



public relations

Overcoming
Your Aversion
to the “M” Word

Marketing your library effectively to patrons

By Lisa Smith-Butler

As a new librarian many years ago, I found the concept of marketing a library to be an anathema. I was certain that sensible and intelligent patrons immediately understood the value and the necessity of a library. Marketing, in my opinion, was a dirty word, something that was done by MBAs marketing a product.

Now, 15 years later, I think my younger self naive. Call it “marketing,” “sharing information,” or “promoting current awareness,” but it is crucial that libraries understand the needs of their patrons and can effectively demonstrate to both patrons and budget decision makers the library’s ability to meet these needs cost effectively.

According to Richard A. Danner in *Strategic Planning: A Law Library Management Tool for the 90s and Beyond*, a library’s mission statement should

More Tech Terms

Looking for more information on some of the tech terms in this article? Check out the following websites.

Blogs

www.blogger.com/start

Wikis

www.wikispaces.com

Smart Classrooms

<http://education.smarttech.com/site/en-US/Classroom+solutions>

Symposiums

www2.smarttech.com/st/en-US/Products/Interactive+Pen+Displays

Vodcasting

http://southernlibrarianship.icaap.org/content/v10n01/michel_j01.html

Podcasting

www.podcasting-tools.com/what-is-podcasting.htm

Flickr

www.flickr.com

Slashdot

<http://slashdot.org>

answer five critical questions: What business are we in? Who are our customers? What products or services do we provide? Who are our competitors? What competitive advantages do we have? However, these are also questions librarians should be answering when they promote their collections and services to patrons.

To effectively promote their libraries, librarians must first know who their patrons are and understand their needs and wants. Are you in a law firm library, working with partners, associates, paralegals, and office administrators?

Is speed in locating information and cost containment imperative? Perhaps your law library is part of a public university with both a law school and a public mission, serving the general public and the local bar as well as your own faculty, staff, and students. Does this mean that you need to be able to handle pro se patrons and attorneys? Do you provide document delivery to the local bar? Do you prepare information guides that help pro se patrons locate the law? Is it a county law library that also serves both the general public and the local bar?

Once you have determined who your patrons are, you need to ascertain their needs. Locate and read current literature that discusses and reviews collections and services provided by law libraries. Talk to your patrons at the reference and circulation desks, asking them what they want and need, what works and what doesn’t. When you teach a class or attend a meeting with faculty or attorneys, ask what you can do to better help them with their research and/or jobs. Survey your patrons and ask them how well your collection and services meet their needs.

Once you know who your patrons are and what their needs are, you need to make them aware of your collections, your services, and your facilities. How do you do that? Tell them. In other words, market your library.

There are several avenues that allow you to get your message out, including:

- Alerts
- Blogs
- RSS feeds
- Podcasts
- E-mails
- LCD screens with informational messages
- “Lunch ‘n Learns”
- Newsletters
- Sharing via a social networking site such as Twitter, digg, or Slashdot

With so many available technologies, you can use a variety of media to broadcast your message.

Use blast e-mails and LCD screens in areas with high patron traffic to alert patrons about collections and services. Let them know that the library’s blog has the latest “how-to” information on researching a subject or using new technologies. Work with faculty or law office staff to create “how-to” vodcasts or podcasts that train students and staff to easily handle routine, daily tasks—such as using online course registration, registering for TWEN or Blackboard, or completing travel reimbursement forms—saving precious time to accomplish less routine tasks. RSS feeds from the library’s catalog can alert faculty and attorneys about new titles acquired and catalogued. Create a subject Twitter

stream that allows attorneys or faculty to follow your comments and article selections. Consider creating a Twitter stream on legal employment trends to provide your students and career services office with information about employment and references to articles about interviewing and legal employment trends.

Make sure that your patrons know about your blog, RSS and Twitter feeds, and newsletters. These items are useless if patrons don’t know about them and use them. Employ several of the technologies listed above to market your library’s services to patrons.

