

Going green as a marketing tool for libraries: environmentally sustainable management practices

Dr. Petra Hauke

Berlin School of Library and Information Science, Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin, Germany.
petra.hauke@hu-berlin.de

Dr. Klaus Ulrich Werner

Philological Library, Freie Universität Berlin, Germany.
klaus.werner@fu-berlin.de



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Abstract:

This paper deals with libraries' awareness of ecological sustainability as part of the marketing strategy with high impact on both clients and stakeholders. Libraries are particularly responsible not only for disseminating information on environmental sustainability but also for serving as examples to follow. Small steps in going green can have a big impact on the library's image. Activities in this field can be developed in cooperation with unpaid partners like NGOs, Friends of the Library groups etc. The paper will give examples from libraries in different countries from all over the world, dealing with ideas of how to gain recognition with a green identity, which conveys an attractive market image.

Keywords: Green Library, Environmental sustainability, library marketing

1 Introduction

Ecological sustainability which can often be an undervalued aspect for the marketing strategy of the library, has more impact on clients and on stakeholders than one might expect. Enthusiastic library users are calling on libraries not just to provide popular services but to communicate a clear green identity. Libraries as gateways for knowledge are particularly responsible not only for disseminating the idea of sustainability but also for leading by example and thus serving as exemplars. Ecological sustainability could be part of the marketing strategy of the library as a socially responsible body. Small steps in going green can have a big impact for the library's image. A small financial input can produce an

important marketing outcome. Bringing environmental awareness to libraries does not necessarily require huge financial effort or a big budget. Activities in this field can be developed in cooperation with unpaid partners like NGOs, Friends of the Library groups, school projects, library suppliers and, last but not least, the library users. There is a wide range of ways to promote the idea of the GREEN library: use of environmentally friendly or recycled materials, virtual user services and resource-saving copy services, waste separation, elimination of plastic bags, no more paper cups and instead recycled/private crockery, fair-trade coffee in the library's coffee shop, green events and choosing library suppliers with green certificates – or are working to get one of those. INFINITE POSSIBILITIES (not only) for FUTURE LIBRARIES!

2 Marketing – it's all about the users' wants and needs!

The customers' satisfaction, their needs, wants and demands are a core element in every marketing process. Although library and information centres are not profit-oriented organizations their "success depends on [their] effectiveness in meeting identified customer wants and needs, both explicit and implicit. Customers are people whose behavior we want to influence and with whom we want to develop long-term loyalties for our library's offering." (Gupta et al. 2006, IX) Although a wide range of ideas of relevance and applicability to marketing in libraries have been identified the most important issue identified is listed as: "[The] customer is the pivot of marketing and all efforts must address meeting customer needs exceedingly." (Gupta 2006, 5) But thinking and acting in a responsible way means thinking and acting not just for currently identified users' demands but also for the demands of future generations.

On the one hand "the modern library is now generally called an information market and the library user is a consumer of information. ... The ultimate aim of marketing here is to provide the right information to the right user at the right time." (Das & Karn 2008) On the other hand examples show that libraries can offer more than just being an information market. "Part of the essential purpose of libraries has to do with supporting human beings and building human potential. Most would agree that libraries should be places to nurture human possibility and aspiration." (Genovese & Albanese 2013, 57) Libraries also help to build (sustainable) communities (Long 2000, Genovese & Albanese 2013), and they teach environmental responsibility to communities (Boyden & Weiner 2000).

Sustainability in general and environmental sustainability in particular are obviously common and very prominent features. "Sustainability is widely considered an important part of contemporary life." (Karioja & Niemi 2013, 138) Environmental awareness is more than a fashionable label. "It is an ethic that should be embedded deep within the actions and consciousness of any person who truly wishes to lighten the burden on nature, our built world and future generations." (Scherer 2013, 32) Sustainability and going green are a trend which has already reached library architecture and design (Sommer 2013, 1) as well as library management and services. Following the "green library movement" (Antonelli 2008) will definitely meet the customers' demands. Therefore "... to create a visible green image for the library is an important part of the environmental work (Sahavirta 2013, 330)" but can and should also be incorporated into a successful marketing strategy.

