

# Cover Notes

## Academic Library Users: What Do They Really Want?

by GWEN M. GREGORY

### Creating the Customer-Driven Academic Library

by Jeannette Woodward  
Chicago: ALA, 2009  
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You may think that an academic library is a building full of book stacks and places for quiet study. Or you may think of it as a busy information commons stocked with banks of workstations. But what is the physical presence of the academic library these days, and how should we plan for its future? What do our users want and need from us? What issues should we be considering in our 21st-century libraries?

You may have all of these questions (and many more) spinning around in your head with nowhere to go and without any answers. Author Jeannette Woodward offers a constructive paradigm to consider as we find our place in academia now and in the future.

Woodward became a library and non-profit consultant after retiring from a career in academic library administration. Her many years of academic experience show in this book through her deep understanding of how academia works and the challenges it holds for librarians.

In this book, she focuses on the library's physical presence, both the building and that of the staff members, rather than on electronic resources and services. Most university and college campuses retain an important physical presence, and the library is part of this.

### Creating Characters

To help readers see how the library appears to our users, Woodward creates several "characters" and describes their

library experiences. These characters include a second-year undergraduate, a returning evening student, and a graduate student doing doctoral research.

I especially appreciated the point of view of the sophomore student showing up for her first experience doing research at a university library. We follow this student, Sharon, through her search for reference help, her use of the OPAC, and her need to find a bathroom. She is often frustrated by the lack of visible library staff as well as poor signage and an unwelcoming atmosphere. She doesn't feel particularly



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respected or valued during her visit. Woodward makes the connection here with the concept of Library 2.0. This term has been tossed around for the past few years, and it's not applicable just to the online library experience. Woodward points out that an important part of Library 2.0 is radical trust, "the willingness of library decision makers to trust their customers

to help them redefine and redesign the library." It can be hard for us to ask what users want and then try to do it. However, if we don't, we will likely be relegated to the list of campus nonessentials.

Woodward also shares some interesting ideas about library staffing. Again she introduces us to a few characters: a reference librarian and a paraprofessional head of circulation. She suggests that many professional librarians don't get the opportunity to develop or use leadership skills; they are often pigeonholed into jobs without supervisory responsibilities, while many nonlibrarians end up in jobs where they are setting policies and handling customers daily.

### Getting Librarians to Know Their Users

Are we fully developing and using the skills and capabili-



ties of our professional librarians? Are they involved in planning and decision making, or are they being "sidelined"? We may not be using our staff resources fully. We should also take a look at what staff members do every day. Are most of them hidden away from helping or dealing with users? Do they "view themselves as hosts, welcoming the public to their realm"? If not, how can we work toward that attitude? We should structure our organization so that staff members are comfortable working with the users and know the overall purpose of the library. This may mean changes in many jobs. Woodward even suggests

moving staff work areas into the public parts of the library, especially in a large building with many unstaffed areas.

Staying within the realm of the physical library, this book emphasizes the importance of the library as a great place to be. This means making the physical space pleasant and usable with appropriate furnishings. When selecting furniture, she recommends getting opinions from the students. There should be proper lights, effective signage, plenty of electrical outlets, and reliable networking. It's even OK to make cozy spaces with comfortable chairs and individual lighting. If they want food and coffee, what are the options? Are you driving them away because they are hungry? Many libraries have relaxed their food and drink policies, and cafes or coffee carts are common in many library settings.

Once again, let's ask our users what they want. This will be specific to your institution. The needs at a large university with many commuter students will differ from those at a small residential college. Even electronic services must be rolled out on an as-needed basis, since not everything online will be used. Students won't use a library webpage if it doesn't provide the information they want or need.

I really appreciated all the ideas in this book. Woodward offers so many great thoughts that at least a few will be applicable to any academic librarian. She encourages us to get into our users' heads and understand what they want and need, and then build our services and facilities based on those concepts. This is a great idea book; it will lead readers to a re-examination of how they see academic libraries.

