313) 451-4512  
NET\* 262-4512

Marketing dialogues and demonstrations to help people use the library were held during the open house. A representative from Unisys Quality Management spoke about how departments can work with the library to improve quality, and showed tapes on quality control.

Carol even got the library recognized at the company lunch table, where the cafeteria substituted library-related names for menu items.

To capitalize on the increased visibility from her NLW program, Carol had a new logo designed for the library. Applied to stationery and bookmarks, the new logo will serve to visually remind people of the library and its good services and products long after NLW is over. Shown here is the bookmark. It's printed on light teal colored paper with black and dark teal ink colors. Very handsome.

The library at Central Maine Power combined NLW with an Earth Day observance. The library sponsored a lunchbox seminar and invited a well-known Maine author to speak, followed by a slide show about Maine's natural resources.

On Thursday the library held their annual open house with refreshments and tours of the library. Various exhibits were set up that included newly acquired computer database programs with related performance graphs, and new publications with sign-up borrowing sheets.

Betsy Brooke says the library's NLW activities were very well attended with one of the biggest "hits" being the showing of an old restored film of a 1928 company picnic.

Lynn Schwartz at the Allentown Osteopathic Medical Center library implemented an innovative approach to the traditional "prize drawing contest". During NLW the library featured a "Pick Your Own Prize Drawing". The library purchased 13 different prizes – books on medical topics, gardening, exercise, and cooking, and two tote bags. Each prize was represented by a container. Every time a person came into the library he or she received a ticket that could be placed in the container representing the prize of choice. This approach allowed everyone to select a prize of special interest to them, and also increased the chances of winning.

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## Worth Its Weight in Gold

Successfully introducing a new product into the marketplace is a very difficult task. *Marketing Treasures'* readers should not be discouraged if a new library service or product doesn't fly. According to industry estimates, only about 15% of all products introduced in the last decade are considered successful. Recently, the Comart Consulting Group talked to 50 companies about their new product successes and failures. What they learned can help librarians implement successful new product/service introductions.

- 1. Listen to consumers and understand how people used the product.** Library customers are the best source of new product and service ideas. Make it a practice to talk with library customers; they can be excellent sounding boards with insights that can prove invaluable. When you have an idea, do some preliminary research with current customers. It doesn't have to be in-depth, fancy research. Just get enough feedback to determine if you have a viable idea that warrants continuation. Consider establishing a library consumer panel, if you want to formalize customer input into your development process.
- 2. Don't try to enter a market too far removed from the core business strengths.** It's okay to diversify, but the best diversification builds on what your library already does best – manage information. It's hard enough to introduce a new product that builds on your existing resources and knowledge. Trying to introduce a product or service that requires a new set of abilities and resources may be more than your library business can handle. So put that pet grooming service idea on the back burner, and investigate the database instruction service instead.
- 3. Avoid bad introductory timing.** Some products enter the market too soon, before the target market is ready for them. Don't plan to introduce an electronic newsletter if most people in your target market don't have ready access to a computer terminal. Conversely, some products enter the market too late, after the competition has already established brand loyalty.

Above all, don't fall in love with your new product or service. When it comes to product development, objectivity is . . . worth its weight in gold!

## Promotion Gems

When you create a logo for your library you should also create a set of guidelines for its usage. One such guideline is how the logo is used in various graphic situations.

Many logos contain the name of the organization for which they stand. There is nothing wrong with this. But when it's time to apply the logo to various Library products, such as cover sheets, bulletins, flyers, announcements, etc. there might be a temptation to let the logo modify the product title.

Take for instance, a library's acquisitions list. Why not just put the logo design next to the words "acquisitions list" on the cover sheet? If you let the logo modify the name, you will be losing the visual impact of the logo. Every time the logo modifies a product or service name, the logo loses its ability to independently identify the Library as an organization. Another problem will surface when you try to write out the proper name of the product – is it the "acquisitions list", or the "Library XYZ acquisitions list"?

If you find yourself inclined to use your logo design to modify a product or service name because the name seems too generic or non-descriptive, take a few minutes and change the name. Use a modifier or a completely different set of words to name your library product. You can always use colors to modify a product name, i.e. The Green Guide to . . . , or Code Red Document Service. Obviously, the color can be reflected in the paper and ink colors. Above all, make sure the name is meaningful and not a library jargon term. A good example is the Fort Frontenac Library pathfinder name "Research Road Maps" (see Pearls of Wisdom).

Other related tips for library name treatments include keeping your library's name from becoming a generic term by not using the name in the possessive form. For instance, rather than saying "the Information Resource Center's computer search services are superior," reword the statement to "the Information Resource Center provides superior computer search services." Another way to keep your library's name from becoming generic is to always capitalize its spelling and use it as a proper noun followed by a descriptive term. For example, Library photocopying services.



