



The AALL Public Relations Committee created this table display for the 2002 AALL Annual Meeting in Orlando, Fla.

It's All In Your Imagination

How to Create a Public Relations Display

by Raquel M. Ortiz

Creating a table display that highlights your library's services and accomplishments is one of the most cost-effective public relations tools at your disposal. All you need is a little creativity and time to craft an informative and inspirational display that will create a buzz about your library.

Every Display Needs a Theme

The first task is to select a theme for the display. For example, the Conference of Newer Law Librarians was charged with producing a display for the 2002 AALL Annual Meeting that demonstrates how the Public Relations Committee serves AALL. Choosing which items to display was easy; conceiving a theme took a bit more time.

Whether one believes in free association or brainstorming, keep an open mind for all ideas big and small. For example, I originally wanted to use communication tools as the theme for the CONELL display. I even considered palm trees and flamingos as part of the theme because the Annual Meeting took place in Orlando, Fla. In the end, I decided to use the conference theme of "Creating Connections" for the CONELL display. The harder task was how to express "Creating Connections" — figuratively as well as literally.

It doesn't hurt to hit users over the head with the concept by using well-placed text: "The AALL PR Committee creates connections between AALL members, institutions and the communities we serve." Illustrate the ways in which the subject of the display relates to

the library's users. The Public Relations Committee displayed samples of PR columns from *AALL Spectrum*, information about the committee's projects, samples of its past work and bookmarks with the Uniform Resource Locator of the Public Relations Committee Web site.

Display Materials

The big secret: An attractive display does not have to cost a lot of money. Many art supplies can be purchased at office supply or arts and crafts stores. Unless a display is of a permanent nature, it is not necessary to pay a signage professional to create it.

The first necessity is a *background* for the display. Foam-core board is very inexpensive (about \$5 for a 20-inch-by-30-inch piece) and is available in a variety of pre-cut sizes from any art and crafts supply store. National chains include Michael's at www.michaels.com and Pearl Arts and Crafts at www.pearlpaint.com. Many stores even carry colored foam-core board, but coordinate it with the other colored items in the display. A folding, self-supporting display can also be purchased in many sizes. Better yet, create one by taping several boards together with transparent packing tape. Just make sure to line them up properly, so that the display can be easily folded and moved.

Next, use *vinyl lettering* instead of stenciling or handwriting the display's title. These pre-cut letters come in sizes from 1/4 inch to 6 inches high and in various basic colors. Brands include C-THRU, Chartpak/Pickett and Stick-On. To ensure the letters are positioned properly on the board, carefully cut around the letters with their backing to see how they fit in the display before peeling off the backing. Paper adhesive-backed letters are also a good alternative for smaller items within the display.

Finally, think about the *overall use of color*. Most copy shops carry "Astrobrights," a brand of colored paper. Many will sell a few sheets so that the customer is not stuck with a ream of "Solar Yellow" or some other color that he or she would not normally use. Because text printed on darker colors is difficult to see, use those colors as an accent. For example, use text in electric blue ink on white paper, then add an electric blue border as an accent for the text.

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Assembling the Display

Once the letters are positioned and the items in the display are determined, be creative about how text items are shown. Scrapbook supplies, such as cutting tools and dies, create interesting shapes for text items, which will be more interesting than the typical rectangles and squares. Remember to measure twice and cut once.

Keep each board of the display clutter free — three or four items at most. Mix text with art for a dynamic display. Newer versions of Microsoft Word come with a large clip-art collection as well as a free online collection. Use free clip-art repositories on the Web. The AALL PR Committee Web site at www.aallnet.org/committee/pr includes a clip-art gallery with links to some of these sites.

Goodies and Giveaways

Nothing attracts more people to a display than free samples and products. The AALL Annual Meeting exhibit hall is always

bustling with people checking out the exhibitors' wares and free giveaways. Students are often attracted to the LexisNexis™ and WESTLAW tables not to hear about the latest research offerings but for the free mugs, t-shirts and other goodies.

Libraries rarely have the budget to provide these big-ticket items, but there are many alternatives. The Oriental Trading Company at www.oriental.com offers a great variety of trinkets, some of which can be personalized. It also sells goodies by theme, such as graduation or Halloween. The big hit at the CONELL table was its transparent linking charms, which sell for \$2.49 a gross. Dollar stores and discount outlets, such as New England's Buck a Book chain, may also sell inexpensive goodies. If necessary, enhance the goodies to make the connection between them and the display's topic. At CONELL, the State, Court and County Law Libraries Special Interest Section gave away notebooks with clever quips and the name of the SIS on the cover.

Finally, giveaways should be clearly distinguished from the items that are for display only. Mark display-only items clearly, but give people an alternative for the same information. At the Public Relations Committee table at the 2002 Annual Meeting, the display included samples of the *AALL Spectrum* PR columns printed in color. As an alternative, the committee provided bookmarks under a sign that said, "Don't carry away heavy papers. Take one of our light bookmarks instead." The bookmarks provided the URL where the articles are located online.

Remember, an interesting library display does not have to cost a lot or take a long time to put together. With a bit of imagination and the right tools and supplies, users will be attracted while receiving the information they need.

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