LJ talks with
Nancy Dowd,
project lead for
NoveList's LibraryAware
By Alison Circle

A NEW PLAYER IN MARKETING

In today's world, savvy businesses know that they can no longer just sell a product. Similarly, when a marketplace is roiling with change (like the library field), many companies shift their focus to help it compete—especially (as is the case with libraries) when there is little institutional history to drive that sense of competition.

Among the companies and organizations that have stepped up their efforts in recent years to deliver on library support are groups like the American Library Association (ALA) and its Public Library Association (PLA) division, which provide hands-on tools such as the Advocacy Tool-Kit or modifiable templates that support programs like Ready To Read. ProQuest's website too, offers similar promotional templates. Gale Cengage Learning has created a customizable widget of Columbus Metropolitan Library, OH, business content to enable us to push that content out of the defined walls of our website and embed it into the community itself. And Geek the Library, OCLC's community awareness

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campaign, provides professional materials and templates, including marketing strategy support. Businesses do this because they understand that their own livelihood depends on the success of the marketplace.

Now NoveList, known for its readers' advisory tools, is getting in the game with a new product, LibraryAware. I sat down with Nancy Dowd, project lead for LibraryAware Publishing and former director of marketing at the New Jersey State Library. Besides getting a firsthand look at the product, we talked about the impetus behind LibraryAware.

While Products like LibraryAware can help libraries create and deliver promotional materials, it is important to remember that marketing is a much larger process. It includes knowing your customers' needs, developing programs and services that fill those needs, and measuring and evaluating the results. While I'm excited for libraries that don't have the resources to professionalize their marketing and promotion, I'll add one comment. For the past several years, many of us have been evangelizing about the need for libraries to understand and value the skills that marketing professionals bring. While LibraryAware works as a step in getting libraries in the right direction, it isn't a substitute for the real thing.

LJ: Why did NoveList come up with this concept? Isn't it a little far afield from its core business?

Dowd: Two years ago, NoveList funded a national marketing study to identify libraries' needs. It was no surprise to us that "help promoting programs and services" was high on the list. Libraries were also facing funding problems and staff shortages. We knew there was a tremendous need for communities to be aware of the value of their libraries and figured it was time to build something that would address those issues.

How did you get involved with NoveList? Weren't you in New Jersey?

I was working as director of marketing for the New Jersey State Library when a friend emailed a job posting for a person to lead the development of a new marketing product NoveList was creating. Within six weeks, I said good bye to the beautiful Jersey shore and moved to Durham, NC, to pursue the answer to the question I'd heard through all my work and travels over the years: "How can [libraries] effectively help our communities become aware of everything we have when we are so strapped for time and resources?"

How does LibraryAware answer that question?

We are building a product that makes it so easy for librarians to create and deliver promotional items that they don't need a lot of time or staffing to do it. Librarians will be able to utilize all of the communication channels needed to reach the media, customers, politicians, organizations, sponsors, you name it. It's not quite the push of one button, but it's close. Not only that, but we're helping them to have their branding in place, writing copy for them to use, giving them professional designs, and providing a library of great graphics (read: no clip art!). We are even working on metrics to help them make the next promotion even better.

Give us a "for example"—how does LibraryAware work?

Imagine a library has decided to run a series of workshops to help job seekers and wants to promote it to the community. You open LibraryAware and decide you want to create a flyer. You can design it from scratch, or you can select a template. We have an in-house graphic designer who has created tons of templates to give you lots of choices. You write a headline and brief program description. You can use the image from the template or replace it with yours, click "save," and it becomes a PDF that can be printed.

LibraryAware uses that information to populate any other promotional item you want to create. So, essentially, with a few clicks, you can create a flyer, bookmark, email blast, press release; post it to social media sites; and even send a few letters to invite local stakeholders—all with a cohesive look and feel and your library's branding. It streamlines the whole promotional process while giving librarians a tool that will produce professional-level designs.

That's some of the "what" it can do. What are the benefits?

We know the name of the game is to make sure our communities are aware of library value. And that means making sure the right message gets to the right people. That message gets heard when your promotional materials look good, speak to the right audience, have a clear message. That's what LibraryAware offers.

As I am out talking with libraries, I always have to start with the idea that marketing isn't the posters and the fliers. It's about understanding the needs of your customers through measurement. Can LibraryAware provide that?

Like you, Alison, I am a firm believer in metrics in market-ing. In the library world, we don't do that enough—if at all—when it comes to our promotional efforts. LibraryAware is working on creating metrics to measure effectiveness across online platforms so that you can understand the impact of your efforts and make adjustments if the promotion isn't working its hardest for you.

Why would NoveList devote resources toward a product like this? Is there a risk that libraries will be confused about why you are doing it and…perhaps a bit of skepticism as well?

This is just an extension of what NoveList already does. We are committed to helping libraries be successful. That means we have to be about more than just books. For us, our business is to do everything we can to help affirm the value libraries bring to our society. We believe a community that is aware of all the programs, products, and services its library offers has an advantage over the community that still believes a library is just a place to borrow books. In a "library aware" community, it is easier to attract champions and sustain funding.

How do you plan to launch NoveList in the library marketplace?

We are driving to have it ready for PLA [in March 2012], where we hope to have a strong presence. If librarians can't make it to PLA, we will have lots of information on our website, including webinars and tutorials on how to make it work. But if we've done our work right, most people aren't going to need any hand-holding from us. The product will be very easy to get started and to use.

Everyone will want to know: What's the cost?

We are developing the pricing structure currently. Library-Aware will be offered on a subscription basis and will be priced based on population served. We believe the pricing will be affordable and of good value to the public library market.

Some of this makes me a little uneasy. With all due respect to library staff, aren't we trying to move the library industry in the direction of professionalizing marketing and promotion, not just making it a stretch assignment?

Great question, Alison. Most marketing departments in libraries only have one or two people, and their time is really stretched. Our advisory board members have told us they like the idea of being able to have other library staff create materials for local programs so they can concentrate on the "big picture" work of marketing: planning, brand development, messaging, expanding partnerships, customer segmentation. Can you envision how powerful it would be if we could free up marketing departments that way?

How does this differ from OCLC's Geek the Library?

LibraryAware is the Geek the Library campaign concept on steroids. It empowers libraries to create a professional level of promotional materials for everything they are doing, not just "big picture" public awareness with great messaging and branding. Plus, it gives them the ability to deliver it through every communication channel possible.

How do you suggest libraries integrate LibraryAware with other template tools like those from ALA or PLA?

It would be amazing for us to talk to ALA and see if we could add its public awareness campaigns to LibraryAware. We have the capability to do that, and it would really make it easy for libraries to implement them. ∎