

## *Marketing Today's Academic Library*

Brian Mathews. *Marketing Today's Academic Library: A Bold New Approach to Communicating with Students*. Chicago: American Library Association, 2009. 171 pp. \$48.00. Paper. ISBN: 9780838909843.

**M**arketing *Today's Academic Library* is Brian Mathews' first solo, book-length publication. Mathews co-edited ARL's SPEC Kit 306: *Promoting the Library* with Jon Bodnar in 2008. Mathews has documented much of his work on his blog, The Ubiquitous Librarian (<http://theubiquitouslibrarian.typepad.com/>), and has a regular column, Social Eyes, in the *Journal of Web Librarianship* (<http://www.lib.jmu.edu/org/jwl/>). Mathews also contributes to other professional library periodicals in the areas of marketing, reference, social networking, and the future of libraries. In his role as User Experience Librarian at Georgia Institute of Technology he has had the opportunity to bring together his interests in emerging technology and marketing to experiment with an array of student-focused projects. Mathews is an "Ideas Man," and in this book he delivers a framework for creating successful marketing ideas to the reader.

Mathews' primary audience is academic librarians who primarily serve the needs of their large undergraduate bodies, but the theological librarian can still benefit greatly from this text. He provides a road map for developing a comprehensive and successful marketing strategy that is oriented around addressing the lifestyles of library users. Mathews' first chapter begins by inquiring into the library's need to advertise. He correctly identifies a common problem: if libraries advertise at all it is often fragmented and inconsistent. Mathews provides a framework for developing targeted marketing campaigns. He is not talking about creating slogans or branding; rather he is promoting the idea of a user experience. When our users feel connected to the library they can begin to understand the value of the library. This approach to marketing is somewhat counterintuitive to methods that libraries currently use. Our usual aim is to convince users of the value of our collections or services with little or no regard to their own needs. Mathews' approach, alternatively, starts and ends with the user. In the next nine chapters he addresses step-by-step how to develop a marketing plan from "Defining the User" to "Measuring the Impact." Throughout the book, Mathews gives brief snapshots of the history of marketing and current marketing strategies. These references add weight to his approach, but thankfully do not turn his work into a Marketing 101 textbook. The final chapter, "Putting It All Together," provides four real-library campaign examples from planning to assessment, providing tools for assessing the success of a library's marketing campaign.

I found chapters 2-4 to be the most useful. In chapters 2 and 3, Mathews provides the librarian with a new set of glasses for viewing her users. Here Mathews looks at general commonalities and notable differences between users. For example, almost all students have in common a semester timetable within which to work, but student library needs differ depending on what week of the semester it is and where that person is in their degree program. Some students come to the library for academic needs, some for social. All of this information that we casually know about our users can be used strategically to enhance our marketing efforts. For instance, during the first week of the semester the library should work hard at being a welcoming and social place. The library's aim should be to get students in the building so they feel comfortable there. It is not the time to push workshops and databases—students do not need those resources and skills just yet. Chapter 4 looks at the library and its products. Most of

our libraries have more to offer students than books and computers. Mathews provides some useful handouts for brainstorming and categorizing all of the services, resources, and amenities that the library offers. These individual offerings can then be grouped together into product lines that are mixed and matched as a portfolio of products that in turn address specific users. For example, suppose you want to target first-year students. These students may be most interested to know that you offer group work spaces, wireless internet access, leisure reading material, and coffee. When developing a campaign for incoming students you will want to highlight these “products.”

The subtitle of Mathews’ book, *A Bold New Approach to Communicating with Students*, suggests that old marketing strategies will no longer do. In an age of social networking and constant internet connection, the lives of students are busier, more frenetic, and sometimes fragmented. Mathews is right to suggest that the library cannot continue with business as usual if it desires to have a greater role in the lives of students. Mathews’ ideas are bold and creative and may not be well suited for all libraries or campus cultures. Yet the framework he proposes is a good starting point for fresh ideas and will certainly help your library to begin thinking about campaigns that work well for your students and campus. This is due to the fundamental recommendation of Mathews’ book, which is a challenge to the librarian to get to know her students.

While there are a few useful handouts and diagrams in the book, I was surprised by the lack of color or black and white photos of the campaigns Mathews has developed. Since our age is a visual one, some photos with examples would have been helpful. This is especially true since the traditional librarian tends to think more in terms of texts than images, and usually lacks the graphic design skills or staff to assist in developing high-quality, visually interesting materials.

In his blog, Mathews described the book as “a personal handbook” ([http://theubiquitouslibrarian.typepad.com/the\\_ubiquitous\\_librarian/books/](http://theubiquitouslibrarian.typepad.com/the_ubiquitous_librarian/books/)). The average theological librarian probably cannot help feeling a bit envious of the amount of time and money Mathews has been able to devote to marketing. In many theological libraries staff numbers are dwindling, and many librarians may feel overwhelmed by the amount of effort, attention, and research recommended for developing a comprehensive marketing plan. We might not all be able to achieve a comprehensive plan, but our marketing efforts, small as they may be, could benefit from the approach that Mathews supports. The ATLA’s Theological Libraries Month participants could pool their talent to develop a comprehensive plan for marketing theological libraries to students and faculty, using this book as a guide. *Marketing Today’s Academic Library* is recommended to those with an interest in developing a marketing plan for their libraries. If you are interested in some new creative ideas, I would recommend that you visit the author’s blog.

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