

KANSAS Trustee Education Program
Trustee Handout

Topic: MARKETING AND PUBLIC RELATIONS - HOW THEY WORK TOGETHER

Discussion: Librarians have a tendency to think that excellent library service will be rewarded by the community. The truth is that excellence in library service is only half of the equation for a successful library. The library must be perceived by the community as being essential to the quality of life in the community. The library staff and board must work to make the library and its services visible to the community.

Keep in mind the fundamental principle of influence. *“Influence is derived from the perceptions of the person to be influenced, not from the perceptions of the person doing the influencing. The key to building your influence lies in your ability to shape the perceptions of others.”*

In other words, the staff and the board must shape the perceptions of the community leaders and the community residents so that they understand the benefits of having a good public library.

Many librarians work hard to develop programs and services but they neglect the work it would take to make the target audience aware of the value of these programs and services.

EXAMPLE ONE: OUTREACH TO LONG TERM CARE. Suppose the library wants to have an outreach program to the community’s long term care facility. Library staff members communicate with residents to learn about their needs. Materials are delivered to the home, requests are solicited and filled. Some residents read regular books, some read large print, some listen to audiobooks or music. The service becomes a good one and it is valued by the residents of the facility. *Public relations* for this service would mean that the library staff maintains good relations with the residents and understands what they need and want.

But *marketing* this service would mean making the facility administrator aware of the value placed on this service.

The director or a designated staff member has circulation statistics for every type of material plus comments from the residents that indicate they are genuinely grateful to have this service available.

An appointment is made with the administrator, the service is described briefly but effectively and a one page flyer repeating the most important points is given. The administrator is also asked if they have any suggestions for improving the service.

There are no guarantees on the outcome of such a meeting, but the librarian has just dramatically improved the chances that support for this service will be continued and that the facility administrator will retain the belief that the library is significant to her chosen work.

This is only a likely outcome if the librarian does believe the service is important and wants it to continue. If service to the long term care facility has been a lackluster project, this kind of marketing will not be a good use of staff time.

EXAMPLE TWO: THE VALUE OF SUMMER READING. Many small libraries have effective publicity connected with their summer reading program and most communities consider it a pleasant service to have available for children. It is often sufficiently colorful and photogenic to attract the local media. This is good *public relations*.

Marketing the critical importance of this program would include finding ways to make more serious points:

- The development of language skills is critically important to the development of young children. If they are frequently involved with reading and verbal exchanges and encouraged to express feelings, imagination and ideas, they will develop the language skills they will need when they start school.

Many small libraries are sponsoring reading programs in the fall and winter so they can concentrate some attention on the preschool children. This is an excellent chance to make this point through special publicity and programs.

- Research has indicated that the biggest single predictor of success in school is whether the children are read to when they are young. To librarians and heavy library users, this is so obvious as to be a truism. But the point is only beginning to gain force with the general public. It needs to be made as often as possible.
- Research has also indicated that children who read for pleasure over the summer retain their reading skills and continue to build their vocabulary. They have a large advantage when they start the new school year. Publicity for the summer reading program can make this point.

Children should not be taught that public library reading programs are anything but fun. It is when they are having fun that they learn readily and happily. *Adults* should be taught that these fun programs are building reading and verbal skills that will help their children succeed in school.

EXAMPLE THREE: TEACHING INTERNET SKILLS. Some rural librarians have taken the lead in offering small classes on Internet skills to members of the public. *Public relations* for this program would involve making sure that the public is really aware of it and that the classmates feel comfortable and welcome when they attend class.

Marketing for this program would involve making sure that the community leadership and local government become aware that the library is making this contribution to the community. This can be done through media coverage or through the library newsletter or through more informal communications.

Feedback from the participants should be gathered as part of the evaluation for the project. Favorable comment can be used very effectively if the library offers Internet classes again.

If the participants are enthusiastic and good teachers are available, the library should very seriously consider continuing the project. It can be a very valuable community service. But it is also a very modern, very polished role for a rural public library to take in the information society. The effort it represents should not be wasted but should be used to benefit the total image of the library.

EXAMPLE FOUR: INTERNET REFERENCE SKILLS. Even a small library often has staff members or reference librarians with a flair for finding information on the Internet. For the library staff and board to say that such a resource will be offered only to people who come into the library and ask for help is to say that a remarkable resource will not be available to the community and will not be used effectively. That is like a business saying that they will sell only to people who happen to discover their location and have time to stop and look at what they have to sell.