What services can be provided to faculty or attorneys? Librarians can help both groups by providing:

- Current awareness
- Research and reference assistance
- Services that publicize their work
- Technology suggestions and support

In terms of current awareness, librarians can work with attorneys, administrators, and faculty to create

Surfing the Blogs

One way to ensure that your library is a useful resource for your patrons is by following blogs. For U.S. and international legal news, consider linking to the **University of Pittsburgh’s Jurist: The Paper Chase** at <http://jurist.law.pitt.edu/paperchase>. **The Law Professor’s Blogs** (www.lawprofessorblogs.com) links to a variety of blogs on a variety of subjects written by professors grappling with cutting-edge issues in their fields. The **ABA Blawg directory** (www.abajournal.com/blawgs) and the **BLAWG directory** (www.blawg.com) provide access to blogs authored by attorneys on a variety of topics, including practice management, litigation, marketing, solo practice, and technology. A list of helpful law library blogs is also available on the **Computing Services Special Interest Section website** at <http://cssis.org> under “Resources.”

effective alerts with Lexis, Westlaw, or Google. You can set up an alert that instantly notifies a faculty member, the dean and/or associate dean, an attorney, or a managing partner any time a faculty member or attorney is quoted or cited in

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a major newspaper or law review. Alerts can also be created to notify attorneys whenever a client is mentioned in a major newspaper or online in a blog.

Materials can be routed to faculty or attorneys in both traditional and innovative ways. Materials still collected in print can be routed among faculty members or attorneys while many resources, such as BNA and the University of Washington's Current Index to Legal Periodicals, allow the table of contents of their publications to arrive directly in a patron's mailbox. Develop a logo or brand for your library and use it on print and electronic materials so that patrons realize timely and reliable information is being sent from the library.

When possible, push content directly to patrons. Deliver news, RSS feeds, and other legal information directly to a patron via a news aggregator such as Google Reader or NewsGator. This allows patrons to manage their information and absorb more content in less time. Make information available to patrons by linking informative, well-written, and helpful websites to your library's information portal. (See “Surfing the Blogs” on page 8.)

Provide both research and reference support to faculty and attorneys. Academic law librarians can set up liaison programs (matching faculty members with librarians), train research assistants, prepare an annual faculty bibliography, develop a digital scholarship repository for the law school, and prepare subject-specific research guides and classes. Old exams can either be posted online on the school's website or maintained in print on reserve.

Firm librarians can create and index a briefs/documents database for use by their attorneys. They can create alerts that notify attorneys whenever clients are mentioned in the news and provide detailed information when attorneys are researching new clients. Handling conflicts checks, if the firm involved is large, is also a service that librarians can provide.

Firm and academic librarians can prepare blogs and newsletters that provide information about new items acquired, new services developed, or new legal URLs of interest. Consider sending acquisitions lists directly to patrons via RSS feeds. New electronic resources and new technologies can also be demonstrated at a “Lunch and Learn” series—faculty or attorneys eat while one of the librarians provides a demonstration of a recently acquired resource or pulls together information on how to research a particular subject.

Librarians can help attorneys and faculty enhance both their classrooms and practices with technology. Librarians

can demonstrate blogs and wikis to incoming attorneys and faculty members, showing them how to create and update content that attracts and interests new clients and students. Librarians can help attorneys and faculty members locate articles and other resources useful to clients or students and post references to them on social networking sites such as Twitter or digg. Librarians can help plan, install, and then implement smart classrooms with symposiums and vodcasting or podcasting capabilities. They can draft a “How To” manual, then train faculty to use the new technologies. Firm librarians can work with attorneys to create podcasts and electronic newsletters that clients and potential clients find helpful.

As Google and other search engines continue the democratization of information and sites such as Flickr seemingly defy bibliographic control, librarians worry and wonder if their skills will continue to be necessary in the 21st century. I think the answer to that concern is “yes.” Librarians will continue to develop collections in appropriate formats for their patrons, and they will continue to develop services considered essential by their patrons.

Library services will continue to evolve, change, and develop. Librarians should never say “no” to an opportunity. Remember: often opportunities arrive disguised as challenges or frustrations. When asked to do something, think about it first rather than automatically responding with “that's not something the library should handle.” Be open to opportunities and remain flexible when conceiving and developing patron collections and services. While libraries and legal organizations, both law firms and law schools, will undergo critical changes as they continue to evolve, the need for information acquisition, classification, organization, and retrieval remains.

Know who your patrons are and what services they need. Develop and provide these services, and make sure your patrons know about them. Market your library. ■

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More Online

For handouts and an mp3 download of Lisa Smith-Butler's 2008 Annual Meeting presentation, “Marketing Your Library,” visit AALL2go at www.softconference.com/aall/sessionDetail.asp?SID=168856.