

Leading Landlords to the Law Library

*How to use ALA's @ your library[®]
campaign as an outreach tool to
local communities*

by Marcia L. Dority Baker

The Situation:

In Lincoln, Nebraska, tenants of rental-housing units often visit the University of Nebraska (UNL) College of Law's Schmid Law Library for information and help in dealing with landlord and/or rental issues. Landlords, on the other hand, rarely use the law library, which lends material to all Nebraska residents over the age of 18. Even non-residents or minors may access and use the law library's collection within the building.

Lincoln landlords are missing out on the law library's resources for assistance with tenant issues, renting concerns, housing discrimination questions, deadbeat tenants, small business needs, and other landlord concerns. According to the *Selected Housing Characteristics: 2005 from the U.S. Census FactFinder* (<http://factfinder.census.gov>) Web site, 40 percent of Lincoln housing units are rentals.

Thus, the law library has a large public constituent base with potential landlord-tenant information needs yet untapped.

The Solution:

The American Library Association's (ALA) @ your library® campaign.

ALA started @ your library® in 2001 to promote awareness and support for libraries, as well as to educate communities about the value and significance of libraries. Although the campaign has been successful and creative in public and academic libraries, it appears law libraries do not utilize it.

Traditionally law libraries serve local constituents not routinely targeted by the @ your library® campaign: law college faculty and students, members of law firms, or prisoners as part of pro se arrangements. Nevertheless, many county, state, and university law libraries receive a variety of public visitors. All law libraries (academic, government, law firm, or a mix of the above) can apply the @ your library® campaign in their local communities.

Why Have Public Outreach?

The primary reason law libraries should use the @ your library® campaign for public outreach is library promotion. At the Schmid Law Library, we realize a law library is not the general public's first choice of library to visit. Law students come either to study or review material put on reserve by professors. Local attorneys visit the law library to research client legal problems, and individuals unable to afford a lawyer visit the law library for reference help with legal issues. But we do not offer popular public programming, such as story time, family events, or summer reading programs.

Despite this, law libraries are unique, providing relevant and useful services to our communities.

Historically, promotion of the Schmid Law Library has not been pursued and is currently needed. The collection is not only intended to help the college of law faculty and students and area attorneys, but also the public. Public outreach has the potential to attract a new constituency, thus Schmid Law Library needs to emphasize its public outreach. It should be noted that public patrons do visit the library after involving themselves in a legal issue. However, the library staff would like the patrons to visit prior to the legal issue.

Law libraries must start relationships with the public before the patrons even need help. It is easier to be on good terms and offer informational assistance than to provide guidance after a stressful situation occurs.

Target Audience

Determining your target audience is the first step in implementing a successful @ your library® campaign. What special collection is your law library known for or do you want to promote? What group of people would you like to see using the resources available at the law library? What is happening in your local community that

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the law library could help with, for example, Volunteer Income Tax Assistance or estate planning seminars for retirement communities?

The audience for a particular program can be large and diverse or small and focused in a specific area. When planning for the program, be sure to consider what your law library staff and building can handle the first time around. Estimate the additional time and effort it will take for your staff to start a fresh program. Determine the facilities that will be used (how many people a room can hold) and consider parking issues that may arise.

The primary target audience for the Schmid Law Library program is both Lincoln city landlords and property managers. This audience owns rental property and can include an individual renting one duplex for extra income or a full-time property manager whose income is derived from multiple rental units.

In addition, Schmid also targets the Real Estate Owners and Managers Association (REOMA) of Lincoln. This organization has been active in Lincoln for 30 years, and many of its 150-plus members own rental property and rent more than 7,000 units in the city, according to the REOMA Web site.

Do not be afraid to use Google—many of your customers use it. It is important to know what type of information is available online because then library staff can interact with customers from the same starting point. When libraries know the background of what type of information a customer has accessed, library staff can then refer the customer to other relevant library material.

Finally, make it obvious who you want to attract to your law library's program by downloading the appropriate ALA @ your library® logo from ALA's Web site (www.ala.org/ala/pio/campaign/campaign_america.htm). This is a trademarked logo and should be used as intended. The site includes detailed use instructions, as well as information about any modifications to the logo. Schmid Law Library, for example, titled its program, Lincoln landlords @ your library®.

