

Marketing Hackathon (Local Business Challenge)

— Library Event Guide (Value Lab)

What this is

A high-energy, community-rooted event where the library invites a **local business owner/manager** to share their real business and marketing constraints—then participants work in teams to build a short **marketing strategy deck** tailored to that business and budget.

The business owner chooses a “winner” (best fit + feasibility). If they want, they can optionally keep working with the team(s) to execute ideas after the event.

Who this is for

- Libraries that want an energetic, collaborative entrepreneurship event that feels **real** (not hypothetical).
- Patrons who want to practice audience thinking, creativity, and practical marketing planning.
- Works well for teens, adults, and mixed audiences (teams help balance experience levels).

What success looks like

Participants leave with: - A concrete marketing strategy deck for a real local business - Better intuition about audiences, messaging, and channels - A “next step” they can take in the next 7 days (learn by doing)

The business leaves with: - 3–6 actionable ideas they can try (within their stated budget) - A shortlist of strategies that felt most aligned

Safety + inclusion (important for libraries)

- Participation is optional; “you can pass” is always allowed.
- No pressure to share personal details (for participants or the business owner).
- Keep feedback respectful: this is a **supportive workshop**, not a roast.
- Avoid professional advice (legal/tax/financial). Keep it practical: what you’d try, how you’d test.
- Make consent explicit for photos/recording and for exchanging contact information.

Facilitator guideline: keep it beginner-friendly. A great deck is clear and feasible—not flashy.

Quickstart setup (30–60 minutes)

Invite a local business (keep it library-friendly)

Choose someone who is: - Local and comfortable with beginners - Willing to share the basics (audience, what works/doesn't, constraints) - Open to receiving ideas (without expecting “free labor”)

Business “brief” intake (10 minutes, can be email)

Ask the business to provide: - **Business name + what you sell** (plain language) - **Primary customer** (who buys today) - **Current marketing channels** (what they already do) - **Budget range** (pick one): \$0 / \$100 / \$500 / \$2,000+ (or whatever fits them) - **Goal for the next 30 days** (pick one): more foot traffic / more leads / more calls / more bookings / more online orders / more awareness - **Constraints** (choose 1–3): limited time / limited staff / limited tech / seasonality / location / regulations

Materials checklist

- Timer + bell sound (phone works)
- Projector or large screen (optional; helpful for pitches)
- Whiteboard / sticky notes / markers
- A printed or displayed copy of the business brief (1 page)
- Name tags (optional)

Room setup

- Tables for teams of 2–4
- A front area for the business owner to speak + for team pitches
- A quiet edge for participants who prefer to listen first (they can join a team later)

Run of show (2.5 hours — default)

Before you start (3 minutes of setup)

- Write the business name, budget, and goal on the board.
- Decide how the business owner will judge (see rubric below).
- Decide how you'll handle follow-up:
 - Option A (recommended): the library shares contact info only by mutual opt-in.
 - Option B: teams and business exchange contact directly (only if both want to).

Time notes - Default agenda below is **150 minutes**. - If you need **120 minutes**: shorten build time and do fewer teams live (use gallery walk). - If you have **180 minutes**: add a deeper research block and a second iteration round.

0–10 min: Welcome + framing

Host script (copy/paste):

“Welcome to the Marketing Hackathon: Local Business Challenge. Today is about helping a real local business reach more people—within a real budget. You don’t need marketing experience. Clarity and practicality beat fancy ideas.”

Norms (say this quickly): - Be kind and specific - Keep it realistic for the stated budget - No one has to share personal details - The business owner can decline any idea—this is a brainstorm, not a contract - Use public information only when researching (no stalking individuals)

10–25 min: Business story + constraints (guest segment)

Ask the business owner to share: 1) What the business does (plain language) 2) Who the customer is (who buys today) 3) What they currently do to market (channels that have / haven’t worked) 4) The **budget** and biggest constraints (time/staff/tools) 5) The goal for the next 30 days

Host tip: keep this to ~12–15 minutes. The goal is clarity, not a long origin story.

