ASSESSING

SERVICE

Quality

Satisfying the expectations of library customers

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Preface

The first edition of Assessing Service Quality premiered in 1998 and was the recipient of the Highsmith Library Literature Award the following year. In 2010, we revised the work and now (five years later), with all of the new developments and trends in academic and public libraries, as well as some new perspectives on evaluation and assessment, the American Library Association asked us to update the content. To increase the relevance and value of the content, we added a third author, Robert E. Dugan, who has been a coauthor with Peter Hernon on a number of books and articles.

Academic and public libraries are continuing to transform as the information landscape changes and their parent organizations or institutions expand their missions and as libraries envision a future that leads to new service roles and improved organizational performance and accountability. Change in libraries is not limited to the United States, as other countries also see rapid advances in information technology, changing patterns of scholarly publication, disruptions to the economics of information production and use, new models for teaching and learning in higher education, and radical changes in the expectations held by faculty, students, members of the public, and users for all types of libraries. The way people search for information—print and digital—is changing, as is the way in which they use the information they find. The demands they make on library collections, facilities, and services are also changing. In essence, change characterizes the nature of library collections and services, the information needs and expectations of library customers, and the competitive environment within which libraries function. The hope of all of us is that libraries transition into organizations that can thrive in conditions dramatically different from those of today.

Libraries today seek to enrich people’s lives and help them be better informed and more productive members of society. Academic libraries seek a bigger role in educating students and guiding learning. They seek to inspire critical thinking, advance knowledge, and foster curiosity for graduates to become lifelong learners. These aspirations are not dissimilar for public libraries, which also seek to advance literacy and a love for reading and learning. The new roles that libraries are assum-
A number of libraries have ignored customers because they perceive them as a captive audience. This book—and the literature on customer service—dispels that notion as it acknowledges that there are many competitors poised to challenge the library’s perceived monopoly on information and knowledge provision. Librarians need new ways of thinking and alternatives for applying a customer-centered approach to service quality and customer satisfaction. The approach presented here recognizes that holistic evaluation involves the use of qualitative and quantitative data collection, as each type complements the other. The approach presented here is too large and too complex for any single library to undertake at one time. Rather, our intention is to present some ways to think about service quality and customer satisfaction, along with some other methods for evaluating and improving service. Libraries can select, from among the methods discussed, those most appropriate to their particular situation and implement them at a pace that suits their needs.

Libraries are service organizations that function in a competitive environment, and librarians must create and perfect services that better match the information needs, information-seeking behaviors, and expectations of those they intend to serve. Finally, we should note that, regardless of the edition, the purposes of Assessing Service Quality are to

- suggest new ways to think about the evaluation and assessment of library services
- present different ways for libraries to become more customer-centric
- explain service quality and customer satisfaction and their theoretical bases as well as clarify the differences between them
- identify procedures for measuring both service quality and satisfaction
- challenge conventional thinking about the utility of input, output, and performance metrics
- suggest possible customer-related metrics that provide insights useful for library planning and decision making
• encourage libraries to take action—action leading to improved service and accountability.

Although this book focuses on academic and public libraries, the basic principles, strategies, and data-collecting procedures presented apply in other settings. If academic and public libraries do not try to be truly service-centered, what are they willing to commit to? What is the source of their service inspiration? What service reputation do they generate, and are they aware of their reputation? The answers to such questions have a definite impact on the extent to which customers are loyal to the library and on the number of customers who are delighted or completely satisfied—not merely appeased. We could re-characterize the previous sentence by emphasizing the net promoter score, which is discussed in this book: are most customers promoters and not passives or detractors? If they are detractors, to what extent do they shape the perceptions of others?

Most people who become librarians do so from a desire to connect people to information and thereby transform their lives—a concept that is the cornerstone of service quality and customer satisfaction. But, somehow, along the way, the profession has gotten caught up in bean counting—how many of this and how much of that—as though the items counted exist in a universe totally unto themselves. It is our hope that the ideas presented here will encourage librarians to remember the ideals that attracted them to the profession and to abandon such misperceptions as “customers cannot judge quality,” “customers do not know what they want,” and “professional hegemony will be undermined by kowtowing to customers.” Perhaps another misperception is that “libraries need not be accountable and be involved in data collection—after all, we did not go to library school to become social scientists and data collectors, having to justify ourselves and our organizational mission?” To this we merely point out that times have changed. Accountability is not something that is bad, but it can be carried out badly.