Remember: it is highly likely law library customers who also use the local public or academic libraries have already seen the logo in use for quite awhile. We do not need to reinvent the wheel. ALA has provided all the campaign information needed for any type of library to use.

Build It and They Will Come

How does a library attract an audience that has yet to visit the library? The simple answer is not always easy—go to them. Libraries spend an exorbitant amount of time creating brochures and flyers that never make it outside the front doors of the library. Consider moving promotional material from the library to where your target audience is located or visits.

Put together a list of places or addresses where your target audience may see the program flyers or posters. But before posting anything, always verify that a program flyer or poster can be displayed. It is also important to discuss what you are posting with the local staff. They may know of interested customers or have suggestions for other locations to post information.

(continued on page 22)

For the Lincoln landlords @ your library® program, Schmid Law Library will provide posters, flyers, and brochures to local real estate offices and the REOMA office. This includes the large agencies as well as the smaller real estate companies. The law library staff will also spend time explaining the program to the real estate and REOMA office personnel. They should be aware of the program details to help promote it.

Landlord Information and Reference Bibliography

Limited list of landlord-tenant information available in the Schmid Law Library collection:

Fishman, S. (2005). *Every landlord's tax deduction guide*. Berkeley, CA: NOLO.

Nebraska Continuing Legal Education, Inc. (2001). *Landlord-tenant fundamentals*. Lincoln, NE: NCLE.

Pakroo, P. and Repa, B. (2004). *The small business start-up kit, 3rd ed.* Berkeley, CA: NOLO.

Portman, J. and Stewart, M. (2007). *Every tenant's legal guide, 5th ed.* Berkeley, CA: NOLO.

Portman, J. and Stewart, M. (2005). *Renter's rights: the basics, 4th ed.* Berkeley, CA: NOLO.

Stewart, M. and Warner, R. (2006). *Every landlord's legal guide, 8th ed.* Berkeley, CA: NOLO.

Stewart, M. and Warner, R. (2005). *Leases and rental agreements, 6th ed.* Berkeley, CA: NOLO.

Stim, R. and Guerin, L. (2005). *Whoops! I'm in business: a crash course in business basics*. Berkeley, CA: NOLO.

Nebraska Resources:

Lincoln Municipal Code (print and online version access)

Nebraska Municipal Codes (online access)

Nebraska Statutes (print and online version access)

Omaha Municipal Code (print and online version access)

Westlaw database (free access to public Westlaw)

After the initial legwork is completed, the law library will have a good base of contacts. In the future when the law library hosts this program again, it can provide information to the correct contact person, and valuable time will be saved. Do not forget to double the time, manpower, and cost to complete the first program. As with any new venture, the exact expenditures are not known.

Consider posting an announcement in local business magazines. When discussing advertising with the business magazine publisher, it is important to check on sales tax and ad costs. Academic and public libraries may not have to pay the sales tax on some promotional spending. It is also pertinent to ask about reduced rates for academic or publicly funded institutions. Some publications may have two price scales, one for local museums, libraries, and arts institutions and another for retail businesses.

The Schmid Law Library Web site provides access to an enormous amount of information and is an excellent venue to promote the Lincoln landlords @ your library® event. Most likely the REOMA Web site and the real estate businesses' Web sites will post the program information as well. A useful tool for any program planning is a "to find out" list. Be sure to include marketing and program promotion on a university Web site to that list. Due to the information policies of universities and colleges, some promotional content may need to be approved before posting.

E-mail can also be a useful promotion tool when used appropriately. If e-mail is used to contact another agency's members, provide the information to the agency. Then the agency can send out the e-mail when promoting its other events. For the Lincoln landlords @ your library® program, Schmid Law Library will ask REOMA to generate e-mails to their members. There are two reasons for REOMA to send the program promotional e-mails: (1) online discussion list and e-mail privacy issues, and (2) more importantly, the recipients will recognize the REOMA address, whereas the UNL address may be sent to junk mail.

Do not be too concerned about promoting program information to each person in the target audience. Libraries cannot plan for every possibility or give program information to every business and person in the area. The best course of action is to start with a strong plan, then modify it as new opportunities arise. Schmid Law Library realizes that many area landlords don't belong to REOMA, don't use the local real estate offices, and don't read the Lincoln

business magazine. Due to time and staff constraints, the law library staff will do its best to prepare an excellent program.