Public relations for this service would mean that the library has used a number of different publicity tools to advertise that the library has staff members who will help locate resources on the Internet as part of the library's Reference Service.

Marketing this service would make it part of a wider campaign to teach the community that the library's public computing access and staff expertise bring incredible information resources into the community that would have been available only in major urban areas a few years ago. It could be integrated with other services such as interlibrary loan and resource sharing to make the point that the small public library offers access to the information resources of the community, the state, the nation and the world. The community leaders need to understand that the library's services have changed completely in the last fifteen years, although it's commitment to public service has not.

EXAMPLE FIVE : MARKETING A VIDEO COLLECTION. The library may have a good video collection for its size that is heavily used. That doesn't mean that everyone in the community realizes that the library has older popular videos available for free for a reasonable loan period. *Public relations* for this service would involve making sure citizens who are not regular users of the library still have multiple opportunities to learn about the library's video collection.

Good *marketing* for this service might involve partnering with the local retail video outlet to publicize the remarkable video resources held by the town of _____, a resource that enhances the quality of life in the community and which the community leaders have a right to be proud of. The library and the video store should regard themselves as partners rather than competitors. The video store will hold the newer and more popular releases while the library will have older videos that have stood the test of time. Their collections will overlap but not enough to force them to be competitors rather than partners. Both the library and the video store can benefit from the opportunity to know about the community's total video resources and to market resources for each other.

EXAMPLE SIX: SHOWCASING THE COLLECTION. Libraries of all sizes have stories and materials in the collection that people would enjoy and use if they knew about them. When the library's collection is buried on its own shelves, the library's central resource is badly under-utilized and the community's access to its recreational and information resources is badly injured. There are ways to showcase the entire collection, not just the new books.

Publicity and special displays should not be focused entirely on new books but also on older genre fiction, light classics and high-interest nonfiction, such as popular science, life skills, crafts and hobbies.

Materials from the collections can be showcased in special displays that are tied

to holidays, national observances, national events, local events, community interests or topics chosen by the staff.

Many creative pairings of library exhibits and citizen interests can be moved into the community. If it is not practical to use actual materials, posters, flyers, bookmarks, booklists and book reviews can be used. Materials on appropriate topics can be displayed in banks, stores, museums, garden centers, service garages and community fairs.

The ongoing *marketing* of the library's collections should go beyond displays to include such things as library columns in the newspaper, adult programs, book discussion groups, one-book community reading programs, what-are-you-reading websites and book reviews solicited from trustees, friends and active library users. The ideal is for the community to have multiple opportunities to be excited about a wide variety of books.

More information on showcasing the collection can be found in *Marketing the Small Library*, State Library of Kansas, 2002. Go to www.skyways.org/KSL/development/libdev.html, then click the title for a pdf version.

Additional resources:

√ WebJunctioKansas

<http://webjunction.org/do/Navigation?category=393>

- *Advocacy Brainstorm*. A list of ideas and resources on advocacy (and marketing) collected by the Rural Library Sustainability workshops, training institutes, and from other discussion areas on WebJunction.
- *Getting Ready to Market the Library to Culturally Divided Communities*. A step-by-step recipe for reaching out to immigrant communities and others.
- *Puskarich Public Library: Perfect Partnerships* (January 2004). A library in rural southeastern Ohio has developed a broad range of relationships that forms a web of mutual support and good will.
- *What's Marketing Got to Do with It?* Marketing trends present librarians with promising opportunities by Jill Stover.

√ Other Kansas

- "Basehor Scores Round Two Knockout," *TrusteeTalk*, May 2006, p. 4-5. Go to www.kslibtrustees.org; click TrusteeTalk Archive for a pdf.
- "Library Board + City + School District = New Eureka Library," *TrusteeTalk*, September 2005, p. 1-2. Go to www.kslibtrustees.org; click TrusteeTalk Archive for a pdf.
- *Marketing the Small Library*, State Library of Kansas, 2002. Go to www.skyways.org/KSL/development/libdev.html, then click the title for a pdf version.
- "Voters OK Two Sales Taxes for Libraries," *TrusteeTalk*, November 2006, 1, 3. Go to www.kslibtrustees.org; click TrusteeTalk Archive for a pdf.

√ Other sources

- Fisher, Patricia H. and Marseille M. Pride, *Blueprint for Your Library Marketing Plan*. ALA Editions, 2006.

3/6/07