It is important to focus on the customers of individual libraries and to realize that comparisons to other libraries (and the use of mostly generic data-collection instruments, which have little relevance to a particular library) assume that customer expectations do not vary from community to community and from individual to individual. We caution against accepting this assumption. At the same time, do not forget that libraries have, as do other service organizations, internal customers who have a direct link to the external customers and the quality of service they receive. We believe that both sets of customers should be addressed. How can libraries best serve external customers if the internal customers are dissatisfied? What is discussed in this book applies to both audiences.
Historically, the quality of a library has been measured by the size of its collection. The acquisition of the millionth volume was cause for celebration, and press releases flooded local and national news media. The millionth volume or a million-dollar “book” budget gave bragging rights to the library's director. For decades, library directors, upon retirement, wanted to be known for the number of titles added during their tenure.

As collections grew, space became a problem, so library directors pressed for bigger buildings to house the increased number of volumes. Bigger collections meant the need for more staff and furnishings, especially shelving. Several other factors influenced collection building, especially after World War II. The expansion of colleges and universities in response to the GI Bill meant more faculty had to be hired, and they were expected to “publish or perish” to receive tenure. Of course, authors wanted the library to purchase their published works. Several publishing companies were launched to translate and reprint works held by major European university libraries that had been damaged during the war. The new faculty expected the library to resemble the one from which they received their doctoral degree—having similar-sized collections and holdings.

By the 1970s, many university administrators regarded academic libraries as bottomless pits because of constant entreaties for more money to keep up with the publishing output. In the 1980s and 1990s, the pleas for more money centered on the large annual increases in the prices of scholarly and professional journal subscriptions and the need for electronically delivered resources and their requisite infrastructure. The biggest impact of the first decade of the twenty-first century was the recession of 2007–2009 and how libraries and their institution or parent organization coped.

More recently, academic libraries have expanded their involvement with consortia and partnerships as they assumed new roles: these libraries are

- “often negotiating and licensing content and software collectively”;
- “aggressive intermediaries and aggregators of information, and, as publishers, are creating new innovative modes of scholarly communication”;

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“partnering with faculty to expand their educational involvement beyond the traditional bibliographic instruction, and to advance operational investigations as research-and-development organizations”; 

• “more entrepreneurial organizations, more concerned with innovation, business planning, competition and risk, leveraging assets through new partnerships to produce new financial resources.”

They also seek more electronic resources while focusing on their customers’ information needs and information-seeking preferences and on the affordability of resources to meet those needs. Libraries also provide access to their digitized collections of archival materials as an essential component of their mission, and they engage in preservation activities to prevent the loss of vital cultural, historical, and scholarly resources. Further, more library directors mention innovation and how it is supposed to guide future planning.

Because the cost of a college education continues to increase, the Obama administration maintains that graduation rates, loan defaults, and the percentage of low-income students enrolled are useful indicators of which institutions best serve their students. Many state governors and legislators add that increasing productivity in higher education depends, in part, on building strong accountability systems that rely on performance-based outcomes linked to such metrics as graduation rate and the extent to which graduates receive high-paying jobs in that state. Revamping states’ higher education accountability systems tends to focus on increasing the use of performance and outcome metrics and then using those metrics to make and evaluate policy decisions, particularly in areas such as budgeting, funding, and regulation. Added to this new focus is one on the affordability of obtaining a college degree. Students often assume high debts as they complete their degrees, but colleges and universities may also have acquired sizable debts. Perhaps the biggest reason for surging tuition in the last few years is not increased spending on the part of institutions but, rather, the steep decline in state and local government support in the wake of the recent recession and its aftermath. And just as the recession varied in severity across the country, tuition rose unevenly. As institutional budgets shrink and get realigned, so do those of libraries. Libraries have increased their involvement with consortia to centralize negotiations with information providers and realize economies of scale in strategic efforts to maintain and possibly expand their collections, especially through database holdings. Additionally, they have embraced partnerships and innovation.

