

Passing the “PR Bar”

by Sue Burch

The voracious demand for information and library services is here to stay. In fact, most of us would agree that our customers want their requests met faster than ever before. To succeed in this information-hungry world, we must not only keep our customers satisfied but also vigilantly promote our staff, services and expertise. Effective marketing and public relations can make a difference in our libraries, and it's fairly simple. The goal is to find out what our clients want and then give it to them. Along the way, the visibility and image of our libraries will be tremendously enhanced. No library can afford to overlook its opportunities to use public relations and marketing to expand its sphere of influence and transform its profile.

Gaining admittance to the “PR Bar” is not that difficult. Successful public relations and marketing activities share similar strategies. They're innovative, anticipate change, and create alternate paths for our customers, which in turn help us meet and exceed their expectations. The projects and activities run the gamut from elaborate and expensive to simple with little or no cost. If handled properly, both endeavors will enhance the library and librarian's images.

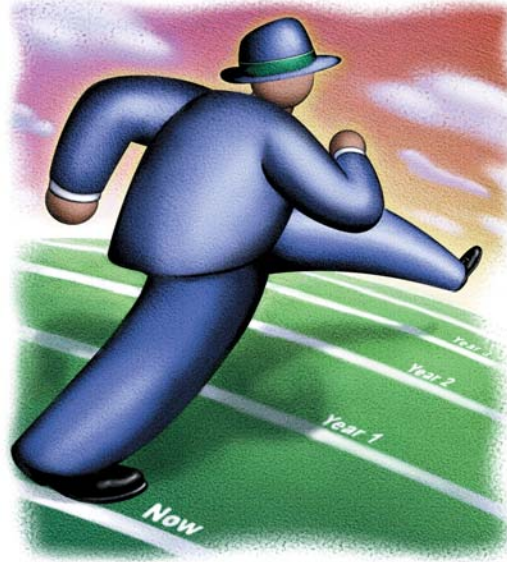
Many law librarians are interested in how they can make a positive difference in their libraries. To do that, we first must answer some questions. Are we effectively communicating our services? Are we recognized for our expertise? Are we consistent and dependable? Do we make the library a comfortable, friendly place? Have we established positive, dynamic relationships with all our customers while anticipating their needs? And then, most important, how do we accomplish these things?

The answers are out there! The law library community is filled with creative, gifted librarians from all kinds of libraries who look for ingenious ways to promote their libraries and staffs. Several of them offered to share some of their marketing success stories, many of which are similar to what other libraries around the country are doing. They are all excellent examples of the variety of ways that librarians showcase the unique value they bring to their institutions and also reveal the

strength of their vision, imagination and flexibility.

Karen Beck, legal reference librarian at Boston College Law Library, described three public relations efforts that have been successful in her library. The first of these deals with its faculty liaison program. Several years ago, the Education and Reference Department decided to revamp the way it gives information about the library to the faculty. The impetus was a desire to better inform faculty of what was available in the library regarding computing services, teaching and instructional expertise of the librarians, phone numbers, e-mail addresses, the location of materials, and anything else the staff felt would direct faculty's attention to what the library could do for them. The law library staff created a faculty notebook with lots of tabs identifying people and services. It included maps, which the librarians updated annually. Within the last year, the staff reconceptualized this service, adapting it to a Web format. Faculty can now easily point and click on the library's home page when they want to find a librarian who can help with a class or a service appropriate to individual information needs. Successful public relations means paying attention to the way our customers work and adapting our services to fit their needs.

Beck also shared a PR activity strictly aimed at raising the librarians' profiles. One of the librarians volunteered to gather information about the activities of the library staff and distribute it to the Boston College newspaper, the law school's alumni magazine, *AALL Spectrum* and other appropriate publications. The librarian highlighted achievements such as teaching classes, publishing efforts and presentations at conferences or meetings. The library staff found an easy way to enhance their visibility without taking much



staff time or costing anything. A similar, simple change will raise the profile of the reference staff within the university and to the outside law community. The reference librarians, like many in academic law libraries, have always provided a great deal of

help, encouragement and guidance to the school's law review staffs. As a recognition of this labor-intensive endeavor year after year, their names will be added to the masthead of all the school's journals. This was a simple, yet effective way to publicly recognize the partnership between the librarians, the law students and faculty, and to recognize the librarians' scholarly contributions to those outside the law school.

The third PR activity Beck shared is more elaborate. Its goal is not to increase publicity per se but to increase awareness and use of the library's rare books collection. A rare book room was added to the library in a 1996 renovation. For the first time, the library had the opportunity to showcase its collection of rare and valuable materials. For the past five years, members of the library staff and faculty have collaborated to bring these materials to the attention of students, faculty, administrators, alumni and the university community. A small group of library staff and faculty creates exhibits, catalogs and publicity. For larger events, the group solicits speakers to discuss highlights of the exhibits, and law-school faculty, alumni, and other friends of the library are invited to informal receptions in the rare book room. The rare books program has helped make library customers aware of some special resources, assisted the administration with "friend building," deepened partnerships between librarians and faculty, and helped the library staff receive recognition and appreciation for

the resources they offer the law school and university communities. Every law library with a rare books programs reaps the same rewards, Beck noted.

