

Window Marketing for Libraries

By Emily Austin Duran

I once read a lengthy blog post about defining the word “outreach” as it is used in academic and public libraries. The author had difficulty defining the word because, depending on what your library’s mission is, the word can take on a different meaning. For the purpose of this article, I will use the word “outreach” based on the principles of my own rural community library’s mission statement which is “To Inform, Enrich, and Empower.”

Step number 1: Evaluate the merchandise.

Your library’s “merchandise” is any resource, instruction, technology, program, or activity that your library uses to foster a relationship with the community. Brainstorm with staff to identify a myriad of services and programs offered by the library. Some are more successful than others, but that is to be expected when so many are offered. Identifying the strengths of the library’s services and programs are part of developing a clearer focus. Conversely, identifying the challenges or weaknesses of the library is important, too. A successful approach to library programming is to develop opportunities for life-long learning geared toward a wide range of age groups. Providing a collection, technology training and services that serve the community should be evaluated annually.

Step number 2: Evaluate the consumer.

Who are your visitors? Are they representative of the community’s demographics? Look at the library’s visitors and segment them by age, interest, need, and behavior. As you learn more about them, you will establish programs and services that are most in demand by your users.

Step number 3: Create your windows.

I refer to a window for marketing as a tool to present your “merchandise.” Each window depends largely on the audience and the library’s mission. An example of this concept in my library was when we developed programming based on historical artifacts. This was geared for a mature audience. After evaluating our audience, we recognized that they are used to a lecture-style format which was appropriate for their longer attention spans. In developing the program, however, we decided to hire an impersonator to play the main character and it was a huge success. This approach had all-age appeal.

Libraries are able to take ideas from retail stores and “merchandise” their resources successfully.

Using the design expertise and “eye” of a creative staff member, create interesting and timely rotating displays in a high-traffic area that promote your library’s collection.

Step number 4: Market your windows.

The four P’s of marketing are price, product, place, and promotion. (Think of “price” as the exchange of value of your customers’ time.) By transferring the four P’s to the library world, you are able to develop an integrated campaign. “Products” are your library’s services and programs; place is the library while promotion is the activities that raise awareness about the products.

Viral marketing consists of using social media outlets such as library Websites, blogs, LinkedIn, Face-Book, Twitter, and Flixster to inform others and to enhance brand awareness. Do not forget to incorporate fail safe avenues such as newsletters, billboards, newspapers, flyers, and cable channels, all of the above are great resources for promoting upcoming events. Each style of promotion will reach a different set of consumers.

Step number 5: Evaluate.

This final step takes us full circle back to our own organization’s mission statement. Through careful analysis, we need to objectively appraise the results. Did we reach and exceed our goal? Did we reach our target audience? What worked? What did not work? What could we do differently to change the outcome? Sometimes our success or failure is obvious from lack of attendance or feedback from evaluation cards. Ask direct questions such as: What do you value at the library? What services do you not use? What are your interests and needs?

In closing, a window marketing plan is a valuable process that allows academic and public libraries to establish community relationships through outreach. Outreach is how we connect with members of our communities. By knowing the library’s strengths and weaknesses and by creating and marketing content, we are able to better assess our impact and progress. As institutions of knowledge and learning, we are able to continue designing effective learning experiences for future generations.

Bio:



Emily Austin Duran graduated from Ball State University in 2015 with a Master of Arts Degree in Adult and Community Education and a Certificate in University Teaching. She received her undergraduate degree from Ball State University in 2013 with a double minor the Psychology of Human Development and sociology.

Her background includes work in both public and private sectors, and over 15 years experience at a not-for-profit agency. Emily is currently employed as a Library Specialist at the Jasper County Public Library, where she concentrates on genealogy, reference, collection development, and programming.