Some critics note the fallacy of equating collection size with quality—not all libraries count items in the same way, while others keep outdated and unwanted books to boost their volume count. Obviously, the sheer number of volumes does not necessarily mean that the library collection matches readers’ interests, and many titles go unused—they have not circulated even once. Today, volume counts are of lesser interest as more libraries decrease the size of their print collections but increase the size of digital ones. Further, public libraries may get e-books from Amazon.com and, like academic libraries, receive scholarly journals electronically from bundlers. They do not own these copies. In the age of widespread access to digital resources, volume and title counts become less important, unless the institution is seeking to comply with prescriptive accreditation standards that set expectations for collection size.

PATRONS, USERS, CLIENTS, OR CUSTOMERS?

Organizations refer to the people they serve by many different terms, such as clients, patrons, students, readers, visitors, and guests. Such terms make these individuals seem like something other than customers. Librarians often prefer the terms patron and user, perhaps to avoid the implication of an exchange occurring between the library and the people using the services. Yet, both words have negative connotations, as Darlene E. Weingand points out:
The word *patron* is associated with the act of giving support and protection, such as occurred in the Renaissance between royalty and artists. The impression here is one of unequal status, of the powerful protecting the less powerful. This is not the type of relationship that puts libraries on an equal level of partnership with their communities. Further, while *user* accurately describes someone who uses the library, the term is quite unspecific and is widely associated with the drug culture.\(^2\)

Special librarians and subject specialists in university libraries probably come closest to treating their users as clients. In the case of subject specialists, faculty and doctoral students who are repeat users become clients. These librarians know their clientele personally and have insights into their research and related interests. Yet, being a client does not preclude one from being treated like a customer.

Public libraries have different types of customers with different types of interests. These *users* range from the preschooler who attends story hour to the homeless person who wants to read the newspaper to the unemployed person who attends workshops on résumé writing and job seeking to the businessperson who needs tax regulation guidelines. All have different interests, but most want materials, information, or a place to sit and use library resources—perhaps the technologies. A *customer* is the recipient of any product or service provided by the organization. That recipient might be internal, such as a coworker in the same or another unit, or external, someone in the community.

Still, some object to the word *customer* because

- "My own preference is 'community member.' I like it because I think of our library as serving the community—large, in addition to our own students and faculty, but those from other institutions, the general public and [whoever] may be in need of our services. They are all members of the community we serve. Admittedly, when in conversation with colleagues at my institution, I may simply use patrons as a convenient way to discuss them and their needs. It is a terminology with which librarians are comfortable.
- "The one term we intentionally avoid using to describe those we serve is 'customer.' For many librarians 'customer' suggests or implies that we are engaged in a for-profit business activity as opposed to providing a community service. Despite the practical implications of thinking of those who use our services as our customers, it just feels wrong."\(^3\)

However, within higher education today, there is an emphasis on running the institution as a business enterprise, and a number of library directors adopt some business terminology when they focus on innovation and risk taking. Weingand notes,

> The word *customer*, which implies payment for a product or service, is a better reflection of what actually transpires between the library and people in the community. With this term the mythology of the “free” library is dispelled, and a more accurate metaphor for service is substituted.\(^4\)

Customers make demands—expecting “high-quality facilities, resources, and services. They want a library that is focused on their needs, and they have no intention of going out of the way to meet the library’s needs or expectations.”\(^5\) Joseph R. Matthews argues that “library customers are the ‘ultimate’ customers because they have already paid for the service through their taxes.” He adds, “How
library staff members refer to their customers is . . . an important issue that deserves much discussion in every library.6

Some academic librarians argue that students cannot and should not be regarded as customers. Yet students surely are potential customers when they select a school to attend. During high school, they are bombarded with advertising from colleges eager to enroll them. They are customers in the bookstore and food courts on campus and when they purchase tickets to college sporting and entertainment events.