B.C.'s program is still fairly new. But the awareness and use of the collection is still increasing quite noticeably from year to year, which is gratifying for all involved.

Many law-firm libraries are also expanding and redefining the kinds of marketing activities they use to meet their customers' needs while raising their own profile. **Lynn Fogle**, director of library services at Greenebaum Doll and McDonald in Lexington, Ky., described the birth of her firm's intranet and the galvanizing effect it had on the library's image.

The intranet idea was proposed in 1998 after a management restructuring. Around this time, Fogle thought the library should look for a good project that would give the library a "value" image. Intranet development was just emerging, and, according to Fogle, it seemed like an interesting task appropriate for the library. The firm initially attempted to develop its intranet the "right way" with committees, but the first intranet version ended up with Fogle and the library staff making it up as they went along. The second generation was a little more structured. Now the firm has an official intranet team composed of librarians, information systems and management members.

Everyone in the firm has become very enthusiastic about the intranet and wants to share in its success. The librarians have tried to provide a real balance in what they provide on their intranet — from legal research links to the firm's policies and news, as well as other kinds of entertaining and fun information. Some of the information and links include: WESTLAW and LEXIS information; Kentucky legal research sites; firm write-ups in newspapers; NCAA tournament news and pool results (this is being written during March Madness); stock information; the firm's top 50 clients' home pages; weather; practical information on word processing and creating templates; a bulletin board for firm employees to buy and sell items; and other news of interest, such as who has made partner, office parties and special firm events.

Looking for PR opportunities and getting in on the ground floor of the development of the intranet has had amazing results. According to Fogle, the intranet has really

exceeded expectations in terms of the image it has created for the library staff and the firm. Because of the library staff's early start and "can-do" attitude, G.D.M.'s intranet has become one of the most developed firm intranets in her region. In addition, it has brought everyone closer — attorneys and staff. They all eagerly participate in e-mail games, like scavenger hunts and a name-the-intranet contest. In fact, there were 170 entries for that particular contest ("Greenebaum Exchange" was the winning entry) — testament to the interest and excitement the library is able to generate for these kinds of activities.

Rather than sit back and let others deal with the challenge of developing an intranet, the library staff responded boldly. They anticipated and confronted the changes the intranet would mean to the firm and helped develop a plan — including a marketing strategy — to make it successful.

Another firm librarian, **Rissa Peckar**, director of libraries at Cadwalader Wickersham and Taft in New York, also shared some of her more elaborate and inventive PR and marketing activities. When administrative department heads were required to give a 30-minute presentation about their departments at the firm's monthly meetings, Peckar decided to use this opportunity to present her report in connection with the National Library Week celebration. Even though her library is a high-profile department, who they were and what they did was still a mystery to some in the firm. She decided to use a format a bit out of the ordinary, knowing it would peak everyone's interest.

Peckar and her staff made a video, "A Day-and-a-Half in the Life of the Library," to serve several purposes. It more than fulfilled her obligation to educate her firm administrators. It entertained and educated the legal and non-legal staff during National Library Week. The video helped define exactly what the library did and the library's future goals. Maybe most important, the video served as a staff bonding experience. Peckar wrote the script. On a quiet Sunday afternoon, the entire library staff met on location to produce the video. The result was a 29-minute, 59-second masterpiece!

Then the promotional and marketing work began. A luncheon was planned to promote the video. Weeks before the event, the library staff started the rumor that the library was doing something

BIG — something different. Excitement in the firm grew. Peckar sent out an e-mail inviting the department heads to the "premiere." Everyone was encouraged to come on time. Each place setting contained a different rainbow-colored bag of popcorn. As department heads filed into the room, they began smiling. The room was filled with excitement and the smell of popcorn. Then, when all were settled, the video began.

It received a two-thumbs-up review. According to Peckar, laughter was the first and foremost response; knowledge and understanding a close second; and third, and most important, there was a genuine appreciation of the quality, standards and breadth of the library's work. Taking an ordinary request for a monthly report and turning it into an extravaganza that included a video and a luncheon is over-the-top marketing and PR, Peckar said.

Not only did the library staff exceed everyone's expectations with an imaginative monthly report, the innovative planning and staging of this event reflected the library's concern for a positive customer attitude toward the library and what it can provide. In fact, sometime later, the library was asked to produce another video. This time it was not just about the library. The video was titled "Cadwalader: In Search of a Better Tomorrow ... Today and FOREVER! AKA, Cadwalader, a Law Firm Odyssey." The cast consisted of 17 partners and a few hundred employees. It was shown at the firm's holiday party on giant screens and again at its own chorus concert.

Effective marketing will bring more projects and more work. And, according to Peckar, it will also provide a lot more recognition — which leads to more motivation and more success. Was it worth the risk? "You bet!" she said.

PR and marketing will become even more important in the coming years as our libraries continue to evolve beyond providing books, Web sites, face-to-face service, and hours from 8 a.m. to 5 p.m. These days, an entrepreneurial spirit is necessary if we want to compete in the information business, remain in charge of our destinies, and make a real difference in our libraries and with our customers. It's simple to be admitted to the PR Bar. The answers are already out there.

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