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MARKETING YOUR LIBRARY'S ONLINE RESOURCES

HOW TO BUILD AWARENESS AND INCREASE USAGE OF YOUR LIBRARY'S ONLINE ASSETS



HOW OFTEN DO PEOPLE TELL YOU THAT NO ONE HAS THE INFORMATION THEY NEED, WHEN YOU KNOW IT'S AVAILABLE ONLINE VIA THE LIBRARY'S WEBSITE?

How often do service members and their families rely on incomplete or dubious information from a general search engine, when the library's databases offer complete and authoritative content free of charge, 24 hours a day?

Sadly, many people don't know what your library has to offer. It's time to show them what they're missing—a "virtual bookmobile" for the 21st century, delivering your entire electronic collection to them no matter their location—your library or from the convenience of their homes or offices. Who wouldn't like free and easy access to

reliable references, newspapers, magazines, e-books, and more, once they knew about it? This guide will help you as you put the power of marketing to work for your library.

This text is divided into two sections. "Get Prepared" will help you make sure that, when users do reach your site, they'll have a good experience. Once you're prepared for their arrival, you'll want to "Get the Word Out" by following the steps in the second section. The order is important: don't spread the word until you're sure you're ready for prime time!

GET PREPARED

STEP 1. KNOW YOUR PRODUCT.

You can't market a product that you don't understand, so be sure you know the "ins and outs" of the databases on your website. What information needs are they designed to serve? When would you use one of them as opposed to another database in your collection? What makes them better than a general search engine? Are they useful to kids? Can you effectively describe and demonstrate them?

IN YOUR MARKETING TOOLKIT...

Database Descriptions. Take a minute to review the database descriptions and other materials in this kit. These pieces are meant to teach people when to use general search engines and when to go for the "good stuff" at the library. They also help library staff describe your resources and how they stack up against the competition.

Now YOU know the databases—who else on the staff should know and love them like you do? Spread your knowledge so the entire library staff can be an advocate for your electronic resources.

IDEA!

Pick your staff members' brains. Which databases are their favorites, and why? Create an online forum for staff to share ideas and tips about each of the databases, and save them in an online reference folder so new staff members can get up and running faster. Or borrow a trick from bookstores, where titles flagged as "staff picks" always sell more. Choose your favorite resource, explain why it's great in a brief note, and add your signature (picture too, if you want) for the personal touch. Post that on your website and watch usage go up. (For extra oomph, have a user contribute a short note on his or her favorite electronic resource, plus name and picture if willing.) Be sure to rotate these "reviews" regularly.

STEP 2. KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER.

Product knowledge goes hand in hand with understanding the customer. Look at the service members, their dependents, and authorized civilians on base, and identify those who might want to use your resources that aren't currently using them. Chances are, they're already using general search engines to do online research. Your task is to modify their behavior by proving that your Web gateway is better than what they're using now, in ways that matter to them personally.

Start by making a list of the major market groups using your library. For example, your library might have a list like this:

- Families with school-age children
- Military retirees
- Genealogists
- ...and so on

Each of these groups has research needs that your library's databases and general search engines can meet. The point is, your resources meet those needs far better, and your job is to make sure your community knows all the ways how. These are just a few of the possibilities:

- Parents want safe Internet experiences for their kids, but the unmediated Web is notoriously risky for children. Searching through the library's Web gateway allows kids to do research in a safe environment that gives them accurate information.
- Retirees need reliable and comprehensive sources for their questions regarding health and wellness. Searching the library's gateway takes them to vetted, authoritative sources.
- Genealogists need historical information that usually requires an expensive subscription. The same information—and better—is free when they use the library's gateway.

The idea is to match your language to your library users' wants, whether it's homework help or help finding information about an ancestor.

If you don't know what your community wants, find out. Talk with those on base. Ask them about their interests, their frustrations with Internet searching, whether they know about the library's Web gateway, and what might make them use it more.

This "need" language is the basis for crafting a message for each of your markets. Make sure your staff is on board and understands your message for each market. Use your messaging consistently in all your outreach and discussion.

IDEA!

Assemble focus groups to discuss the library's Web gateway. Since information searching can vary widely, you'll want to schedule targeted focus groups based on market segment (e.g., parents with young children, young adults, etc.). Send invitations, and follow up by phone until you've confirmed at least a dozen people. Have your discussion questions ready (broad, open-ended questions such as "What kinds of questions do you use the Internet to answer?") and be prepared to demonstrate the gateway and its resources. Encourage honest feedback and take notes. Keep your eyes open for particularly insightful guests. Note that "insight" is different from "talkative." Draw out those whose comments ring true or, even better, cause you to think "aha!" You may want to stay in touch with these insightful guests as you develop your Web program. These are potential opinion-shapers and library advocates on base.

