

Marketing the Small Public Library

compiled by

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Conference Abstract: Athalia Taylor and Dinah Harris will discuss their tips and ideas for promoting, endorsing, and advancing small public libraries.

Introduction

Marketing involves getting the word out about what the library has to offer in order to get more people to use the libraries offerings. This session gave ideas on how to do just that. The session covered ways to be involved in your community, ways to promote the library to local officials, use of the media, use of signage, and the marketing of summer reading programs. A list of marketing resources is also included.

Active Community Involvement

Try to fit the library into every large event held in your community in some way. You can set up booths at events such as local festivals, truck and boat shows, health fairs, holiday marts, county fairs, etc. You can reach many people because these shows draw large crowds. At each event, display books and handouts pertinent to the event. For example:

- **Health fair:** books on illness, disease, diet, exercise. Include health reference books, like the *PDR*.
- **Truck and boat shows:** books on boats, boating safety, and trucks. Also pass out information on how to apply for fishing and boating licenses and what websites to search for more information.

- **Festivals without a certain theme:** hand out library promotional materials, and possibly have a used book sale.

If your area does not have a **festival**, why not head one up yourself? It is much easier than it may seem. Just form a committee with members of the local media, chamber of commerce, and educational entities. Decide what type of festival you think would work for your area, set a date, split up responsibilities, and then go for it! We are attempting such a venture in Henderson County in May of 2006. We have orchestrated the “Henderson County Folk Festival” to be held on May 13, 2006, downtown Lexington. A coloring contest is being held among the schoolchildren. Merchants are donating \$25 gift certificates so we can give away a \$500 prize package. In order to be eligible for the prize, entries will have to visit the booths of all educational agencies presented and have an entry form stamped. There will be live music, storytelling, demonstrations of folk crafts, and contests such as whittling, washer tossing, and horseshoe throwing.

Look for other kinds of events to participate in, too. At a **Holiday Mart**, your library might actually sell merchandise, with a discount on the price for purchasing at the event. Items such as cookbooks or local history books could be sold. Samples of candy and punch from recipes in a cookbook will increase its sales. Decaturville Public Library had an afghan made with sketches of local historical buildings along with the library’s new building. These afghans were great promotional products for the library along with being useful collector’s items.

Participating in **Christmas parades** by entering a float is also a great way to promote the library. Center your theme on a book or reading if at all possible. “Seasons Readings” is one such holiday theme. If your library is located on the parade route, you might want to serve hot chocolate or spiced cider at your library to parade attendees.

Becoming actively involved in area **civic organizations** is another way to promote your library. Such organizations include historical societies, chambers of commerce, local garden clubs, arts councils, literacy advisory boards, etc. Participate as a representative of the library.

Visibility with Local Officials

Instead of trying to sell your library and its benefits to money-bearing government only once a year, become involved and always be in the mainstream. Attend **city, county, and school board meetings** on a regular basis in order to keep your face and your name known to them. That way, they will not be afraid that every time they see your face, you are only going to ask for money.

Media Contacts

Maintaining regular contact with the media is very important in marketing the library's products and services. Establish relationships with local and regional media outlets to make the most impact.

A **weekly library news column** can keep citizens informed of happenings at the library. This column could contain news such as special programming announcements, weekly story time themes, new additions to the library's collection, and/or special displays. If news is slow, use that time to describe the Tennessee Electronic Library, the R.E.A.D.S. System, or some other special service. Also, once a month, add a list of memorials given to the library. Sponsors like the recognition, and readers will see how others are supporting the library. This will increase the likelihood that others will give to the library. People tend to like to be part of anything that is growing and prosperous.

Find out who your contact is for the nearest **regional newspaper** and establish a relationship with that person. Many regional newspapers carry a section of announcements covering the whole area. Since these announcements aren't isolated under a library news heading, the likelihood of reaching non-library users increases. Also, regional newspapers often have a magazine associated with their organization. This would be another outlet for your information.

Add your **local radio and television stations** to your list of weekly contacts. Most local radio stations offer free community calendar announcements, but be aware that most prefer to list just the more important events or special programming. Do not forget television advertising also in your marketing plan. Local PBS stations have a community calendar where you can post your announcements free. In addition, in our area, there is a local ABC affiliate that allows local

community events to be announced free, but you must get the information to them two weeks in advance of the event.

If you have a large event planned, you may want to **branch out of your local area**. The *Tennessee News Media Directory* can help you identify news outlets. It contains information on all the dailies, weeklies, magazines, radio, and television in the state. Entries include the address, phone number, email address, website, and personnel of each. There is a county index in the back to help you find what you need. You can find out more about this book at www.newsmediadirectories.com.

You can also send a copy of your news to the local chamber of commerce, senior group, or anyone else who has a **list of constituents** to whom pertinent information can be passed. To get your computer savvy patrons involved, start a news group on a popular site such as Yahoo. If you teach free computer classes at your library, lead your students through the sign up process. Besides getting word out in the community, be sure your staff knows all about what is going on. If weekly staff meetings are not possible, email the staff a copy of the library news. Marketing is everyone's job.

Outdoor Lighted Sign

Another successful method of marketing is to use an outdoor lighted sign. People driving down the road read the sign out of habit, whether they really intend to or not; they can discover many things the library offers of which they had no idea. Most non-users of libraries still think the library is only about books. Then, if they aren't interested in books, they will not read the library news. Therefore, getting the word out there where non-users will see it is very important and effective. After installation of a sign at the Everett Horn Library in Lexington, TN, an event that formerly had only drawn one person suddenly drew more than space allowed. Signs are expensive, so you might see if the purchase could be a project for your Friends of the Library group. You might also ask someone with money if they would like to do something for the whole community, and they might just oblige, as a donor did for the Everett Horn Library.

Summer Reading Program Marketing

Marketing summer reading programs offers a new set of ideas. One effective method is to develop **brochures** that describe each category of

summer programming offered: one for children, one for teens, and one for adults. Children's brochures can be distributed to all elementary schools in your service area. Call the school ahead of time and find out how many children are in the target grades. Childcare providers are also should be given information about your programming. Check the state web site for a list of approved childcare providers in your area. Distribute brochures for teens to 7th and 8th grade students along with all high school students in your service area. Brochures on adult programs can be distributed at the senior citizens' center, and to local groups and clubs. Our list includes Woodmen of the World, FCE Clubs, and any other adult group we can find. Of course, copies of all brochures are distributed at the checkout desk in the library also.

If there are any special events in your area during the period before your summer programming begins, attend these events and pass out literature if possible. There are many festivals in April and May right before summer begins. The main purpose of the library organizing the Henderson County Folk Festival is to create a venue to reach a new group of people with word of the library's summer programming.

Resources

These five great web sites can assist you in your marketing:

<http://www.chrisolson.com/marketingtreasures/indexmt.html>

<http://librarymarketing.blogspot.com>

http://clips.lis.uiuc.edu/2003_09.html

http://www.gale.com/free_resources/marketing/

<http://www.infotoday.com/MLS>