



## Law Firm Libraries Call for Stealth Approach to PR

by Lee Neugebauer

Establishing and maintaining a good relationship with the community a library serves is a public relations challenge for most law libraries. But based on a law firm library's unique patron community, public relations is both easier and more difficult for law firm libraries than it is for academic or government law libraries.

The users at a law firm library are a relatively small, very well-defined group likely to need what the library can offer them quickly and regularly. Yet these same factors can work against firm libraries. A smaller community entails a smaller library staff, library space and library budget. Thus the law firm library has less time and resources for marketing and public relations. The situation is worsened when the firm assumes that PR isn't as important in law firm libraries as in other libraries given that its built-in patron base is unlikely to go outside the firm for its library needs. Perhaps the biggest hurdle of all, however, is figuring out how to make this audience receptive to public relations efforts in a business environment, where time very much equals money and everyone keeps an eye on the bottom line.

Nonetheless, most law firm librarians would agree that, especially in today's cost-cutting economy, establishing and maintaining a good relationship with other parts of the firm is absolutely essential to a law firm library's survival. Unfortunately, the attorneys and administrators in the firm may not perceive library PR as significant to a library's success. Attorneys want librarians to

provide them with the best, most efficient service and resources available. They are not usually going to spend time learning about the library's other services. For these reasons, traditional public relations techniques won't work well. For example, Paul Hastings Janofsky and Walker LLP is generally very supportive of the library. Yet it is difficult to imagine finding time to publish a newsletter or any other current-awareness tool just for the library. Even if the library staff had time to produce a newsletter and the firm was willing to budget for it, the chances are low that many attorneys — already stretched for time to read their professional or trade publications — would read a library newsletter.

The challenge is to find ways to deliver all the necessary information about the library and its staff to attorneys and other law firm library users without making them feel that the library is taking up their time. Each library, and indeed each librarian, will employ different strategies. But here are methods that have worked best at Paul Hastings Janofsky and Walker LLP.

**Offer an incentive along with the information.** Food is always a selling point. If the library budget has some padding built in, consider an afternoon cookie and coffee break in the library every couple of months. When these interludes attract people into the library, the library can display some of its new resources and materials, such as that new loose-leaf set.

If the library doesn't have the funds, vendors may be willing to work with the library. When Paul Hastings moved into a new building several months ago, initially some attorneys weren't even sure where the library was located. The library held two open house events sponsored by a couple of vendors, including one with cakes from a local, popular bakery, which attracted most of the library's users.

Don't overlook nonfood incentives. One of the library's biggest draws was a vendor-sponsored putting contest. The winner received a miniature putting green that was originally set up in the library.

**Take the library and library materials to users.** If a librarian can be spared for a small amount of time, deliver requested material by hand, which is usually quicker than interoffice mail delivery. Attorneys appreciate the speed, and personal delivery helps library users attach a face to a name — especially useful for new librarians.

When someone asks a question about a specific electronic service, offer to demonstrate how to find and use the service in his or her office rather than instructing the attorney about the service by phone. In-person tutoring is usually faster and easier for both the librarian and the user.

**Develop relationships with the other support departments**, such as conflicts or business development. Librarians should familiarize themselves with the roles these support personnel play in the firm. Even though each support department has a different purpose, job duties frequently overlap slightly. When a librarian recognizes that a request is better suited for another department, the library can deliver the request to the appropriate department and provide assistance in carrying out the request. The library thereby prevents a potential clash between departments. In the meantime, people in those other departments may return the favor by referring some of their tasks or projects to the library.

**Get to know the secretaries and paralegals.** Sell them on the benefits of the library. Many attorneys ask the secretaries and paralegals to carry out or arrange tasks that the library can do as well, such as cite checking or pulling case dockets. If the library provides good, reliable service for other departments and makes their jobs easier, those departments will include the librarians in their future projects.

Most attorneys value the opinions of the secretaries and paralegals. A few positive comments from them about the library and its librarians can persuade the attorneys to comfortably send projects to the library.

Above all, **be prepared to take advantage of opportunities** to promote the library or establish relationships on the fly. An attorney at Paul Hastings often assigns the library important tasks and promotes its services to new associates because of a chance encounter with a librarian in the elevator. The librarian answered a fairly simple question on the spot in the elevator. A day later, the attorney and the librarian happened to walk into the building together and discussed a more in-depth project. Later the attorney told the librarian that she hadn't realized the library was equipped

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to handle such in-depth projects. The attorney wouldn't have asked the library for assistance if the librarian hadn't broached the subject at this encounter.

The lack of traditional public relations avenues can challenge a law firm setting, but a library willing to be flexible, creative and persistent without being pushy can overcome that obstacle.

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