Some librarians dislike library service being equated with customers and commodities. They perceive libraries and their activities to be on a higher plane than their retail or commercial counterparts and decry the evaluation of rather basic processes, functions, and services as pedestrian and unsuitable. They might equate customers with the adage, “The customer is always right.” Customers are not always right, but they have the right to express their opinions and to learn about the library’s service parameters. They also have the right to choose not to associate with the library (or even any library). However, whether the term customer is used to describe the individuals whom libraries serve, the people who interact with any library service are the reason for the organization’s existence. Therefore, their needs and desires should drive the service.

As Arnold Hirshon notes, the concept of customer service dates to the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries and to practices found in retail trade and hotel management.7 Customer service is all about getting people to return and sending them away feeling positive about their experience. The goal, succinctly explained, is to generate repeat customers and lessen the likelihood they will seek the services of a competitor.

Unless the library infrastructure (collections and services, facilities, staff, and technology) and customers come together in a way that is both interesting and meaningful to customers, the library is nothing more than an expensive warehouse. Hard work, much of it pedestrian, must be performed before this coming together can occur—even in the Magic Kingdom. “As Walt Disney once said, ‘[T]here is no magic to magic. It’s in the details.’”8

With the onslaught of the Internet, the development of new technologies, and the economic recession, academic administrators as well as state and city officials have questioned the worth of the library. Some of them think the Internet replaces libraries, and others think libraries offer little value. As a result of the recent economic recession, a number of libraries or their branches have closed, and some staff have received unpaid furloughs or lost their jobs, or they have seen reductions in spending on library materials as well as the number of hours open to the public. As the operating costs for a college or university continue to soar, with state legislatures decreasing funding to public institutions, academic libraries are grappling with the “new normal”—coping with budget reductions. The new normal also applies to public libraries at a time when they are experiencing a significant increase in the number of people visiting them.

Libraries have responded, in part, by placing greater attention on demonstrating their value. As discussed in chapter 4, they emphasize the public’s return on investment by encouraging those interested to use a monetary calculator (provided on the libraries’ home pages) to determine the return on investment received from minimal library use. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) commissioned Value of Academic Libraries not only to demonstrate the contribution of academic libraries to their institutions but also to offer a framework for viewing value.9 At the same time, many public libraries are demonstrating their worth in terms of dollars and cents. Likewise, they are using a traditional business measure—return on investment—to put a value on library service. Adding value is vital to the continued well-being of academic and public libraries, and so is documenting value as part of a library’s accountability.

Libraries can evaluate and improve customer satisfaction, enhance service quality, and add value in ways meaningful to their sponsoring organizations. Librarians manage organizations and information resources in ways that serve their communities effectively and efficiently. More and more, managers fully understand they are accountable and must meet the expectations and demands of those
to whom they report. Accountability is about the effective and efficient expenditure of money and the meeting of promises specified in strategic plans. In doing so, the customer should neither be forgotten nor considered secondary.

**SERVICE QUALITY**

Every organization’s service has a quality dimension—ranging from wonderful to awful. Service and quality cannot be disconnected. *Quality* is the manner in which the service is delivered or, in some cases, not delivered. For a library, *service quality* encompasses the interactive relationship between the library and the people whom it is supposed to serve. A library that adheres to all the professionally approved rules and procedures for acquiring, organizing, managing, and preserving material but has no customers cannot claim quality because a major component is missing: satisfying people’s needs, requests, and desires for information. Maurice B. Line defined librarianship as “managing information resources for people.”¹⁰ How the library sees and interacts with those people—customers—clearly affects the quality and nature of the service rendered. As Françoise Hébert noted, “When library and customer measures of quality are not congruent, the library may be meeting its intended internal standards of performance but may not be performing well in the eyes of its customers.”¹¹

Service quality is multidimensional. Two critical dimensions are content and context. *Content* refers to obtaining what prompted the visit (physically or virtually)—such as particular materials or information, study space, technology, or an acceptable substitute. *Context* covers the experience itself: examples are interactions with staff, ease or difficulty of navigating the system, and the comfort of the physical environment.

