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Review of Start a Revolution: Stop Acting Like a Library

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Ben Bizzle with Maria Flora. *Start a Revolution: Stop Acting Like a Library*. Chicago: ALA Editions, 2015. 194 pages. U.S. \$55.00. Paperback.

In *Start a Revolution: Stop Acting Like a Library*, Ben Bizzle and Maria Flora have managed to bring forth a manual that is informed by experience but also advocates unconventional ideas in regards to library marketing. The book begins—and is punctuated by—firsthand reporting of the efforts undertaken at the Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library in Jonesboro, Arkansas, where Bizzle worked to improve the library’s technological edge, social media and web presence, and marketing efforts. In his quirky, honest style, Bizzle is straightforward about what worked well, what didn’t, and the occasional challenges of getting everyone on board with a new marketing plan. All told, however, *Stop Acting Like a Library* is a story of success and a guidebook for other libraries interested in improving their own community presence.

Much of the material presented in Bizzle’s book makes common sense, but the very convenience of having such solid ideas collected in one place is valuable. Bizzle’s explanation of the “three-click rule” for library websites is an example of this. The “three-click rule,” Bizzle explains, describes the number of mouse clicks required to access a web page from any other location within the library’s website. Bizzle observes that many libraries require users to delve deep into their websites to find information, causing frustration. Making web pages accessible in three clicks or fewer reduces the potential for user frustration and breaks down barriers to usability (p. 26). Implementing such a rule makes perfect sense—especially for institutions that exist to improve access to information—but Bizzle articulates this in a way that provides clear and attainable objectives for library personnel.

Other ideas are less conventional. In discussing various strategies for library marketing and advertising, Bizzle highlights the surprising potential for improved cost-effectiveness using roadside billboards rather than mailed advertisements. For the Craighead County Jonesboro Public Library, social media and other platforms provide an effective marketing base, but billboards offer more exposure at a less expensive rate (per person who saw the advertisement) than mailing out hard-copy advertisements. Billboards certainly qualify as traditional or conventional ads for many businesses, but for libraries they offer a unique opportunity to reinforce the library among a captive audience. Billboard advertising, Bizzle notes, should “instill curiosity and sell the library as an idea,” and have a “big” emotional impact. “It’s important to ensure the billboards look nothing like the others along the roadside” (pp. 124–26).

Library marketing doesn’t have to be an isolated endeavor, however. Libraries can also establish partnerships within their communities that will promote the library as well as enhance the efforts of a local business or organization. A specific example from the Jonesboro story is the development of library drink coasters for use in a local restaurant. Bizzle notes that the logic behind this idea “was pretty simple. . . . We would basically have a captive audience from the time a customer placed their drink order until the time they got their food. . . . Given that we had a very well-designed mobile website, the idea was that the funny coasters would entice the diners to check it out, and we could go from promotion to delivery in real-time” (pp. 131–33). Not only

did this promotion solve a very specific problem (the establishment in question did not initially have drink coasters available), it also increased awareness of the library among the restaurant management and established a community partnership. Libraries attempting to enhance their marketing and outreach efforts could very well benefit from “out of the box” ideas such as this.

Ultimately, Bizzle also explores a distinct but closely related topic to library marketing—persuading library administration of new marketing strategies. Bizzle’s treatment of this area includes material about workplace personality profiling and evaluating motives behind an individual’s buy-in to a certain program or strategy. It also—importantly—emphasizes the importance of telling a story. As Bizzle points out, administrators are generally more interested in the impact of a proposed program than they are the specific “detailed functions and features.” In Bizzle’s words, “Telling a story allows decision makers to picture an idea in action. It cuts through all of the complexities of how something works and gets to the essence of why it will be beneficial to our patrons” (p. 156). Furthermore, Bizzle advises readers on how best to present new strategies, down to the words to use, to better persuade management. “Convincing Decision Makers” is a short chapter but one well worth the read as libraries consider ways to promote themselves in today’s world (pp. 157–61).

Fortunately, Bizzle’s advice is applicable for use by information professionals working in settings other than libraries. Archives, museums, cultural centers, and other organizations can benefit from these same strategies to enhance their community presence as well. In many ways Ben Bizzle has done something more useful than simply presenting a set of interesting ideas. In effect, he has codified a way of thinking that emphasizes creativity and strategy—applicable to a wide variety of professions, organizations, and situations. It is for these reasons that Bizzle’s work is so valuable to our profession. *Start a Revolution: Stop Acting Like a Library* is solidly recommended for anyone looking to take their marketing efforts to the next level.