STEP 3. MAKE YOUR LIBRARY'S RESOURCES EASY TO FIND.

Is your database gateway easy for non-librarians to use? Can visitors find the resources quickly? People have become attuned to self-service, and they expect those services to be intuitive. In an environment rife with alternatives, people quickly abandon those that are puzzling. If you want people to turn to your virtual library first and regularly for their information needs, you must make sure they can get to your resources quickly and easily.

Once you have visitors on your homepage, the gateway to your online resources should be bold and inviting. Don't make your visitors hunt for them or they might give up. Consider a click-through graphic that not only invites visitors, but tells them what they'll find:

ENTER YOUR VIRTUAL LIBRARY: Click here for free online resources that answer your questions 24/7!

- Homework Help
- Magazines
- Newspapers
- ...all available with a mouse-click!

IDEA!

Quick field test! Is it really that quick and easy to find your homepage and online resources? Go to the coffee shop and find a laptop volunteer who'll trade outspoken feedback for a latte. Have him find your library's homepage, and then the online resources. Take notes, and put any problems at the top of your "must fix" list. (You can field-test anyone who doesn't already know the library, like your neighbor or relative...but give yourself a break. You deserve a trip to the coffee shop and a latte yourself, hard as you work.)

STEP 4. SPEAK YOUR VISITOR'S LANGUAGE ONLINE.

Libraries are rife with industry jargon and systems that can confuse people (or worse, make them feel unwelcome). You must speak your visitor's language online so that he or she can navigate with ease—especially if the visitor will experience your Web gateway remotely, without librarian guidance.

Start with the basics: do your customers use "databases," or do they visit websites? If they don't use the word "databases," don't describe them that way. Don't know which word they use? Ask. Talk with people on base, show them the gateway, and ask if they understand what the label means. Take it a step further and ask if there's a better way to label the gateway.

Next, look at the resources' labels. Is there simply a list of resources, such as "ProQuest Platinum" or "CultureGrams"? Would a non-librarian know what the labels mean? If you do use an industry label, make sure you add a description that your visitors will understand.

IN YOUR MARKETING TOOLKIT...

ProQuest Database Descriptions and User Guides have been provided for use on your library's website. The user-friendly descriptions explain the contents and uses of many of the resources available through your library's gateway. You can customize these to reflect your library's subscriptions.

The user guides tell patrons how to use the databases to effectively search for information and how to use tools to view, organize, print, and email the information they find.

STEP 5. GO GET 'EM!

If you followed Steps 1 through 4, it's time to spread the word. Read on for how to "Get the Word Out."



GET THE WORD OUT



1 STEP 1. SEIZE OPPORTUNITIES IN THE LIBRARY.

You have a built-in audience every day at the library, and every encounter with military personnel and their families is an opportunity to teach them about your online resources. Seize those moments!

Create brief, easy-to-read brochures that advertise the gateway. (Remember to use the messages you developed for your customers to address their needs—see “Get prepared: Step 2.”) Put brochures at the circulation desk, and send one home with anyone who checks out a book. Keep a stack at the reference desk, as well.

Speaking of the reference desk, the staff members here are ideally placed to introduce your online resources as they help visitors with their questions. Encourage the reference staff to introduce the entire gateway, rather than answering just one question. These folks are also positioned to gather feedback—positive and negative—that can help you fine-tune the format, language, and contents of your online library.

Where do people stop and linger in the library? Watch for natural stopping points and take advantage of them to spread the word about your online resources. Create a one-page flier that briefly summarizes the contents and needs that can be met. Post it where service members, their families, and other visitors can easily see and read it.

These ideas are the tip of the iceberg. Create these marketing tools and consider every encounter with customers an opportunity to teach them about all the good things their base library gives them online.

IDEA!

Ask people who use the library’s databases to provide short reviews and testimonials about their favorite electronic resources. Post the testimonials on your website for others to see. Be sure to rotate the reviews regularly.

IN YOUR MARKETING TOOLKIT...

Brochure and Promotional Flier. Samples can be found in the “Library Marketing Tools” section of www.proquest.com. Customize and print your own version by accessing the Microsoft Word version online.