Can You Hear Me?

A provocative ad or interesting program promoted online or in a local publication does not always motivate you to attend an event. What really brings people in the door? Word of mouth promotion. Find the biggest talkers and socializers to spread the program information.

Discussing the program with friends and acquaintances in the rental market will help determine where Lincoln landlords spend their time. Also, be sure to clearly

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explain the program to library staff, office personnel, and interested customers. Word of mouth spreads news (good or bad) quickly, which makes it an affordable way to promote the law library's program. However, make sure your program information is online, easy to find, and correct. The date, time, place, and contact information are the most relevant parts to the program.

Another way to advertise your program is with radio and local TV. As an academic library affiliated with a university, Schmid Law Library potentially could have airtime on the local stations. The college radio station in particular could be a good fit, as well as the city of Lincoln public access TV station. By using various media, such as the Internet, print, word of mouth, radio, and TV, the law library expects to attract a sizable landlord crowd.

With any new outreach program, the best strategy to target an audience not currently using the library is to saturate the target area with program information and prepare the most useful @ your library® program possible.

Evaluation and Feedback

Library programs in general are time intensive and hard work. It is imperative

with a first-time program to determine not only if it was successful but also relevant as an annual program. The best way to determine this is with numbers and feedback, so good evaluation is necessary.

The first mark of a good program is attendance. This is a double-edged sword, even with great marketing. Attendance can be poor due to the weather, a Husker football game, or parking issues. The library staff must determine prior to the program how many people in attendance are needed to offset the staff time and output.

The second mark of most good programs is the evaluation form. A simple evaluation should include feedback on topics such as whether the information was relevant to the attendees, how they heard about the program, what other topics they are interested in, and if they would suggest this program to friends.

As discussed in the promotion section, word of mouth is important. Therefore, if audience members find this program useful, they will pass the information on to others in their group (the power of association). One way to track this is by documenting the phone calls received about missing the program or asking when the next program is. Communicating with the program

partners for their feedback would also provide another source of evaluation.

For the Lincoln landlords @ your library® program, the law library will call the REOMA office for its reaction to the event. In addition, the library staff would call the radio and TV stations to determine the amount of feedback from the airtime advertising.

Two evaluations the Schmid Law Library can track are the circulation rates of the NOLO books in its collection and landlord-tenant reference questions (see “Landlord Information and Reference Bibliography” on page 22 for a list of NOLO books). The circulation supervisor will record the statistics of the NOLO books prior to the program to compare to the same statistics after the program on pre-determined dates. The reference librarians at the law library keep detailed statistics on reference transactions (including patron type) and can also mark questions that come from the landlord program.

Evaluation is necessary for all libraries. Our resources are tight due to budget and staffing constraints, so documentation of how our time and efforts are used is critical. Libraries must use this same process when promoting library programs to attract other audiences. As a public institution, the law

library must know the outcome of its programming and if it is relevant. Law libraries also need to reach out to the community for awareness and to meet our mission of helping people find legal information. The ALA's @ your library® campaign is one such way to accomplish this goal. ■

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@ your library

How to use ALA's @ Your Library®

- 1. Determine your target audience.** What special collection is your law library known for or do you want to promote? What group of people would you like to see using the resources available at your law library? What is happening in your local community that the law library could help with?
- 2. Customize the @ your library® logo for your program.** Make it obvious who you want to attract to your law library's program by downloading the appropriate ALA @ your library® logo from ALA's Web site (www.ala.org/ala/pio/campaign/campaign_america.htm). This is a trademarked logo and should be used as intended, so pay attention to the instructions.
- 3. Promote your program where your target audience is located.** Move promotional material from the library to where your target audience works, lives, and visits. Consider partnering with an organization that your target audience associates with.
- 4. Don't overlook the power of word of mouth promotion.** Gossip spreads news (good or bad) quickly, which makes it an affordable way to promote the law library's program. Find the biggest talkers and socializers to spread your program information. However, make sure your program information is online, easy to find, and correct.
- 5. Finally, evaluate the program.** A simple evaluation should include feedback on topics such as whether the information was relevant to the attendees, how they heard about the program, what other topics they are interested in, and if they would suggest this program to friends.

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