3 Ecological sustainability as a marketing tool

Marketing in LIS first appeared in the literature in the early 1970s (Gupta et al. 2013/2, 13). At about the same time the “The Role of the Library in Environmental Education” was identified (Armstrong 1971). Although “Green marketing” today leads to 1,100,000 Google hints, a “green” library image as a marketing tool, or “green” library marketing strategies seem expressis verbis never to be described nor discussed in the LIS literature. (see “Bibliography” in: Hauke et al. 2013, 405–421¹) Why? “...a majority of people believe that green marketing refers solely to the promotion or advertising of products with environmental characteristics.” (Polonsky 1994, 1) But “greening” a library refers not only to its “products” but to its management, its services, and – last but not least – to its building.

A green image is a good image? One may say, that “green washing” is a popular marketing strategy to promote services and products as eco-friendly and is just a fashionable label while in reality there is no real impact on the ecological footprint of the vendor or the customer (Eigenbrodt 2013, 92). But this should not prevent libraries from taking a clear stand (Sahavirta 2013, 330) in green thinking and green practice through their buildings, management, and services. Practice and demonstration of “sustainable thinking” throughout the library building, equipment, management, and services make clear that we care about our customers as individuals and about our community – locally and globally. Sustainability and environmentally-friendly services are a way to create a good image and thus to market libraries to decision makers and customers. An ecological intelligently designed facility “can be part of a library’s marketing strategy to demonstrate to its community that it cares how the funds allocated to it are spent with an eye towards reducing future costs.” (Aldrich 2013, 16) To create a visible green image for the library by, for example, expressing their commitment to green values through disseminating knowledge and information about environmental sustainability or through reducing the library’s ecological footprint, meets the users’ wants and demands and is therefore a good marketing strategy.

4 Libraries are obviously ecologically sustainable – or are they?

On the one hand “lending, the sharing of books and other media, and also the sharing of computers, the move from printed to electronic resources, common spaces for learning and socializing, retaining cultural heritage, offering information and a variety of materials about a responsible way of life” (Hauke et al. 2013, 5) is indeed ecological sustainable.

On the other hand we have “libraries as mainly deep-plan buildings with high energy consumption for lighting, heating, air-conditioning, and ventilation and with a lot of computer installations, many copiers making many paper copies all day, and – last but not least – printed books which one can define as “dead forests”. None of this can be considered sustainable.” (Hauke et al. 2013, 5) But “we cannot rebuild all libraries and make them energy efficient, and we have to find other ways. Libraries have to operate environmentally now and in the future in existing buildings and without new resources. But how do we achieve this?” (Sahavirta 2013, 318)

¹ See also online: Project “The Green Library” / Bibliography 1971–2012. www.ibi.huberlin.de/studium/studprojekte/buchidee/2012-13/bibliografie-green-library/view (PDF, 418 kB). Accessed on 25 June 2013.

5 Greening libraries – how to do?

Not everyone can be so lucky as to have a new, environmentally ambitious library building. But it can be highly effective to check all aspects of the building, management and services that might be seen as environmental sustainable. A checklist (Werner 2013) can be a useful tool to find out all the detailed ways by which the library can be run in an ecological friendly way.

What you can consider with a new library building - sustainable aspects of the structure of the building, the façades, the building climate, ventilation, heating and cooling, the lighting, the interior fittings, green information and communication technology - are all features that you can point to for green marketing after opening and from which you can benefit for years. And you can also check your existing building, your renovated or second-hand library building, to identify all the areas that can be made of sustainable.

