

A Case Study of Narrative Marketing and Appreciative Inquiry in a Special Library

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Setting

- North Carolina Biotechnology Center (NC Biotech)
 - Private, non-profit organization that promotes economic development in North Carolina
 - Headquarters in Research Triangle Park, with regional offices in across the state
 - Supports a small, specialized library in its headquarters



Problem Definition

- Special libraries are increasingly concerned with demonstrating value and return on investment
- Where could the library improve its value?
 - Increase usage by external users
- How can the NC Biotech library increase its visibility to outside users?

Narrative Marketing

- Grounded in narrative theory, which argues that **storytelling** is the primary way that humans communicate and understand information.
- People best comprehend and recall events that can be viewed as story arcs that involve **characters** and unfold with distinct **beginnings, middles, and ends**



Narrative Marketing

- Effective marketing campaigns create stories that are **customer focused** rather than product or service focused.
- These campaigns enable consumers to **co-create the meaning and value** of a product or service.
- Marketing materials should tell a story that allows customers to envision how using a product or service would improve their outcomes.



Appreciative Inquiry

- Organizational philosophy that also originated psychology research
- Organizations should focus on improving what they do well, rather than working towards eliminating what they do poorly
- Organizations should invite feedback from all sources, especially employees and customers.



Applying to a Special Library

- How can libraries utilize these theories?
- We need to ask our users: “How do you use the library?”



Applying to a Special Library

- NC Biotech
 - Created an online survey that was emailed directly to external library users
 - Survey was estimated to take less than 5 minutes to complete
 - Survey population of 388. Total of 99 responses. 25.5% response rate.



Applying to a Special Library

- “Any additional comments you would like to share with the library staff?”
- Textual analysis
 - Most common phrases: “willing to help,” “professional,” “great staff,” and “really appreciated.”
- Many responses identified staff members by name
 - Described staff members as:
 - “a wonderful resource and always willing to help”
 - “awesome and always willing to help me in any way possible”
 - “very helpful to me in the past”



Applying to a Special Library

- Responses were reviewed for inclusion in future marketing materials
- Criteria for evaluation: clarity, level of detail, and tone of content



Applying to a Special Library

- NC Biotech Library created a webpage titled “Customer experiences”
 - Page also includes a web form, which invites visitors to share their success stories as well.
- These user success stories offer concrete examples of how the library can help users meet their goals.



Applying to a Special Library

- Benefits of Narrative Marketing and Appreciative Inquiry
 - Addresses the issue of “authenticity” in marketing materials
 - Creates rich, qualitative stories to share with stakeholders and senior leadership that communicate the library’s value and demonstrate return on investment



Customer experiences

The Library Staff do an excellent job and are always very responsive. They have helped our firm identify resources and prepare customized responses for our business development initiatives. I appreciate their professional approach and would highly recommend them to others.

— Jim Nichols, O'Brien/Atkins Associates

We have been extremely grateful for the assistance of Susie Corbett and her staff over the last few years. They have been able to find numerous scientific studies and papers that have eluded our staff, and they do with great celerity and insight.

— A.E. Ted May, Andersen Products

The staff have always been knowledgeable and helpful whenever I've consulted with them or needed information.

— Anonymous

A very professional group. They get the work done and on a very timely basis. Thank you.

— Kathleen P. Baran, Ph.D., DABT, TOX-TK Associates, Inc.

Archives in back room are truly fantastic for industry and policy research! Would be wonderful to catalog these and eventually make them (or at least the catalog) available for wider use and ideally, via electronic access. Wonder if this is something SILS at UNC could assist with?

— Anonymous

Let us know about your own [NCBiotech library experience!](#)