Customers who come into the library as well as those who visit virtually experience both the content and context of the service. From these interactions, customers form opinions and attitudes about the library. Customer expectations can influence satisfaction with both content and context. These expectations may or may not match what librarians think appropriate, but nevertheless they represent reality for the customer.

Expectations change according to what customers want and how urgently they want it. Sometimes they are seeking a quiet place to read, sometimes just a book for enjoyment, sometimes access to technology to play video games, and sometimes a vital bit of information. Importance and urgency, though seldom considered, are likely to have a strong influence on customers’ satisfaction with a service. The prevailing custom has been to treat all searches or inquiries with equal priority, except those from people of special importance to the library such as an administrator in the sponsoring organization. The concept of equal treatment should be reconsidered because of its impact on consequences to the customer. If the level of service for all is high, exceptions become detrimental, costly, distinctive, and unnecessary.

Service quality is a complex concept. It has several dimensions beyond the content/context and the gap between performance and customer expectations. Service quality is both personal to individuals and collective among many customers. In a number of instances, impressions of service quality can be changed: perceptions move up with positive experiences and down as a result of negative ones.

**DIFFERENCES BETWEEN CUSTOMER SATISFACTION AND SERVICE QUALITY**

The terms *satisfaction* and *service quality* are frequently used interchangeably; this mistake has led to confusion and to mislabeling (or misrepresentation) of study findings. Satisfaction is an emotional reaction—the degree of contentment or discontentment. Satisfaction may or may not be directly related to the performance of the library on a specific occasion. A customer can receive an answer to a query but be unsatisfied because of an upsetting or angry encounter. Conversely, although the query might remain unanswered, another customer might feel satisfied because the encounter was pleasant and the helper interested and polite.
Service quality, as used in this book, is a global judgment relating to the superiority of a service as viewed in the context of specific statements that the library is willing to act on if customers find them of great value. The implication is that a number of transactions or encounters that an individual experiences with a particular organization fuse to form a positive impression of service quality for that person. The collective experiences of many people create an organization’s reputation for service quality.

**OTHER DIMENSIONS OF SERVICE QUALITY**

Marketing consultant George E. Kroon offers other ways to look at service quality: conformance, expectation, market perception, and strategic. Because the last of these measures applies only to commercial establishments, we will not consider it here.

Conformance requires that standards for quality be set for many processes and functions. The intent is to reduce mistakes (e.g., shelving errors), streamline workflow (e.g., cut backlogs), and establish required behaviors on the part of staff (e.g., ask if the customer got what was desired). Setting standards for service quality, as opposed to targets for work productivity in technical services or restrictions on the time allowed to answer reference questions, is rather a novel idea for libraries, but one whose time has come. The library has considerable control over quality as conformance to standards that it can use to improve service in many areas.

The idea of conformance standards leads to consideration of three kinds of situations that might negatively affect service quality: predictable, foreseeable, and unpredictable. Predictable situations are those over which the library has considerable control and thus can take action to prevent or at least minimize. Foreseeable situations are those that are likely to happen, but the time frame between occurrences is longer and incidences are fewer than for the predictable ones. To some extent, it is possible to plan for even unpredictable and unlikely situations. For example, staff trained to respond to certain disasters or crises, such as fires, bomb threats, and tornadoes, can greatly ameliorate the situation. Following are examples of each type of library situation.

- predictable situations
  - equipment failures
  - network crashes
  - no paper in photocopiers and printers
  - staff absences
  - patron ignorance

- foreseeable situations
  - power failures
  - weather problems
  - budget cuts and rescissions

- unpredictable situations
  - natural disasters
  - fire
  - psychopaths

The downside of concentrating solely on conformance quality is that the focus is internal and may not match customer expectations or preferences. Although conformance standards are desirable, they should not be used in isolation.

The second dimension is customer expectations. Expectations are influenced by factors outside the control of management, such as customers’ prior experience, word of mouth, and competitor behavior. Performance that repeatedly, or in some particular way, fails to meet customers’ expectations is a clear signal to management that improvement is needed. Such improvement can be facilitated by training, technology, or conformance standards. Sometimes, however, customers have erroneous or unrealistic ideas about the service. In these cases, customers should be told why their expectations cannot be met.

