

What's Your Bacon Number?

The art of individualized PR

By Duane A. Strojny

A few years ago, “Six Degrees of Kevin Bacon” was a very popular phenomenon. It is the theory that no matter what major entertainment/sports/music name you pick, you can link that person to the actor Kevin Bacon within six connections. It became so big that Kevin Bacon created a new organization (www.SixDegrees.org) to use the concept to help spread the word about various charitable organizations. “Six Degrees” also illustrates a very quick and individualized way to sell yourself or a concept.

You might wonder what this has to do with public relations in general or you in particular. The fact that so many people can be connected in so few steps shows how small the world we live in really is. Try replacing Kevin Bacon with yourself and see how many professional acquaintances you can connect with in six degrees or less. The more people with whom you can connect, the more opportunities you have to market yourself as a law librarian and the value of the work that you do. This individualized PR, which we all must conduct on a regular basis to promote ourselves, can be very successful.

If you can link yourself to notable names in your field, you most likely have done a good job focusing on individualized PR. In “Six Degrees,” each link represents one point in the “Bacon number.” The more links between you and other people, the higher your Bacon number. The higher the Bacon number, the more likely you have been successful at conducting individualized PR. In today's fragile economy, the ability to sell yourself by educating others about who you are and what you do is essential to the survival of the profession and the education of others about what we do as law librarians.

The problem is creating time for working on individualized PR. In today's fast-paced world, when can you make time to develop skills for promoting yourself? Most often in a library setting, people tend to think of public relations as a well-thought-out plan devised by

librarians sitting around and brainstorming, hiring a consultant, or just thinking ideas through until an organized and documented plan is in place. The reality is that as a librarian you are involved in public relations on a very personal level in nearly everything you do during the course of a business day.

Do any of the following examples happen to you? If so, there are opportunities to perform some individualized PR through daily interactions in workplace settings.



1. You walk in the door to the office and say hello to either the secretary or circulation desk attendant.
2. You participate in a conference call with your colleagues and a faculty member, law school development office administrator, or member of the alumni board.
3. You go to lunch with a local court librarian and she brings along a friend who works at the downtown branch of the public library.
4. You attend a meeting of the circulation department to discuss the topic of the new security guard program.
5. Your supervisor schedules you to cover the reference desk from 3 - 5 p.m.

Each of the above daily occurrences creates the opportunity to advance your agenda of publicizing what you do and the value it has to the community. Any

interaction with someone else, whether it is a colleague, an employee, or a friend, gives you the occasion to share a story or explain more about what you do.

Turning everyday occurrences into PR events takes a little planning and organization, but since we are all pressed for time, the emphasis is on simple and easy. Also, a little preparation goes a long way. Try the following six ways to market yourself and enhance your individualized PR program.

Carry the card.

The card is your business card. Keep a few everywhere: in your briefcase, notepad folder, wallet, and your luggage tag holder. You never know when you might need one, and they even come in handy for taking down others' information if they forgot their cards. If your institution does not offer individual cards, it is economical to purchase a box of cards with general information and a blank space where employees can write their names and numbers.

Be prepared.

Make sure you have some basic statistics on hand for telling people what you do and how you do it. It never hurts to compile a list of talking points for general purposes. Our library has one just for tours so that both student admission counselors and librarians can refer to it. It can also be distributed to staff you supervise in case they find themselves in a work situation in which someone asks about the library.

Carry a calendar.

In today's tech-savvy world, a paper calendar might be fairly obsolete. If you are a gadget guru, make sure your online calendar is current. Block off personal times as well as work meetings and events. Be considerate in making sure you do not double-book yourself. Printing your calendar for the week and tucking it in your notepad is helpful when you are on the run. If your calendar is still paper-based, make sure you always carry it. A calendar makes it easier for you to stay organized and connect with others.

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Do homework.

This goes hand in hand with being prepared. Even five or 10 minutes of research on an organization, a leader, or a business acquaintance will pay off. Skim a book, run a search in a database, or check out a Web site, and it will help prevent the “deer in the headlights” look when you meet someone new.

Be open to change.

You might have figured out that not everyone is like you. Following from this easy observation is the fact that if you are open to entertaining new ideas, a conversation or meeting will be more light-hearted. By being open-minded, you may

also learn something new or receive an offer to participate in something different. Routines are good, tradition is comforting, but in the world of promoting yourself, being open to change and flexibility has to be high on your list of mantras.

Listen.

While the topic of this article is ultimately selling yourself, there is a lot to be gained from being an excellent listener. You do not have to be a “yes” person, but listening and responding appropriately conveys a strong message to others. Good listeners have a great reputation among peers and others. Put yourself in this position, and you will have people listening to you as well.

Take one step at a time, and try one or two of these six items to increase your Bacon number. Doing so ultimately increases your connections, recognition, and awareness of your value within the community. The art of marketing yourself is an ongoing task. Using the “Six Degrees” concept and some of these individualized PR suggestions can make the task much easier and more successful. ■

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