



Book Review

Review of *Empathy by Design: Empathy-Driven Marketing for Libraries*

Joyce G. DeStasio, *Stockton University*

ABSTRACT

Review of Dantus, S.B. (2024). *Empathy by design: Empathy-driven marketing for libraries*. Association of College and Research Libraries.

KEYWORDS

Library marketing, empathy, empathy-driven design, academic libraries

SUGGESTED CITATION

DeStasio, J. G. (2024). Review of *Empathy by design: Empathy-driven marketing for libraries*. *Journal of New Librarianship*, 9 (2), 59–62. <https://doi.org/10.33011/newlibs/17/6>

This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International License (<http://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0>), which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is properly cited.



If you are responsible for marketing your library and your marketing collateral does not resonate with your patrons, then you should read *Empathy by Design: Empathy-Driven Marketing for Libraries* by Sabine Jean Dantus. Even if you are satisfied with your current marketing efforts and results, you would still benefit from reading this book. It truly has something for everyone.

The book clearly and concisely gives library marketers the tools to incorporate empathy into marketing strategies to connect with all patrons in a more effective and engaging way. In the preface, Dantus explains the importance of empathy for “understanding that each library user has different needs, curiosities, backgrounds, and reasons for visiting the library. Compassionate libraries can create more positive experiences for their patrons, develop more effective marketing strategies, and create a sense of belonging and community” (xii). This approach is key to providing a welcoming atmosphere and safe space for patrons.

Author Sabine Jean Dantus is an outreach and reference librarian at Florida International University Libraries in Miami, Florida. Before becoming a librarian, she earned a B.S. in communication and master's degrees in both mass media & journalism and library science. At the time of this writing, she is also completing her doctoral degree in instructional technology and distance education. Through all of this, Dantus has garnered expertise and experience in outreach, communication, and marketing, all of which she approaches through an empathy-based lens. In her preface to *Empathy by Design*, Dantus draws insight from her own experience. She notes, “Because I empathize with other people, I can understand their backgrounds and points of view. Understanding the users lets me be creative and realistic in crafting my messages and ensure they reach users meaningfully” (xii). With her credentials, her work in these areas, and her willingness to empathize, Dantus is perfectly positioned to research and write this book.

Dantus begins by defining empathy and explaining why it is important to employ an empathic approach to library marketing. By helping patrons feel seen and heard, library marketers can build rapport with their users and better understand their needs. Because libraries communicate with various demographics, marketing pieces should consider all types of patrons. It is key that marketers also consider DEIA (diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility) values to create an inclusive and accessible atmosphere for all users. Dantus then describes empathic design, which draws from UX (user experience) principles, focusing on user-centered design and understanding users' motivations and needs to create resonant messages. She reviews the five steps of the empathic design process to match services to perfectly meet users' needs and provide meaningful engagement. A chapter is dedicated to each of the five steps: observation; capturing data; reflection & interpretation of data; brainstorm or ideate solutions; and create potential prototypes & test solutions. In each of these chapters, Dantus outlines the motivation for performing the step, methods and techniques for success, and key takeaways. Each of these chapters allows the reader to find ideas that would work best for them, their library, and—most importantly—their patrons.

After explaining empathy and empathic design, Dantus introduces the FIRST Values Framework, which is her framework for putting empathy into action in library marketing. FIRST addresses these five values: fellow-feeling, identification, responsiveness, self-awareness, and thoughtfulness. She highlights the importance for library marketers to understand users' needs; get to know users; pay attention and adapt to meet their needs; reflect on their own biases and limitations; and consider how their decisions impact users. She also stresses that this framework can apply to any situation, but that it is not a one-size-fits-all solution and requires reevaluation for any new situation. Dantus concludes with a chapter on evaluating and measuring success, emphasizing the need for feedback, qualitative and quantitative evaluations, and SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound) goals.

Lastly, Dantus includes three appendices with resources for implementing the principles outlined in the preceding chapters. First, the Empathic Library Marketing Solutions Toolkit offers guidelines and tips for creating collateral, empathy maps, user journey maps, user personas, and survey questions. Second, the FIRST Framework for Library Marketing Questions supplies questions for designing and developing a FIRST framework for your library. Third, Marketing Plan reminds readers that, before creating a marketing plan, it is key to understand the library's mission, vision, core values, target audiences, user personas, and current situation. This section reviews these principles and then provides additional marketing and outreach strategies and tactics.

In the preface to *Empathy by Design: Empathy-Driven Marketing for Libraries*, Dantus states:

The strategies outlined in this book can help bridge the gap between tradition and modernity by giving you the tools to make your marketing more targeted and empathic. With this open, empathic dialogue of mutual respect, I hope libraries will become safe places for users of all backgrounds to learn, think, and discover (xi).

Dantus excels in explaining empathy-driven marketing and provides a wealth of resources for library marketers with any level of experience. The greatest strength of this book is just that: whether the reader is just starting to dabble in library marketing or has been working in this area for decades, there is something new and applicable to take away.

While I appreciate the time and care that Dantus put into crafting the chapters, I found the appendices particularly valuable. It would have been beneficial to see more of this material throughout the book or additional chapters on these topics. Of course, this content can be found in other books, so, understandably, Dantus did not need to reiterate it all within her pages. However, additional coverage on applying these helpful tools and resources through the empathic design lens would have enhanced and strengthened an already solid and informative book.

Empathy by Design is a great resource for empathy-driven marketing for libraries. While it is written for library marketers to learn a more empathic approach, anyone working in a

library and anyone working in marketing—I would argue it does not have to be in a library! –can benefit from reading this book. Whether you are just starting or are a marketing expert, you can learn from this book. Dantus affirms her goal in writing: “I aim to give libraries the tools they need to break down barriers and foster empathetic marketing strategies that reach all users” (xii). And that she does. Dantus herself leads by example, communicating her message inclusively and accessibly. No matter what your marketing goals, *Empathy by Design* has something for you.