In order to pick the key points to include in your strategic plans, look for areas that lend themselves to cooperation with partners in sustainable activities and projects and the unique green features to create a specific green identity for the library. And for all this, the library needs no budget – just make use of what you already have! Alternatively the library administration can check the user services, the library management and the facility management to see what can be planned; a checklist is an easy way to identify what the library can do on a low level, far removed from certificates and green awards. A good checklist is a tool to identify the green potential for further steps to achieve a convincing green image.

6 Marketing the green library: a lightning round of ideas

One may discuss which processes are best when going green. “Is it greener to make paper posters to advertise library events or is it greener to eliminate paper and use LCD monitors to advertise events? While the answer may not be known, the right answer is to move in the right direction.” (Schaper 2013, 24) The following examples will show what libraries have already successfully done, or could do, to convince their clients and their stakeholders through projecting a green image.

6.1 Traffic & transport

With the building and beyond the building there are many ways to green your library and many ways to promote green features and to use them for green marketing. But not every green library needs to be GOLD or SILVER LEED awarded. The discussion among green libraries has been largely limited to the buildings especially to new buildings, but librarians can do much more without focusing just on the building. In general it does not only concern new buildings but can equally apply to a sustainable renovated library building which can have a greater impact than a new building because it is more surprising! (Hauke & Werner 2012) After all what can be more sustainable than reusing all the materials and embedded energy contained in an existing building.

For example if you ensure good accessibility of the library with public transport, perhaps by encouraging the use of electric cars or bikes, you do something for environmental sustainability. And additionally, it is not expensive to create good parking facilities for bicycles.

The Amsterdam Public Library is not only easily accessible by bicycle and by public transport but provides 2,000 secure bicycle racks for their visitors. (Genovese & Albanese 2013, 56) Since Queen's University Belfast opened the doors of its new McClay Library in August 2009, the University has promoted the use of public transport; 100 cycle stands, shower facilities, lockers and dry rooms have been provided as part of the library design. (Latimer 2013, 208) If sustainable travel is included in the green portfolio you should widely advertise it to support this – although this is not specific to a library. In Belfast, Queen's University has a number of provisions to promote sustainable travel. These include discounts on purchasing bicycles and safety equipment, loans to buy annual travel commuter cards and a car sharing scheme. (Latimer 2013, 210)

As mentioned above, cyclists are encouraged to use the library by providing a range of facilities. Libraries may also become a refuelling stop for electric vehicles in the parking area of the library: it is innovative and cheap! And parking is an example of how to add to the green image by creating reserved parking spots for hybrid or electric vehicles, convenient parking spaces for bikes – especially for employees. Get a bus route stop at the library. Make transit to the library greener!

Another example in the field of transportation is in the area of delivery; the big German library supplier *ekz.bibliotheksservice GmbH* has implemented the following measures: CO₂-neutral transport of books, "GoGreen" is a new service provided by their delivery partner DHL – as part of the GoGreen initiative relating to the transport emissions produced by a certified method (ISO 14064). In accordance with the objectives and targets of the Kyoto Protocol, these emissions are due to others (carried by DHL). The overhead of two Euro-Cents per packet are carried the ekz. The holistic approach also extends to the vehicle fleet of DHL, the use of modern and efficient vehicles, alternative propulsion, aerodynamics and engine modifications in which electricity is to be used. (Mittrowann 2013, 387)

6.2 Management

Green thinking can be implemented in all areas of library management. In many detailed ways it can be useful for the marketing of the library, even beyond achieving a certificate of environmental management according to ISO. Not every library can be eco-awarded, but if you can get such recognition, it is an invaluable gift for the marketing strategy. Not every library can be an environmental champion, but the library as a hub can do its job to encourage others to adopt greener and low-carbon behaviour. In any case it is of key importance that the library management is pro-active.