The third dimension of service quality is market perception—evaluation against competitors. Libraries realize they have competitors beyond just other libraries. These competitors include, for instance, bookstores where customers can read without buying and enjoy food and drink; Redbox, Netflix, and iTunes for movies; iTunes, Blip.fm, Last.fm, and Pandora for music; and search engines such as Google for information and for creating the impression that the Internet offers everything. Amazon.com is also a competitor because of its vast offerings and ability to fill many orders promptly. This dimension
forces libraries to ask the following questions: Why don’t more people use us? What do we do better than other service organizations (including other libraries)? How do we alert customers to this? Do their patterns of use realign and tip in our favor? The key is not just to ask these questions but to develop innovative ways to answer them—persuading customers to make greater use of libraries. Figure 1.1, adapted from one presented by Kroon, depicts the differences in quality dimensions.

WHY INVESTIGATE QUALITY?

There are multiple ways to view quality and report on the extent to which organizations provide quality programming and services. Stakeholders are interested in quality and define it differently and at times narrowly. “The quality of education is the ‘elephant in the room’ in most discussions of college and university performance.” Quality might simply be defined in terms of the number of students graduated. Clearly, academic institutions and others must be able to provide different perspectives on quality while better defining what it is and is not; more important, they must persuade stakeholders that their definition and related metrics are the important ones to track. To date, however, they have not been successful.

Libraries have gathered and reported statistics about their collections, funds, and staff for decades. These statistics have, however, concentrated primarily on finances, the resources purchased with those finances, and workloads. As a result, an infor-

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**FIGURE 1.1**

Differences in Quality Dimensions

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DIMENSION</th>
<th>CONFORMANCE</th>
<th>EXPECTATION</th>
<th>MARKET PERCEPTION</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>VIEWPOINT</td>
<td>• Internal</td>
<td>• External</td>
<td>• Peers and competitors</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KEY TERMS</td>
<td>• Service quality</td>
<td>• Expectations</td>
<td>• Peer performance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Processes</td>
<td>• Performance gap</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Functions</td>
<td></td>
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</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Services</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FOCUS OF EFFORT</td>
<td>• Service</td>
<td>• Service</td>
<td>• Peer comparisons</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Customer</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WHAT TO EVALUATE</td>
<td>• Context</td>
<td>• Customer expectations</td>
<td>• Rankings/ratios with peer data</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Performance</td>
<td>• versus performance and\versus importance</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Transactions</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SUPERIOR QUALITY RESULTS IN</td>
<td>• Stakeholder satisfaction</td>
<td>• Performance exceeding\expectations \ Loyalty</td>
<td>• Good reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>INFERIOR QUALITY RESULTS IN</td>
<td>• Errors</td>
<td>• Bad word-of-mouth</td>
<td>• Unfavorable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Delays</td>
<td>• Dissatisfaction</td>
<td>• reputation</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Higher costs</td>
<td></td>
<td>• compared to peers</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Lost customers</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


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information gap remains. These traditional statistics lack relevance. Most of the traditional statistics do not measure the library’s performance in terms of elements important to customers. They do not really describe performance or indicate whether service quality and satisfaction are good, indifferent, or bad. Even worse, they do not indicate any action that the administration or a team can or should take to improve performance.

Libraries need to evaluate quality on a much broader scale than resources held, resources acquired, and activities completed. They also need to view their institution or broader organizational role in a context much bigger than such yardsticks. A variety of companies in the for-profit and not-for-profit sectors have developed a series of customer-based metrics that they label “service quality indicators”; some collect the data quarterly. Examples include successful complaint resolution and call success rate.\textsuperscript{14} As Robert E. Dugan, Peter Hernon, and Danuta A. Nitecki show, a variety of metrics could be tailored to capture the customer perspective for academic and public libraries.\textsuperscript{15}

**THE PAYOFF FOR THE LIBRARY**

Everybody is bombarded with messages and stimuli. Therefore, attention and time are two of the most valuable assets that individuals have. Those who choose to spend these assets in the library or using library resources should be regarded as precious customers. Recognizing the value of repeat customers, as previously noted, is important for the success of most organizations. Repeat customers, especially the more frequent ones, tend to be loyal. The library’s repeat customers already have demonstrated their interest in reading, seeking information, or making other uses of the library. Loyalty means that the customers return repeatedly; they recommend the library to their friends and colleagues and may be more forgiving when the system makes a mistake. Some of them will actively campaign for library bond issues or protest library budget cuts.

