

ESSENTIALS OF MARKETING YOUR LIBRARY: HOW WE DO IT AT CARMEL CLAY

by Beth Smiertana,
Carmel Clay Public Library



Promoting your library, and its programs and services, is imperative to the success of the library in today's ever-changing economic and high-tech environment. In a time of cutbacks, and even elimination, of all but the most essential public services, anonymity can be the undoing of the library. We must prove our intrinsic value, and garner support in our communities to build a strong foundation upon which we can rely during times of both prosperity and the more difficult periods. We provide a valuable service to the community and society in general, but we can't assume that the public, elected officials, or even our patrons fully appreciate this fact. We need to educate them continuously, and effective marketing is the first step in doing so.

At the Carmel Clay Public Library, we use a variety of publicity methods to market the library and our more specific programs, services, and events. Each one has a specific purpose and is part of an overall plan. This is important to promoting the product because haphazardly creating publicity materials is a drain on time and resources, and is unlikely to be effective.

Promoting the library need not be complicated, however. We have found that following these five basic guidelines has been effective for us:

1. We create pieces that are readily available for patrons to take with them (e.g., in a self-serve kiosk in the lobby or at public service desks).
2. We have acclimated patrons to our regular schedule of events by producing general publications, such as newsletters, on a predictable timeline.
3. We know our local media outlets and have established a regular schedule of press releases.
4. We network with other organizations in the community to establish mutually beneficial relationships.
5. We monitor the effectiveness of our promotions, and if we find that a particular strategy is not working, we modify or discontinue it.

OUR STRATEGY

Our major challenge, albeit a positive one, is that of promoting an ever-increasing number of programs and services, without overwhelming our audience. In the past, we promoted everything virtually equally, creating separate publicity pieces for any program or event that took place. Not only was this extremely time-consuming, but the public service desks were always covered with a myriad of promotional materials. While each piece was attractive and eye-catching by itself, it was lost amidst all the other information available. We soon realized we were throwing away more materials than patrons were picking up.

Our solution was to restructure our methods and tools to focus on improving our most effective publicity pieces, eliminating or reinventing less effective pieces, and streamlining our overall production process. While we forged this strategy to deal with our particular situation, its straightforward, organized and predictable structure lends itself well to adaptation in a variety of circumstances. An added bonus is that it is easy for library staff to understand and follow.

The basis of the plan is a monthly schedule in which the production of materials follows a logical progression, beginning with our principal publication, *Happenings*. The key is that *Happenings* becomes available to the public three weeks in advance of the month that it covers. For example, June *Happenings* was completed by May 10.

Once *Happenings* is finished, the departmental publications are produced so that they, too, are available 2 – 3 weeks ahead of time. Quarterly publications due in a given month would have the next priority, then any auxiliary pieces for major events. This structure allows patrons to plan ahead and schedule library events into their busy lives.

When the publications for the month are complete, we create a cheerful display in our glass cases in the main hall (that all patrons pass on their way into the library) and on the bulletin board in the Reference department. These displays are designed to attract attention and give patrons just a taste of upcoming events. For details, they are encouraged to obtain their own copy of *Happenings* inside the library.

THE CENTERPIECE – HAPPENINGS

As mentioned above, *Happenings* is our main publicity tool. It contains information about all of the programs offered in a given month, the library's coffee shop specials, merchandise at the Friends Library Store, the library's address, web site, and public service desk phone numbers, and information about a different service each month, such as Book Alert, our electronic new arrivals notification system.

Happenings is a very lively piece, with pictures, designs and clipart throughout to attract initial attention. It is a 22" x 17" single sheet, folded so that the bold and colorful masthead faces out. Both its size and brightness allow for easy recognition by patrons. We always utilize the front to highlight a major program or event at the library, varying this among departments as much as possible. The rest of the publication is divided into a page each for adults, children and young adults. A local printing company prints and folds the necessary 1500 copies each month, with a turnaround time of approximately one week.

Events listed in *Happenings* are posted to the calendar page of the library's web site. Patrons can also sign up via the web site to have the information e-mailed to them.

Because the cost of mailing to all of our cardholders would be prohibitive, *Happenings* is distributed within the library. We do, however, mail it to more than 500 Friends members, whose membership dues subsidize the mailing costs. We are also exploring other distribution options, such as including it in packets that local realtors provide to prospective new residents.