## Sparkling Reviews

*Information Marketing Handbook*. Edited by Betty Unruh. The National Federation of Abstracting and Information Services, Philadelphia, PA, 1989. ISBN: 0-942308-24-7 \$50.00 (non-members)

Just when you think you have a marketing book that can be used by library managers, it turns out to be geared to the information industry. The *Information Marketing Handbook* has some good information and ideas to offer librarians, but not as much as the title might suggest.

The book is actually a compilation of chapters by five people writing in the areas of their expertise. While this is usually a good approach, in this case it has produced an uneven treatment of topics, with some redundancy.

The book begins with an excellent, brief discussion on strategic planning, and progresses to the centerpiece article on marketing. Unfortunately, the chapter author spends too much time defining marketing concepts that you can find in any marketing textbook, and never really applies the concepts to information marketing challenges, except on a very superficial level.

There is one chapter on pricing, which is so short your editor almost missed it. Librarians will be able to pick up pointers from the chapter on customer service. The chapter on overseas marketing is very enlightening.

If you are considering a career move to the vendor side of the street, this book may give you some interesting insights – although if there is a need for this level of marketing guide, then maybe it isn't greener on the other side . . . ? On the other hand, if you are thinking about embarking upon a commercial information project, this book offers a quick "jump start" into the marketing process.

*Customer Perceptions . . . continued from page 1*

The last portion of the book is devoted to discussing suggestions for eliminating service quality gaps. While the book tends to be a little academic in areas, its discussions and ideas can be important contributions to a library's approach to marketing management. *Delivering Quality Service: Balancing Customer Perceptions and Expectations* by V. Zeithaml, A. Parasuraman, and L. Berry. Free Press, 1990. ISBN: 0-02-935701-2. \$24.95.

## The Crystal Ball

June 18 - 22 "Strategic Marketing Planning". Program offered by The University of Michigan Business School in Ann Arbor. Contact: Pam Stator 313/763-4229.

June 20 "Persuasive Writing Skills". Seminar offered by Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore. Contact: 301/659-8211.

June 22 "How to Proofread". Seminar offered by Fred Pryor Seminars in Philadelphia. Contact: 800/255-6139.

June 22 "Desktop Publishing and Beyond". Pre-conference course at the ALA annual conference in Chicago. Contact: 800/545-2433 or 312/290-5038.

June 23 "Financial and Cost Accounting". Pre-conference course at the ALA annual conference in Chicago. Contact: Alia Al-Taqi 800/545-2433.

June 23 "Measure for Measure: Expectations and Performance Measures". Two o'clock program at the ALA annual conference in Chicago. Sponsored by the Association of College and Research Libraries.

June 24 "Image Management: Value, Vision, and Visibility". Presentation by Kaycee Hale at the ALA Black Caucus session at the ALA annual conference in Chicago. Contact: John Tyson 804/289-8456.

June 25 - 27 "Marketing for the Non-Marketing Manager". Program offered by The University of Michigan Business School in Ann Arbor. Contact: Pam Stator 313/763-4229.

June 29 "How to Write, Design, and Produce Your Newsletter". Seminar in Chicago offered by Ragan Communications. Contact: 800/878-5331 or 312/922-6267.

July 16 - 17 "Planning and Marketing Information Services". Seminar by Darlene Weigand at the University of Wisconsin in Madison. Contact: 608/262-6398.

July 19 - 20 "Designing Successful Brochures Using D.T.P.". Seminar offered by Clemson University in Arlington, Virginia. Contact: 803/656-2667.

August 8 - "Practical Marketing Research". Seminar in New York City offered by the Burke Institute. Contact: 800/544-7373.

September 6 "Writing & Designing Successful Promotional Materials". Seminar offered by Clemson University in Greensboro, NC. Contact: 803/656-2667.

September 10 "Demystifying Marketing Strategies". Seminar by Chris Olson for the NY/NJ Chapter of the Medical Library Association in New York City. Contact: Richard Farsino 212/340-5397.

September 11 "Scared Speechless". Workshop by Kaycee Hale in Washington, D.C. Contact: Leigh Watson Healy 800/225-6055.

September 15 "The Information Broker's Seminar". Offered by Sue Rugge in Los Angeles. Contact: 415/649-9743.

September 23 - 26 Marketing Research Conference in Chicago. Sponsored by the American Marketing Association. Contact: 312/648-0536.

September 26 "Library Expressions of Excellence". Presentation by Kaycee Hale for the Missouri Library Association in Kansas City, MO. Contact: Fred Rathol 800/325-0131.