25–40 min: Clarifying Q&A + “don’ts” (15 minutes)

Take questions that help teams build better ideas: - “What’s your best-selling product/service right now?” - “What type of customer do you want more of?” - “What’s one thing you *don’t* want to do?” (e.g., TikTok, cold calling, discounts)

Facilitation tip: cap answers at ~60–90 seconds so you can get through more questions.

Optional (very helpful): “Constraints list” (2 minutes) Ask the owner to pick 2–3 non-negotiables: - “We can’t discount.” - “We can’t hire staff.” - “We can’t do daily posting.” - “We need local customers (not national).”

40–50 min: Form teams + roles

Teams of 2–4.

Optional roles (helps quieter participants): - Facilitator (keeps time) - Scribe (captures ideas) - Presenter (gives the pitch)

50–60 min: Quick research plan (10 minutes)

Teams decide what they need to learn before proposing strategies: - What do competitors do? - Where does this audience hang out (online/offline)? - What

offers/messages seem to resonate in this category?

Research rules (library-friendly): - Use public sources only (business website/social, reviews, competitor pages, public directories). - No digging into personal/private info.

60–123 min: Build + research + iterate (63 minutes)

Teams create a short “strategy deck” (paper, whiteboard, or slides).

Deliverable (still simple, but more complete): 8 slides / sections 1) The customer (who + what they care about) 2) The goal + constraint summary (budget, non-negotiables) 3) One-sentence message (why this business, why now) 4) Strategy stack (3–5 strategies aligned to budget) 5) Budget allocation (how you’d spend the money, if any) 6) 7-day action plan (first steps + who does what) 7) 30-day plan (what happens after week 1) 8) Measurement (how we’ll know it worked)

Facilitation tips (what makes this work): - If a team gets stuck, ask: “What would we try in the next 7 days with this budget?” - Encourage teams to mix channels: one quick win + one partnership + one repeatable habit.

Optional structured check-in (keeps teams moving) - At minute 30 of build time, do a 60-second “stand-up” per team: - “Our customer is .” - “*Our strongest strategy so far is .*” - “Our biggest risk/unknown is ____.”

Optional micro-break (recommended): 2-minute stretch/water break before pitches.

123–148 min: Team pitches + judge Q&A

Each team gets: - 2 minutes pitch - 1 minute Q&A from the business owner

Time management: - This pitch block assumes ~8 teams max. - If you have more teams, use a gallery walk (below) or limit live pitches to the top 5 teams chosen by quick audience vote.

148–150 min: Winner + close

Business owner chooses a winner based on fit and feasibility.

Close script (copy/paste):

“Great work. The win is not the trophy—it’s learning how to turn a real problem into a practical plan. If you want to keep building, your best next step is to pick one strategy and test it in the next 7 days.”

Optional enhancements (if you have extra time)

Gallery walk (best for 6+ teams)

Instead of full pitches: - Teams post their deck summary on the wall/table. - Business owner and attendees walk and ask questions. - Business owner picks a winner at the end.

Office hours with the business owner (10–15 minutes during build time)

If the guest is willing, offer a short “office hours” slot: - Teams line up with 1–2 questions each. - Keep it fast and friendly; the goal is clarifying constraints, not debating tactics.

Execution follow-up (turn ideas into action)

If the business owner wants help executing: - Offer an optional follow-up session at the library (60 minutes) one week later: - Pick 1–2 strategies to run - Assign tasks - Set a simple measurement plan

Judging rubric (copy/paste)

Ask the business owner to choose based on: - **Fit**: does it match the business and customer? - **Feasibility**: can it be done with the budget and constraints? - **Clarity**: is the plan easy to understand and act on? - **Creativity**: is there one fresh idea that stands out? - **Measurement**: is there a simple way to know it worked?

Outcomes to track (library-friendly)

- attendees
- teams formed
-

business guests hosted

- % who wrote a 7-day next step (optional quick hand raise)
-

After the event: keep momentum going (where Value Lab enhances the journey)

Hackathons create energy—but without follow-up, plans stay on paper.

Value Lab helps patrons keep moving upward after the event: - Participants can keep practicing real-world thinking (audience, messaging, testing) over multiple sessions. - Libraries can turn this into a repeatable cycle: business challenge → follow-up build session → showcase. - The platform keeps progress going between events, making entrepreneurship programming sustainable and consistent even with limited staff time.