Chapter 6
Public Relations

ABSTRACT

Public relations and marketing are more than simply advertising the library's existence. Everything the librarian does or says is public relations fodder. Properly used, public relations and marketing activities can create a favorable library image with both the library's governing authority and the library's target audience. They also allow the librarian to educate everyone on the library's role in both society and the legal system. The purpose of public relations is to develop a relationship between the library, its governing authority, and its users. The failure of even one of these relationships makes the library ineffective or completely unable to adequately serve its public. Such failures mean the library can find itself at the bottom of the funding list at budget time, first on the cut list for budget or service cuts, or treated as a necessary evil that translates into "merely existing" with minimum wage, volunteer, or community service room-sitter coverage.

OVERVIEW

According to the *Concise Oxford American Dictionary* "public relations" or PR is variously defined as "the state of the relationship between the public and a company or other organization…" and the "professional maintenance of a favorable public image by a company or other organization."

Often, the public law library has a low-key, even obscure, relationship with the parent organization and is even lesser known to the outside world with the general public being completely unaware of the library's existence. An effective public relations program is one of the keys to a library's receiving support from the parent organization. Lack

of library support is often traced back to a lack of library education and public relations efforts.

There are many different approaches to public relations and marketing. Many of these are easily adaptable to public law libraries. As with public libraries, not all approaches work with all public law libraries. Just because one library is able to use social media for its public relations efforts does not mean the public law library 50 miles away can use that same social media successfully. This chapter will discuss reasons public law libraries need to be concerned with marketing and public relations as well as practical tips on developing marketing plans and devising cost effective public relations activities.

ROLE OF PUBLIC RELATIONS

As Bausch points out in "Public Law Libraries' Outreach Equals Survival" (Bausch, 2003), a public law library's' broad mission means the librarian has to meet a dauntingly high service standard, avoid favoritism and treat all patron groups equally. Local politics contribute to the public law library's ability to sink, swim, or merely exist. It is possible for the parent organization to say it supports the library but then fail to show its support by failing to provide one or more of the necessary resources. In such situations, the librarian's initial focus should be directed toward the governing authority because without that primary support, user support will be insufficient to keep the library open and growing. Once the parent organization is convinced the library is a valuable asset and shows its support through both fiscal and non-fiscal resources and adequate staffing, public relations actions can focus on the library's potential users.

Simply advertising in the local newspaper, on the radio, on television, or maintaining a website is not enough to bring in the patrons. According to Carol Billings,

We can no longer assume that 'if we build it, they will come.' If we are to continue making legal information available to all who need it, we must improve traditional services, develop new services and then promote them aggressively to inform people about how these services can benefit them. (Billings, 2001, p. 20).

Billings' statement applies to not only a specific public law library's service population but also to other librarians and it is no longer safe to assume that a display of library users in lieu of strong political support will protect the library from cuts or total elimination. Unlike the public library, until one has a legal need, the public law library is the last place Mr. Public is going to visit. In many cases, even when Mr. Public has a legal need, he often needs to have someone point to the public law library as *the* go to resource. Just for referral purposes alone, the librarian should seek out and maintain a positive relationship with the governing authority, larger parent organization, community organizations and local attorneys.

In January 2010, these authors sent a brief survey to four law library list-servs: SWALL, AALL-SCCLL-SIS, SLA-DSOL and LAW-LIB[1] and received responses from:

- 37 public law libraries.
- 23 firm libraries.
- 17 law school/academic libraries.
- 6 corporate libraries.
- 16 court libraries.
- 1 attorney general library.
- 1 legislative research library.
- 1 general academic library.
- 2 federal agency libraries.
- 1 association library.
- 1 state law library.
- 1 non-profit library.
- 1 business firm library.

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