The collective experience of customers creates a reputation for the library. A reputation will become known to the administrators who fund the library and to the library community—students, faculty, the public, taxpayers, and so on. What kind of reputation does a library have? How well does that reputation match the one that library staff desire or think the library has? If the library wants a better reputation, what is it doing to improve its reputation? These questions need serious consideration. Librarians need to consider how to better describe the benefits of their service to the administrators who fund them.

Complementary to reputation is brand image—a strong one sets the organization apart from (and above) its competitors. When staff think about the brand of the library, they should be thinking about the entire customer experience—everything from the website to social media experiences to the way they answer the phone to the way customers experience the staff. A library’s brand, therefore, is the way its customers perceive the organization. Building a brand is just like building a reputation in that the organization needs to prove itself repeatedly in order for people to put their trust in the organization and to become loyal customers. At the same time, to gain community support, libraries need to tell the community about the various services that are available and to do so in a way in which the public will listen and respond positively.\textsuperscript{16}

**NATIONAL AWARDS**

Each year, the Malcolm Baldrige National Quality Award recognizes outstanding U.S. companies and education, health-care, service, and nonprofit organizations that apply and are judged to be outstanding in seven areas of performance excellence: leadership; strategic planning; customer engagement; measurement, analysis, and knowledge management; workforce focus; process management; and results. The first three areas represent the leadership triad and provide the context for evaluating where the organization is heading and how important effective lead-
ership is to strategic planning focused on customers. The customer engagement component, which examines how the organization engages its customers to achieve its mission, underscores the investment that customers make in the organization or their commitment to the organization, its education program, and service offerings. Engaged customers refer to their retention and loyalty, their willingness to use the organization (become a customer of it), and their willingness to be an advocate of the organization and recommend it to others. Applicants are asked to explain their data collection plan and how that plan addresses the determination of market requirements, the support provided to customers, the use of data collected to improve education programs and services, relationship building with others, and complaint management. It is important to note that past application forms—prior to the 2014 version—used the term customer focus, not customer engagement. Engagement is a stronger, more proactive term that requires direct input from customers—creating a relationship with them.

Winners of this award, given since 1987, have enjoyed considerable success. Steve George, who has written about the award and worked with some of the winners, lists several characteristics common among them:

- a genuine concern for all people using or working in the organization or its community
- a strong desire to improve in every way
- a commitment to learning from other organizations and individuals
- use of data to measure and improve an alignment of strategies, processes, and activities with the mission of the organization

Within academic librarianship, since 2000, YBP Library Services has provided ACRL with annual funding for an Excellence in Academic Libraries Award Program to recognize an outstanding community college, college, and university library. This award honors the accomplishments of librarians and other library staff as they work together in support of the mission of their institution. Recipients, as reflected in the applications we examined, have focused on what they do and not on criteria such as those of the Baldrige Award; customer satisfaction and dissatisfaction are not emphasized, and leadership appears to be equated with accomplishments.

The Public Library Association (PLA) does not have an award similar to the one for academic libraries. The EBSCO Excellence in Small and/or Rural Public Library Service Award honors a public library that demonstrates excellence in service to a community of no more than ten thousand people. The Allie Beth Martin Award, sponsored by Baker and Taylor, recognizes a public librarian for demonstrating a range and depth of knowledge about books and other library materials and a distinguished ability to share that knowledge. The Polaris Innovation in Technology John Iliff Award recognizes a librarian or a library for the use of technology and innovation to improve services.

Each year, the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS), in coordination with the White House, awards a national medal to five libraries and five museums that make a long-term commitment to public service through innovative programs and community partnerships.