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### Meet the Editor

## Kathy Dempsey: Marketing to Keep Libraries Going

by LAUREE PADGETT

Perhaps it was Kathy Dempsey's destiny that as the first New Year's baby in 1965 to voice her arrival in Trenton, N.J., she would become a heralding voice for libraries in her home state, nationally, and even globally.

### Only Yesterday ...

Dempsey became the editor of *MLS: Marketing Library Services* newsletter in

1994 when Information Today, Inc. was still Learned Information, Inc. (LII) and she was still Kathy Miller. She took over from Sharon LaRosa, who was the original editor when Riverside Data, Inc. first started *MLS* in 1987.

In 1990, the newsletter was sold to LII, which published the February/March 1991 issue as its first edition.

When Dempsey took over in 1994, the content, which originally covered corporate libraries, began focusing on public and academic libraries. She made *MLS* less formal and started including more practical articles. Today, Dempsey describes her publication as a "newsletter [that] helps librarians and other information professionals learn to promote their organizations and their own expertise. It covers marketing, promotion, advocacy, public relations, advertising, program planning, fundraising, and the like."



Laaree Padgett





She also says, “Many libraries don’t have dedicated marketing staff, so lots of people end up doing parts of these processes, from directors to children’s librarians and beyond.” *MLS* features case studies about projects that others have done, as well as advice, tips, conference coverage, book reviews, and news.

Every issue (six per year) has a cover story, a “how-to” feature, a book review, and news, in addition to longtime library marketing expert Christie Koontz’s thrice yearly Customer-Based Marketing column, which combines library data with geographic, demographic, and census data. A department called Spectacles by Ruth Kneale explores how popular culture (comic strips, books, movies, and more) views librarians; the Ideas for Programs & Promotions column is just that: a short section of events/anniversaries/observances from *Chase’s Calendar of Events* reference book that gives librarians program ideas to mark these occasions.

Dempsey’s 2009 hot topics and her concerns go hand in hand: maintaining funding in a tough economy by proving your ROI to those providing it—anyone “holding the purse strings,” including funders, administrators, politicians, and deans.

Interestingly, Dempsey thinks the state of the economy hasn’t made marketing more of a priority for libraries. “Many public libraries are busier than ever (and have the stats to prove it),” she says, “because people who never used them before are coming in to learn to write resumes, get help posting them on job sites, and doing job searches on library PCs if they don’t have their own.” She adds that patrons are borrowing more (books, music, and movies) to save money, and they are suddenly valuing libraries more.

Although that sounds like a good thing, Dempsey says that because of the influx of people, librarians are feeling no need to promote themselves and are too busy to do it anyway. She is afraid that many public librarians will “ride this wave of wonderful public service,” but when the economy turns around, they will be no better off as far as being valued by society.

### By the Time I Get to Phoenix ...

Dempsey, who spent time in the Netherlands this spring, spoke more about this very topic at a symposium on April 24 in Delft. She proposes that librarians “need to find their phoenix,” that mythological bird that bursts into flames and rises up out of the ashes either as a new bird or as an egg that hatches. As budgets shrink and technology and information seem to be everywhere, how will libraries survive? For Dempsey, this can only happen by letting them reinvent themselves. She is encouraging librarians to look ahead. “I am asking librarians: What will your phoenix be? What will your new library look like and do? What will your patrons want in the future?”

Librarians answer these questions through “true marketing,” which she defines as asking your users what they want, designing those services, and showing them to the customers to see if their wants and needs are being met. If not, “Tweak if necessary, launch the desired services, and promote them to tell everyone you’ve done what they asked,” she says. Then, it’s important to keep in touch with customers via relationships, surveys, focus groups, and so on, to make sure



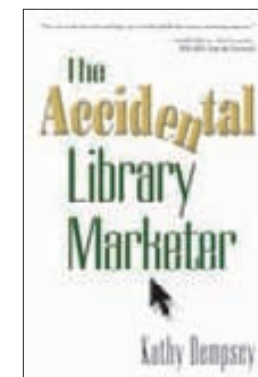
you are always giving them what they need. “True marketing is not a process with a beginning and an end,” she says. “It’s a cycle that never ends.”