The strategic management of the library can easily be linked to sustainability objectives. It is advisable to adopt strategies from the entire body of the library: the university, the community or the parent organization to which the library belongs. The aim of the library is to be part of an overall strategy. Create your own "eco-action plan" according to the aims of the whole organization. The impact for the library is to participate in wider programmes and thus be part of a green profile for the entire institution. A public library may be part of a network of the municipalities: the library can highlight the municipality's green profile and this could be a good marketing strategy (Niegaard 2013, 282). To be part of community-wide green thinking is a good strategy for a library.

Libraries can raise their visibility as key sustainability partners: the following three strategies have proved to be very effective in many communities: create, collaborate and communicate. Get in touch with local organizations, institutions and the city for green networking. This can be an excellent way to collaborate especially in any aspect of sustainability. Find partners and

work together on green projects. If the library is located in a green residential setting, then be a good green neighbour and make it obvious to all.

A focus on project management is a good approach to greening the library management. For example managing a green conference might afford the opportunity to demonstrate a green image to many participants and to the public. Communication, specific details during the conference and green labelling motivate the participants to adopt sustainable behaviour during and after the conference. Even being fully transparent about the environmental footprint of the conference can have a major effect on the participants, the sponsors and the press. Realize the three “Rs” – re-duce, re-use, re-cycle – and make them obvious to all. Motivate the sponsors of the conference to be part of the “green conference”. In the future you can build best practice from this specific example of project management.

An easy and low-budget approach to green management is to check the workflows and everyday routines of the library administration. Embed an eco-ethic deep into day-to-day operations to produce a daily green culture. To influence business partners (publishers, booksellers, suppliers), the library can make the decision to choose a green supplier instead of one without green portfolio! This in turn can motivate competitors to focus on the sustainability of their services because they will soon be aware that a library selects its suppliers according to their commitment to sustainability. The easiest way to reduce the library’s ecological footprint in relation to library suppliers is to choose local delivery from local partners: think green – act local! And it can be a good principle for everyday library administration: if environmentally friendly versions of products are available, they should be purchased. Green library management includes the green library office: green procurement, green products and green behavior - again the three “Rs”: re-duce, re-use, re-cycle! An energy-efficient equipped staff kitchen may cost more, but awareness training for employees in promoting the concept of green library administration is (nearly) free!

6.3 Services

On the occasion of its 75th anniversary IFLA “asserted that library and information services promote sustainable development by ensuring freedom of access to information.”² Published in 2002, this statement does not focus directly on ecological environmental sustainability, but this issue should be considered included.

As well as the decision that one of the criteria for purchase should be environmental sustainability, there is a wide range of quite simple little things that could be employed in marketing the “Green Library” on a shoestring. These include the information technology, activities and events, the café, and special non-book services.

6.3.1 Information technology

Libraries contain a large number of computer installations, many copiers making many paper copies all day, and – last but not least – printed books which can be defined as “dead forests”. Although many libraries already have a “daily green” routine, e. g. recycling, double-sided copies, switching the lights off when not needed etc, most don’t venture beyond these basics. There are a lot of examples as to how libraries can handle such issues in a user-friendly way, and how they go about marketing their respective efforts.

² www.ifla.org/publications/statement-on-libraries-and-sustainable-development. Accessed on 7 March 2013.

“Switching off computers and other machines at the end of the working day and for the weekends and using machines “go to sleep mode” are usually used in more than 50% of the libraries” according to those who took part in a recent Finnish survey. “More issues to reduce the environmental burden are to prefer laptops in computer acquisitions, to turn off computers and other devices at the end of each working day and at weekends, printers printing on both sides of the sheet by default, or to prefer electronic channels in communications.” (Sonkkanen 2013, 131f.)

At Queen’s University Belfast, “staff and students are encouraged to think before they print and to print double sided if they really need a printed copy. Alternatives suggested include printing summary pages rather than making multiple copies, or using online documentation, email and MS PowerPoint presentations. Increasingly users are encouraged, within the copyright legislation, to scan material to memory sticks. This not only saves paper but is very popular with students as it is a free service.” (Latimer 2013, 207)

Not just a “shoestring“, but very effective in saving energy is upgrading computers with thin clients, energy-rated CPUs and efficient servers.