DEPARTMENTAL PUBLICATIONS

After *Happenings* has been sent to the printer, we immediately begin producing the departmental publications. These pieces are tailored to the audience of each department. The children's calendar is large and colorful; *Teen Happenings* takes on a "cool" look, and *Second Story*, the Reference/Readers' Advisory newsletter, is more sedate in terms of graphics in order to highlight the written information.

The children's calendar and *Teen Happenings* contain the same information that is found in *Happenings* in terms of programming. However, the children's calendar is especially popular with mothers who are accustomed to it and use it to plan their children's monthly activities at the library. Because it only contains children's programs and is truly a calendar format, it is clear and easy to use. It also contains additional, helpful information about the Children's department that *Happenings* does not.

Teen Happenings is produced quarterly. Young

adults enjoy having their own publication, and they can see what is coming up in the department months in advance.

For adults, *Second Story*, (so named because the Reference/Readers' Advisory department is on the second floor of the library) is a one-page publication with Reference information on one side and Readers' Advisory on the other. The only routine publication in the library that does not contain program information, *Second Story* is a more traditional newsletter for patrons seeking both helpful information and fun tidbits regarding books and reading. Each month, a different subject in the collection is highlighted, complete with resource recommendations. There are also author or genre recommendations and a Q & A section, as well as a listing of current displays in the department. Also, departmental contact and web site information is included.

Because *Second Story* does not incorporate program information, and some of our adult patrons just want a simple listing of programs, we produce a single sheet calendar each month. It lists the date, time, location, and title of each program offered by both Reference and Readers' Advisory, including computer classes and book discussion groups.

The Audiovisual department also has its own routine publication, but instead of a newsletter, they utilize a bookmark format. Each month, the department sponsors a movie at the library that attracts many families. Movies are planned several months in advance, so we produce a colorful, quarterly bookmark that includes the titles of the upcoming movies, dates, times, and a brief description of each. Any special programs that the department sponsors are covered in *Happenings*. Much like the mothers who look forward to the children's calendar, our movie patrons anticipate the quarterly bookmarks.

The final regular publication we produce is the Friends of the Library newsletter, *Just Between Friends*. Along with *Happenings*, this newsletter is mailed to Friends members each month, and like *Happenings*, it is distributed 3 weeks ahead of the month it covers. This allows us to publicize upcoming Friends events and opportunities far in advance, and aids members in planning their volunteer schedules. It also serves as another outlet for publicizing Friends Library Store merchandise and specials.

AUXILIARY PIECES

For major events and programs, we produce additional publicity pieces and then distribute them to targeted places in the community. For example, when the Reference department hosted a program presented by a woman who had bicycled throughout the country, we designed fliers and distributed them to four local

bicycle shops. The shops were amenable to placing the fliers in the stores, and one even included the program in their online event calendar.

For the Friends semi-annual book sales, we blanket the community with posters, attempting to target as many different segments of the population as possible. This requires the combined efforts of Friends board members who visit restaurants, grocery stores, bookstores, churches, and shops throughout the city to request permission to post the fliers.

For any children's programs during the school year that need extra publicity, we design brightly colored fliers advertising dates and times, and then courier them to the schools to be sent home with students. By working closely with the schools and obtaining permission prior to sending the fliers, we are able to reach students and their parents directly. Often, we notice an increase in attendance after a "mailing".

PRESS RELEASES

Getting familiar with your local media is imperative to receiving valuable publicity and reaching your community. We have created a master list of our media outlets that includes the reporters' names, telephone and fax numbers, e-mail addresses, deadlines, and the format in which they prefer to receive information. We monitor each of our media for changes in personnel, contact information, or format, and update the master list accordingly.

We also keep a calendar of each media's deadlines. Once a week, we write press releases and send them out in time to meet the deadlines. As with our contact list, when deadlines change, we update the calendar. Having all the deadlines together in one document is very helpful in staying organized and on schedule.

PARTNERSHIPS

Building partnerships with local businesses, cultural organizations and the City is an ongoing effort for us and an integral part of our publicity plan. While developing these relationships takes time and energy, the rewards are well worth the effort.