### Hit the Road

Something that did end for Dempsey was editing *Computers in Libraries (CIL)* magazine, which she had done since ITI bought the publication in 1995. She started out as associate editor in 1995 and became the editor in 2000, although she didn’t get the “in chief” officially added to her title until 2003. She had a foolish notion that by stepping down from *CIL* in 2007, she would have more free time.

In 2008, she was project editor for an ITI book, *ShanachieTour: A Library*

*Road Trip Across America*, “a story about three Dutch librarians who drove across the U.S. visiting libraries while videotaping and photographing the journey.” She then decided to write her own book, which will be part of ITI’s “Accidental” series. She describes her tome, *The Accidental Library Marketer*, as “an A-to-Z guide for all those folks in libraries who have ended up doing promotion and marketing even though they’ve never been taught how.”



Now that she has finished her book, she finally has time to spend on her own marketing consulting firm, Libraries Are Essential. In this capacity, Dempsey is busy with speaking engagements and writing, offering librarians advice and consulting on marketing, public relations, and promotion. She has spoken at the New Jersey Library Association (NJLA) regional co-ops and Special Libraries Association, and she will be doing a workshop for WebSearch University this September.

While she might not have the free time she thought she’d have at this time, she is busy ensuring that libraries continue to “live long and prosper.”

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## Hopelessly Devoted to ... Intranets

Last April in my interview with Michelle Manafy, editor-in-chief of EContent, we briefly touched on her other publication, *Intranets* (see April 2009, IT). This month, editorial assistant Eileen Mullan whipped up the following description about this “ultimate intranet resource.”—LP

*Intranets* is a publication devoted to covering the strategies and the tools necessary to successfully manage intranets, portals, extranets, and other knowledge management initiatives. Designed to serve the range of professionals involved in intranet management, each issue of *Intranets* provides in-depth analysis of the latest trends affecting the industry as a whole.

Founded in 1998, the newsletter was originally known as *Intranet Professional*. In 2004, Michelle Manafy was asked to relaunch the publication and give it an enterprise focus. The publication underwent an extensive overhaul of its content and design, and a companion website (www.intranets today.com) was created to provide subscribers with a deep resource. Issues of *Intranets* usually contain two feature articles, best-practices case studies, as well as strategic information and analysis. With contextually relevant and useful images accompanying these features, as well as a “Vital Stat”—an at-a-glance image of current industry statistics—*Intranets* strives to arm intranet managers with the tools they need to perform their jobs effectively.

*Intranets* also offers reviews and advice from top industry professionals, such as the publication’s contributing editor, Martin White, managing director of Intranet Focus Ltd. White writes the Read Me File section each issue, presenting readers with an examination of the latest books, blogs, and reports that will impact intranet workers. For a highly condensed view of the most current industry news, readers can browse The News and Tools section, while a rotating roster of regular columns such as International Intranets and Social Work supply advice and guidance from expert intranet professionals around the world, including Jane McConnell, who produces the annual “Global Intranet Trends” report, and Paul Miller, founder and CEO of the Intranets Benchmarking Forum.

According to White, “*Intranets* represents the only regular report of intranet best practice and trends from a global perspective.” While other publications touch on subjects of interest to those involved in intranet, portal, and extranet deployments, *Intranets* remains the industry’s premier pure-play publication on these topics. “Today, organizations must effectively manage their human and intellectual capital to survive and thrive,” says Manafy. “At *Intranets*, we work to deliver the latest thinking along with proven and practical strategies to help maximize these valuable assets.”