6.3.2 Activities and events

The core of a green library is to be seen to be making reliable environmental information easily accessible. “This is the thing we should be able to do better than anyone else. And even more, we should display the information and make it interesting, there by awakening interest in environmental issues. One way to do this is to organize environment-themed events. In Vallila Library, Helsinki, we have introduced environmental topics in our discussion events: in spring 2010 it was the climate change, in spring 2011 the role of water as an environmental factor and in spring 2012 we organized an entire series of discussions entitled “How to live sustainably”. Leading experts in the field have been happy to come to the library and share their knowledge.” (Sahavirta 2013, 329)

Local, regional, national or international occasions like “European Green Capital”, “Sustainability Day”, “Climate Week”, “Environmental Project of the Year”, a “Fairtrade Fortnight” (Latimer 2013, 210) can be used to create special events or projects to disseminate the goals of environmental sustainability.

Jakob Heide Petersen, the new director of the Copenhagen Main Library, is planning activities to respond to Copenhagen’s nomination in 2014 as “Green Capital” by the European Union. “First of all the idea is to have public debates on ecology and sustainability as part of the library’s lecture programme; secondly, there is a plan to have the main library properly evaluated in terms of sustainability and updated energy-saving measures.” (Niegaard 2013, 281)

The Kasetsart University Eco-Library in Bangkok, a prototype for the next generation of sustainable buildings in Thailand, totally designed, constructed and furnished by sponsored scrap and factory offcuts, offers a Do-It-Yourself programme, using waste materials from home or everyday life. “The activities are led by the library staff, who qualify by being eco-minded. Sometimes, they can even sell products from the craft activities such as coasters and bookmarks made from used plastic straws, toy puppies made from used socks and handmade notebooks decorated by old New Year cards. They once had an eco-essay competition and a book discussion. The library always changes and presents itself as a living library. It is still trying new things and looking for possible ways to bring people closer to environmental friendliness.” (Tinarat 2013, 225)

6.3.3 Food & drink – fairtrade and sustainable

Often libraries serve food at events to attract attendees. “But often it is junk food served on plastic and washed down with liquid in a plastic bottle that gets thrown into giant waste bins whose contents fill up landfills and incinerators. Instead serve healthy food, using real, recycled or recyclable crockery, compost waste and strive to achieve zero-waste events. Partner with local food growers, bakers or chefs to provide snacks. When contracting for on-site cafés, add green requirements into the contract.” (Schaper 2013, 25)

In the cafeteria as well as for internal meetings and conferences, fairtrade products are preferred at the McClay Library, Queen’s University Belfast “when purchasing tea and coffee, as is local sustainable food. Tap water rather than bottled water is provided where possible and bottle-fed water coolers are being replaced with mains-fed versions.” (Latimer 2013, 210)

“Friends of the Library” groups should be asked and encouraged to promote the idea of sustainable services within library projects. The Friends of Vallila Library, Helsinki, have taken up the challenge of a “green” library. “Whenever they arrange an event in the library, environmental sustainability is taken into account: no more paper cups but recycled crockery and only fair-trade coffee. ... the action may be small, but it makes the values visible. Moreover, in this way it is our customers who help to make the library greener.” (Sahavirta 2013, 326)

More and more libraries on the east coast of the United States are using the popularity of local, fresh food through presenting the library’s green label at the local farmers’ market. “The Carnegie Library of Pittsburg, Pennsylvania and the Darien Library of Darien, Connecticut have stalls at their respective farmers’ markets. The Friends of the Hudson Area Association Library in Hudson, New York held a cookbook book sale at their farmers’ market.” (Aldrich 2013, 20f.)