A MANAGEMENT INFORMATION SYSTEM

Many businesses have adopted the concept of the balanced scorecard to evaluate the performance of the organization from the perspective of each of its stakeholders. The scorecard transforms an organization’s strategic plan into an action plan to guide the organization daily. It offers a framework that not only provides performance measurements but helps planners identify what should be done and measured. Few libraries, however, have created a scorecard and, when they have, they have not always linked it to strategic planning and collected data continuously. Furthermore, many libraries do not have a management information system of any sort. Others compile and manage local information (e.g., inputs and outputs) using spreadsheets. An alterna-
tive means that is not time-consuming to maintain is provided as a service from Counting Opinions of Toronto, Canada. Through an agreement with the American Library Association, Counting Opinions provides libraries with a platform to include and access data from either ACRL Metrics or PLA metrics, which collectively provide data from libraries completing surveys for ACRL, the National Center for Education Statistics’ (NCES) Integrated Post-secondary Education Data System (IPEDS), PLA, and IMLS. Through both data services libraries have access to data (inputs and outputs) that they and many other libraries provide. They can use the data to create benchmarks, engage in best practices, and monitor trends and competition. They can also insert other data sets into the system and thereby add other perspectives, such as that of the customer. Clearly, local libraries could insert the data collected elsewhere—such as those that represent the customer’s perspective (see chapter 11)—into the system and use the ongoing data set for decision making, planning, and accountability.

A FINAL WORD

The time has come to stop confusing means—processes and functions related to the collection or to technology—with ends (i.e., purpose) and to manage information resources for people. People are the reason for having a library; without them there is no need for a library. Service is basic to the customer’s satisfaction or delight with the library. Studies carried out by some companies have found very high levels of customer satisfaction. This result is not surprising because these companies emphasize market research and marketing as the tools to find out what customers want. Knowing what customers want makes it possible to tailor service provision to pleasing them. Customers are not always right, but they are our customers! They are the lifeline of any organization, and it is important to keep them by avoiding or minimizing customer dissatisfaction. If good customers are worth having, they are worth the effort to keep them coming back.

The quality of service from the customer perspective is a complex phenomenon that is composed of the content of the service itself and the context in which the service is rendered. It is also affected by the quality of the information supplied and used and by the expectations that customers have for the service. All managers should want to avoid situations in which library performance is perceived as poor and customer expectations are low but customers appear indifferent or merely satisfied. Service quality is both individual and collective; the collective determination of service quality and satisfaction creates the library’s reputation in the community and for the administrators who fund the library. Customer satisfaction effects loyalty and helps to gain acceptance for brand image (see chapter 10).

Traditional library performance metrics do not reflect the quality of service from the perspective of customers. The focus of such metrics is primarily on expenditures for resources and the amount of use generated rather than on delivery of service and how customers perceive it. For these and other reasons, library managers must look for better ways to measure and describe the quality of the services provided and, in effect, demonstrate that the organization deserves the type of recognition bestowed on Baldrige Award winners.

NOTES


19. An interesting way to find out about other awards is to look at the websites of some major libraries. Under the heading “about the library” they might list the awards received. For example, see Orange County Library System, “Press Room: Awards & Recognitions” (Orlando, Florida), www.ocls.info/About/OnlinePress/awardsRecognition.asp.


21. See Peter Hernon, Robert E. Dugan, and Joseph R. Matthews, *Managing with Data: Using ACRLMetrics and PLAmetrics* (Chicago: American Library Association, 2015). This work explains how to perform different functions (e.g., prepare a return on investment) and provides access to a subset of the data available through these services.
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Ellen Altman, now retired, was visiting professor in the Department of Library and Information Studies, Victoria University of Wellington (New Zealand), 1996–1997. She had been a faculty member at the Universities of Kentucky and Toronto and at Indiana University, professor and director of the Graduate Library School at the University of Arizona, and feature editor of Public Libraries, the official publication of the Public Library Association. Altman was coeditor of “The JAL Guide to the Professional Literature” in the Journal of Academic Librarianship, a member of the editorial board of Library Quarterly, and a coauthor of Performance Measures for Public Libraries. She received the Distinguished Alumni Award from Rutgers School of Communication, Information and Library Studies, in 1983.

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