2 STEP 2. NETWORK, NETWORK, NETWORK!

Imagine that perfect day, when your staff member personally demonstrates the library gateway and its electronic riches to every patron and potential patron in your community. If that day comes, go for it! But you can also build a network of advocates to do it for you, every day.

In “Get Prepared: Step 2,” you made a list of your library’s major market segments and their needs. Now look at who influences them.

These groups might have influencers that include teachers, chaplains, doctors, and club members. Introducing these groups to the gateway is a great way to get THEM to spread the word to the people you want to reach. And with that word of mouth comes endorsement.

When, where, and how can you reach them? Doctors might be best reached with a letter about your gateway (be sure to mention your health resources!), plus the brochure you developed. Teachers and community groups might be accessible through meetings, where you can demonstrate the gateway and its contents. Be prepared to take your show on the road.

IDEA!

Your library is part of a larger network—a base. Because of its information resources, your library is in a unique position to serve this community. For example, while a library representative may already be attending organizational and department meetings, you can boost the library's profile by bringing information "goody bags" for representatives of other departments—research culled from the library's online resources to help them with their projects. Be sure to include the source, Web address, and any passwords users will need to access more information.

STEP 3. MEET THE PRESS.

The base's media—newspaper, radio, and TV—can reach and influence your market segments effectively. Their coverage carries weight, an implicit endorsement that can make phones ring and mice click. Don't overlook or back down from these opportunities. In fact, make the opportunities happen.

First, make a list of the reporters, editors, and producers whose beat includes the library. Don't know? Call the media's main line and ask. Gather contact information and keep it accessible. Next, pay close attention to their coverage—read, listen, view—to learn their style. You'll soon understand how they approach their stories.

Now it's time to go after a story. Prepare a press release that helps the reporter accomplish her goals—giving the nuts and bolts of a news piece. Make sure your message is loud and clear, and tell the reporter why it's important or fascinating, why it's timely, and how readers/listeners/viewers will benefit from this story. Before you send the release, be sure you've identified a spokesperson at the library who is comfortable talking with the press AND has the expertise to provide a rich interview.

Email is the preferred method of press release delivery for most reporters. Land mail is marginally effective, at best. The most effective? Email with a phone call to follow up. When you call, pitch your story again just as if you never sent the email. Remember: you have the advantage of being one of the "good guys." Libraries are beloved institutions—be proud and confident when you call.

If you get the story, congratulations! If you don't get it, don't give up. No matter the outcome, cultivate a relationship with the reporter. Stay in touch by sending news from the library and be sure to follow the reporter's career. When you see a story under his or her byline that you like, send a quick email saying so. You'll find that every time you pitch a story, it gets easier

IN YOUR MARKETING TOOLKIT...

Press Release. A customizable press release awaits you in the "Library Marketing Tools" section of www.proquest.com. Fill in your library's pertinent information and adjust as needed. Then, go get the coverage!

STEP 4. AND THE CLASSIC: ADVERTISE.

Advertising can be expensive, but there are plenty of budget-conscious options, too. No matter what you're spending, your approach should be strategic—don't squander opportunities to talk with your markets.

Start with your markets/needs list developed in "Get Prepared: Step 2." What are the media reaching these markets? Try the base radio station, newspaper, newsletter, etc. Contact them to get their ad rates and schedules. Advertising salespeople can help you with good editorial matches (for example, perhaps there's a back-to-school segment featuring homework tips for parents). Don't overlook the obvious, like your library's newsletter.

Next, develop the ad. For print, create the copy first, with the appropriate market message as the anchor. Create the design second, according to the mechanical specifications provided by the publication. Remember that ads are "teasers," not your whole story. With too much text or art, ads are too busy for busy people to bother with.

IDEA!

Some media will barter advertising time or space in return for research services. You have information professionals on staff who can do fact-checking or conduct research to support their reporting staff. Offer a trade for services—before you spend.

IN YOUR MARKETING TOOLKIT...

Advertisement/Flier and Radio Script. See the customizable samples in the "Library Marketing Tools" section of www.proquest.com. Add your library's pertinent information and go!

STEP 5. DON'T GIVE UP!

Effective marketing is an ongoing commitment that gets easier over time. Think of it as part of your library's daily operations. Just as you set a course for the development of your online collections, marketing these resources requires goals and planning, too.



789 E. Eisenhower Parkway
P.O. Box 1346
Ann Arbor, MI 48106-1346 U.S.A
800-521-0600 x3344
www.proquest.com