

Speakeasy: The Art of Communicating Value

by Cindy Spohr

The lines are continually blurring among marketing, public relations and communications. Many corporations have even changed the name of their public relations departments to "corporate communications," signaling that it is not simply a matter of offering a product or service to a customer but of communicating that value in a more concrete way. The number of professionals working within this field is growing, as evident in the growth of the International Association of Business Communicators, which assists professionals and organizations in public relations, employee communications, marketing communication, public affairs and other forms of communication. IABC had slightly fewer than 3,000 members in 1970. This year, IABC has almost 14,000 members. Clearly corporate communication has become big business.

Information professionals are well aware of the overload of communications received from a variety of sources. To develop a marketing and communication plan for the library, the librarian needs to determine an overall strategy in providing services within its organization. What is it trying to "sell," and who is the library "selling" to? Once those factors are determined, a communications plan can be developed to reach the target audience with the library's message.

What is the library selling? To deliver a communications message, one needs to know what is being marketed. Because librarians and the organizations in which they work are in the service business, they cannot develop processes, as in manufacturing, and warranties, as with tangible products. The library staff needs to determine what is being "sold" or marketed to the organization. "May I help you?" or "let us know if we can help" are frequently part of the vocabulary of the library staff, but without some idea of what services are (or could be) available to them, their customers may not know enough to ask for assistance.

Define what role the library should play as a department within the organization. What are the requirements placed on the library by the organization, or even better, what should be expected? This includes the

working relationships with other departments and members of management. What is the library's role in overall information management? How should the library be involved in decision-making on systems and content development for use by the entire organization? Often this role has not been clearly defined within the organization, leaving the librarian with an opportunity to carve out a niche for the library within the larger organization.

Define what role the library should play for the individuals within the organization — and then let them know specifically what the library can do for them. Many members of the organization may not have had past experience to rely on as a framework for what a professional library staff can do for them.

Who is the library selling to? Every type of organization consists of multiple departments and positions within those departments. As part of the overall plan, the library needs to address the services that will be provided to the different departments and positions within the organization. These decisions can then be incorporated into communications messages to these groups.

Set goals — the library doesn't want to be ordinary. The standards the library set for its services last year may not be good enough this year. Things are constantly changing; the methods of research are moving at a fast pace, currently with the introduction of intranets, extranets and portals. The changes that will be seen next year are still unknown. The library needs to stand out as providing services and standards that are creating the curve within the organization — not just meeting last year's standards or the benchmark within other organizations.

What is the library good at and what does it want to do within its organization? Establishing the scope of the library is a vital portion of its overall plan. Establishing a library strategy could be developed in the same way as zero-based budgeting: Instead of looking where the library is currently, look at where the library wants to be and what is required to get there. Once the services that should be provided are determined, they should be compared with current offerings to figure out what needs to be added that is not available and what portions of current service are no longer necessary.

Many of today's opportunities were not formerly available. Tap into the staff's creativity and the possibilities available when setting goals. Some things that have been held sacred until now may have to

be let go. It may be necessary to think outside the strategies that have worked in the past, outside the grudges that may have developed between different departments within the organization and move forward with new goals and strategies to continue the library's impact on the organization.

The Communications Plan Relationships.

Public relations, communication and marketing are the responsibilities of every member of the staff. Every contact, formal or informal, is part of the overall perception of the library. Relationships are built through the individual interactions each staff member has with each member of the firm. Through these interactions trust is built. Frequently the librarian's expertise is assumed — it is the interactions around the services provided that creates the perception of the library's "customer." These perceptions need to exceed the satisfactory — customers must be wowed or delighted. They need to see how the work of the library fits into their needs and the overall goals of the organization.

The library's customers need to believe that their work cannot be complete without the its services. In *The Invisible Touch*, Harry Beckwith says, "A service succeeds when it makes significant numbers of people feel their lives are somehow better than they would have been without that service." This is how the members of the firm should feel about the library. When the library has determined what it is selling, and the standards it will meet, every member of the library staff must carry the message with conviction and zeal. That way both the library staff and those receiving the message know that there is a passion for the services provided.

Letting the customers know what the library can do for them. In addition to building relationships, the library staff can use a variety of methods to communicate the library message to the rest of the organization. Many strategies are being used successfully in different law libraries, including intranet pages, newsletters, success stories, attending department meetings, orientation for new students, new associates or new partners, National Library Week activities, brochures and training classes. The key to developing a successful plan is instilling confidence and pride in the staff so that they realize that the library is a successful service organization and show it!

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