



Cross-Functional PR

Development and Fundraising Efforts Can Have Unanticipated Public Relations Benefits

By Donna Bausch

I'm sure you've heard the expression that "all press is good press." In this age of reality TV, blogging, and 24/7 sensory bombardment, the shibboleth holds more truth than ever. To effectively cut through the media clutter, librarians need to develop compelling marketing materials that enhance the image of the library and its services among its stakeholders, particularly when fundraising.

Ready, Set, Hands Out

Law librarians often find asking for money to be one of their most challenging tasks. For those without a great deal of fundraising experience, the prospect of pounding the pavements for cash, even from those with whom they have worked and know well, can be daunting. Given the plethora of community and charitable causes, a library's donor prospects—practicing attorneys—are likely already actively solicited for donations. Asking for money is also something many people are almost ashamed to do, because it feels to some like begging for alms.

However, instead of viewing the fundraising process as one based on shame, librarians need to perceive it as one based on sincere pride. When developing fundraising activities, librarians need to keep in mind that their libraries provide integral services to patrons, offering them quality and utility. That mindset should serve as the premise and foundation for any fundraising event.

Libraries that depend on gifts as a significant portion of their operating budgets have learned that fundraising efforts create wonderful opportunities to cross-market their services while soliciting cash contributions. The more donor prospects believe that the library is essential to their practices and central to their professional excellence, the more willing they are to give and give generously. But how do librarians convey that valid message to donors?

Dependable, fast, responsive service over the long haul is the best development tool of all. However, in recent years, a superb message can often be lost in the fog of information overload. Lawyers' snail mail and e-mail in-boxes are overflowing, and no matter how worthy the message, without visual impact to set it apart, it may not be noticed in a timely fashion.

The Power of Design

The Norfolk Law Library benefited from the pro bono services of a local graphic design professional during our annual Friends of the Library fundraising campaign last year after the library board president said that the library's usual fundraising method needed to be updated. In previous years, the library sent letters to local bar association members requesting contributions in an annual mass mailing.

To pump up that worn approach, the library recruited a graphic designer affiliated with a company that creates computer games. The staff was pleasantly surprised to find that what they could express only in words a graphics expert could easily convert to images that speak volumes, particularly to those in a younger demographic.

The library decided to create a self-mailer of an unusual size (seven by eight inches) that would set it apart from the rest of the daily mail. A self-addressed envelope was inserted in the mailer to make it easy for the recipient to send a check without fumbling for an envelope.

Although the library used high impact contemporary images, it also relied on Virginia history and tradition in its visual concept. The cover of the self-mailing brochure was a stark black background covered with the image of Thomas Jefferson in profile in shadowed white and gray tones. The designer used Jefferson's

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image to convey that the brochure contained a message of importance, not to be ignored or to be treated as junk mail. The only text on the cover was: "Our founding fathers protected such treasures with their lives" in script, with the name of our library across the bottom of the page in contrasting gold.

The copy on the inside pages explained the nature of Norfolk Law Library's financial needs and its value to the practitioner. Testimonial pull quotes from prominent local attorneys ran along the margins in two wide gold-tone border areas. The quotes touted the value of consulting the law library for research services, with a particular focus on cost effectiveness. The brochure used quotes from lawyers because lawyers are more likely to respect the opinions of their peers than unattributed text drafted by library staff. The library has used testimonial quotes—which are easy to obtain and effective in conveying the library's message—frequently in its promotional mailings for its fee-based research services.

The back of the brochure was blank, except for the bulk mailing permit and space for the address label. The overall look was professional, crisp, and different from anything we could have produced in-house without professional design expertise.

Free of Charge

Although the designer created a dynamic brochure, there are downsides to outside consultants who volunteer their time. The designer had a demanding "day job," which took precedence over the library pro bono project. His limited available time, combined with a desire for the finished product to be visually perfect and faithful to his concept,

slowed down the process. The library's usual letter campaign was quick and easy, but it took six weeks to design, print, and mail the brochure.

However, the long wait allowed the library to find a printer who produced the mailer free of charge. The local bar association bore the cost of postage and provided free access to the association's member database for mailing. All in all, the piece was worth the wait, as last year's gift income was more than 10 percent higher than ever before.

Any library can find free design and public relations support. Many communities have local chapters of the Public Relations Society of America, which often provides free services to nonprofits, including law libraries. Students in art, design, and public relations classes at local universities and community colleges may be willing to provide their services for free or a low fee in order to enhance their portfolios and gain experience for their resumes. Contact the job placement offices or internship coordinators at those schools.

Follow Up

The Norfolk Law Library plans to follow up on and refine its successful fundraising campaign by offering prior contributors a Friends "renewal" opportunity rather than simply soliciting from scratch annually. A different pitch will be made to loyal Friends than to those who have not yet contributed, thanking them for their past support.

The library also initiated a Friends appreciation event last year. It will continue that tradition annually by providing a free

lunch and a program with free continuing legal education (CLE) credit to Friends, making certain that those who have not contributed know what they're missing. Last year, LexisNexis™ Librarian Relations Consultant Leanne Battle sponsored the event and provided the CLE program "60 Sites in 60 Minutes," in which speakers critique 60 Web sites in an hour.

The Norfolk Law Library also raises funds by having the local bar association include a voluntary check box for a charitable contribution to the law library when the bar member pays annual dues. The library raised nearly \$2,000 using this mechanism without any effort or expense on its part, other than convincing the bar association that this was a good opportunity for their members at no additional cost to the bar. This year, the suggested dues "check-off" amount will be doubled from \$25 to \$50 per attorney. The library will also suggest including a per-attorney contribution level for larger firms on the membership application to level the playing field for all "Friends."

Pound the Pavement

"Press" of any kind—even when asking customers to donate their hard-earned cash—does nothing but enhance the public perception of the value and relevance of law libraries. Fundraising and public relations work in tandem and result in both a healthier bottom line and community image. Get out and pound those pavements!

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- **Student Division** for budding law librarians still in school. (Students need not be members of AALL.)

The winner in each division receives \$750, generously donated by LexisNexis™, plus the opportunity to present his or her paper at a special program during the AALL Annual Meeting in Boston. Winning papers will also be considered for publication in the association's prestigious *Law Library Journal*.

For more information, a list of previous winners, and an application, visit the AALL Web site at http://www.aallnet.org/about/award_call_for_papers.asp. **Submissions must be postmarked by March 1, 2004.**

If you have any questions, please contact any member of the AALL/LexisNexis Call for Papers Committee: Chair Connie Strittmatter, connie.s@asu.edu; Kathryn Hensiak, k-hensiak@law.northwestern.edu, or Virginia Davis, Davis@UH.edu.