In Arlington, Virginia the Arlington Public Library has created an impressive sustainability programme called “Bikes, Buildings and Broccoli”. The library not only promotes the city’s status as a bike-friendly community by encouraging staff to bike to work etc. With the “Broccoli” programme it takes over the role as a gardening leader through the Central Library’s organic vegetable garden. “The library provides classes in the garden, donates harvests to the Arlington Food Assistance Center, offers master-gardener demonstrations and tree-steward clinics, and won an award for its innovative “Arlington Reads” programme on food sustainability. Through these efforts, the library has leveraged its deep community connections and its role as an education hub to demystify sustainability mandates, raise civic awareness and celebrate the ways in which people can take individual and collective action.” (Benton 2013, 29f.)

6.3.4 Special services

Promoting the “Green Library” label should be achieved not only through environmentally-related theme weeks, events, and environmentally-themed literature being displayed on a separate shelf and the number of loans of environmentally-themed materials being monitored, but also for example through energy consumption meters which can be borrowed from the library. Recycling points for books, newspapers as well as for spent batteries should be installed. (Sonkkanen 2013, 132)

Some libraries in Helsinki do not just lend traditional library materials, but also, for example, electricity meters and sports equipment. Some of these items are owned by other city agencies, some have been acquired by the library. Vallila Library cooperates with the

Kuinoma borrowing service, an NGO people use to lend their goods to others. “The owner of the item and the borrower agree on the terms of the loan, after which the item is brought to the library for collection by the borrower. The advantage of this operation to the library is that it does not need to acquire the goods it provides. Although, we do need a bunch of motivated people who want to loan their own goods to strangers.” (Sahavirta 2013, 327)

7 Communication

Vallila Library, Helsinki, has a sign on its door saying “A visit to the library reduces your carbon footprint.” (Sahavirta 2013, 332)

But while even airlines, airports (Istanbul, Turkey: “Greenport”) etc. understand about marketing through ecological labels, libraries are often green without telling anybody about it. Communication is essential for marketing. Libraries should tell people, customers, decision-makers as well as the staff when building and improving their sustainability. These people want to know what the plans for, and the result of, environmental work are. (Sonkkanen 2013, 125)

How well we tell the story of our organizations – through the annual report, through public media like newspapers or journals, through local, national or international conferences – will have a significant impact on our communities’ willingness to invest in us. (Aldrich 2013, 16) Good results of eco-friendly efforts (less waste, less energy ...) should be communicated. To get resources from the city, we must ensure that the political decision-makers and the media as well as the customers and local residents become aware of our environmental efforts and that we deal with important issues.

Environmental awareness works well with the public library agenda. To offer easy access to reliable information about human rights, the rights of minorities, health and medicine – and environmental sustainability - just to mention some subjects, is a duty for libraries; it is their job. On the other hand, there are many librarians who prefer to remain silent – as a librarian it is difficult to take a stand, and it seems that librarians have traditionally thought that their opinion does not need to be advertised. “Yes, we are discussing the marketing of libraries. To take a clear stand and to create a visible green image for the library is an important part of the environmental work. And one should bear in mind that new ideas and ideals cannot be disseminated if one remains silent. So, libraries should take a clear stand and shout it out to make an impact.” (Sahavirta 2013, 330f.)

8 Résumé

Environmental sustainability is obviously of key importance. A green image is a good image. Therefore a “green” label can serve as an effective part of a library’s marketing strategy. Bringing environmental awareness to libraries has an important impact on customers as well as on stakeholders but does not necessarily require a big budget. There are a lot of ideas and realized projects from all over the world on “how to green” the library’s building, management, and services. Libraries often deal already with sustainability issues and act in an ecological responsible way, and their buildings are often “green” buildings with less energy consumption etc. They just should be more aware of the opportunity to use these advantages as an effective, customer-oriented marketing tool. Marketing on a shoestring with a green library label: going green can be cheap – “Opportunities are just around the corner.” (Sonkkanen 2013, 134)

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