



Public Relations

THE HOW OF PR— NEW REALITIES, NEW ROLES

by **Sally Wambold**

Very few people will question that public relations is necessary. At its most basic, it is good communication. At its most sophisticated, it is Madison Avenue advertising. The bottom line is that any business, and especially any library, needs to inform its users and its accounting officers that it is "doing good." Probably no one will quarrel with that.

The real crux of the matter is how to do PR. Some of the old methods are still effective. Bookmarks appear in many libraries. They are old-tech, but they can still inform and even entertain. Why, even Amazon.com has been known to give bookmarks as promotions. Posters, maps, library guides, and newsletters still have a place in public relations. With the relatively new reality of the computer and printer, these tried-and-true tools have become even more clever, attractive, informative, entertaining, and readable. Another newcomer, the television screen with events streaming across it, is an evolution of the poster. More conservative users seem to prefer the paper poster or bulletin boards. The convenience of printed library guides and library maps are still appreciated.

Although these old ways to communicate (and cultivate users and administrators) are still in existence, law librarians are keenly aware of new tech PR. The World Wide Web has mushroomed and exhibited

global appeal. The sheer number of Web sites is astounding. With links to other useful sites a possibility, a Web site can command a healthy audience and offer a real information service at the same time. It is a real coup for a library to draw in scores of users by means of its Web site. This extends the service area of a library and often offers 24/7 service. It gives the library a new, modern role whereby the library can grow.

Supporting these new roles for libraries are librarians in new roles. A librarian who started practicing before microcomputers were prolific might well be in awe of the current Webmasters who put information on the Web with the speed of light. They enable surveys to be answered electronically, an easier way to solicit and give opinions about library service. Webmasters enable the library's Web site to link to useful sites such as FindLaw, an example of one-stop shopping. The Web is a powerful way to do PR.

For those of us less technically adept, electronic mail is an easier new way to do PR. If there is a flood in our library, we can e-mail a distribution list of library users to update them on what is being done. News items of any kind, for that matter, can be transmitted in a timely and efficient manner. Newsletters are sent by e-mail. For example, the Library of Congress allows librarians to subscribe to its *Library of Congress Cataloging Newsline (LCCN)*. As an excellent illustration of efficiency, committee work can be done with e-mail; and there are e-mail courses. ALA is providing an e-mail course on *UCITA*. Plus, e-mail messages can provide links to the Web so that articles and Web sites are only a click away.

Now, some people are more talented at PR than others. AALL recognizes some of the best PR efforts of the past year through its Excellence in Marketing (EIM) award, developed a few years ago by the Public Relations Committee under the leadership of Michelle Schmidt. This award, underwritten by West, rewards the Best Brochure, the Best Campaign, the Best Newsletter, the Best PR Tool Kit, and the Best Use of Technology. Year 2000 recipients were:

Best Brochure: Marshall-Wythe Law Library, College of William & Mary, for "New Student Brochure"

Best Use of Technology: New England Law Library Consortium (NELLCO), for "NELLCO Resource Sharing Database"

Best Public Relations Toolkit: Social Law Library (Boston, Massachusetts)

Best Campaign: Marshall-Wythe Law Library, College of William & Mary, for "My Law Library"

Best Newsletter: Social Law Library (Boston, Massachusetts) for *Social Law @ Large*

The AALLNET Web site lists other winners and describes the EIM awards. Have a look: http://www.aallnet.org/about/award_eim.asp.

All of us can learn from these exceptional people and institutions. That is why we all benefit from the exchange of ideas this award encourages. Stop by the PR Showcase at the 2001 Annual Meeting in Minneapolis to get even more ideas to inspire you to produce your own award-winning PR materials. The PR columns in *AALL Spectrum* are another source of inspiration; check out Tracey Gray Bridgman's idea in this issue.

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