The library is a member of the local Chamber of Commerce, which provides us with many opportunities for both networking and marketing. We are able to showcase the library and its business-related resources by participating in the Chamber's annual business fair. We host Chamber events and tours of the library, and have utilized the Chamber's communication tools to publicize library programs and Friends book sales. Monthly luncheons sponsored by the Chamber provide us with the opportunity to meet community businesspeople and even to answer their library-related questions.

Participating in community events along with Chamber activities is an excellent way for us to show our public that we are an integral part of the community and that we take satisfaction in serving them. In Carmel, the 4th of July celebration known as Carmelfest has become a standard for library participation. Each year, we set up a booth at the festival, and give away free popcorn, library magnets, bookmarks and other goodies. Last year, we created a library book cart drill team and participated in the parade for the first time. The response from spectators was overwhelmingly positive, and provided a solid example for us of how investing a relatively small amount of time and effort in a community activity resulted in a large amount of goodwill and support.

Reaching new residents, or potential new residents, is an equally important aspect of building strong partnerships. To do so, we are exploring a variety of possible methods, but one avenue is already in place. A local organization known as Hometown Greetings, visits new residents in Carmel each month, delivering a basket of coupons, free product samples, and helpful information from area businesses and organizations. We keep Hometown Greetings supplied with information and giveaways such as library magnets, the annual report, Friends book sale publicity, Friends membership pamphlets, and a simple "Welcome to the Library" information sheet. Our partnership with Hometown Greetings allows us to reach an audience we may not otherwise have access to.

We have also developed a very positive relationship with the City of Carmel, as well as the township, school board, and county representatives. We routinely communicate with elected officials through quarterly reports we send to them, and occasional group meetings and library tours set up just for them. We look forward to continuing our partnerships and working to make them stronger.

INTERNAL COMMUNICATION

Any marketing strategy will work better if your staff is well informed and understands the plan. To do so, you must communicate with them and be available for feedback and questions.

In the Communications department, we create a schedule of deadlines for our various publications and distribute it to those staff members who are responsible for supplying us with the pertinent information. We first compile and edit all the text, and then create the graphic look for each publication. Before any publication is sent to the printer, it is given back to the appropriate staff for proofing, after which we conduct a final proof. This greatly reduces the potential for errors and misinformation.

When we send out press releases, we inform the

staff members whose programs we're promoting. Not only can they help us watch for the information in the newspaper, but they can also evaluate whether the release helped to boost attendance.

Finally, if we make any changes to our publicity structure or schedule, we communicate those changes to staff as soon as possible. They appreciate knowing what's happening and we feel confident in moving forward with the change after receiving feedback from them.

MEASUREMENT & EVALUATION

An important aspect for us in marketing the library is determining whether our publicity has resulted in the desired outcome. We want strong attendance at programs and we want to reach residents who are non-library users. We also want to ensure that we continue to serve the needs of our loyal patrons.

While it is sometimes difficult to evaluate the success of your publicity methods via tangible means, there are a variety of ways to gain the information you seek. We ask attendees at programs how they heard about the program. We also compare attendance numbers before and after a "mailing" to the schools. We monitor how many *Happenings* and other newsletters are picked up from the desks each month to ensure that people are receiving them. If fewer newsletters are taken in a given month, we try to determine the reason.

Last year, we began our long range planning process by conducting both surveys and focus groups that reached approximately 1500 people in the community. The information we collected let us know how patrons preferred to receive library-related news and what methods they perceived to be our most effective communication tools, as well as those that were less effective. Participants also offered helpful suggestions on how to reach more people in the community. While our planning process is complete, we will continue to seek feedback through surveys and focus groups to ensure that we meet the ever-changing needs and desires of our growing community.

CONCLUSION

Promoting our libraries and keeping a high profile in our respective communities is essential to the success of the library. Marketing is an ongoing educational process that results in benefits for both the library and the public we serve.

We have found that planning and organization are crucial to successful marketing. We identified our challenges and modified our publicity structure to increase the effectiveness of our publications.

We enjoy being a part of our community and form partnerships with other organizations to ensure that

our population is well served. Regular communication with residents, elected officials, business leaders, and our patrons is a key aspect of this involvement.

Finally, we continuously monitor the effectiveness of our publicity methods to ensure that the library is receiving maximum exposure. The end result is a community that uses and supports its library because residents realize the many benefits they receive from our programs, services, and resources.

For further information, contact Beth Smiertana at bsmirtana@carmel.lib.in.us.