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# Market Your Library: How to Create a Library Marketing Committee

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# MARKET YOUR LIBRARY

## How to create a library marketing committee

By Deborah Schander

Much has been written about the value that public relations efforts and specific marketing plans have added to law libraries. Whether it's getting more students into the library or letting clerks know about the latest new database, libraries are making their value known in new and creative ways.

Although these efforts benefit the whole library, their creation tends to be the responsibility of one or two people. Even if that is the case, though, it is worth considering ways to involve more voices in planning your outreach efforts. One such way to do this is through the creation of a marketing committee.

### Two Heads Are Better Than One

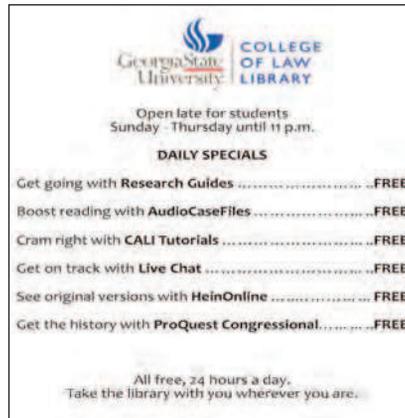
You may be thinking, “The librarian who does our marketing is great! Why would we mess with a good thing?” In that case, go you! There might be no need to change how you currently operate. Still, even when things are going well, there may still be room for growth or an occasional fresh outlook. A marketing committee is just one way you can help make your outreach efforts an ongoing success.

A lot goes into the creation of marketing materials. A subject must be chosen; the tone and wording of the language has to be crafted; and fonts, color schemes, and images must be selected. A marketing committee can be tasked with helping to gather data, wordsmithing text, and commenting on design possibilities. Each person is going to approach these tasks with a different perspective, and their varying viewpoints can bring a positive critical eye to the project. It can be easy to get caught up in the creation process, and it's helpful to have others around to ensure that nothing is forgotten.

### Forming the Committee

The key to selecting committee members is to create a diversity of perspective. While it may seem natural to pull together a couple of librarians and get to work, there are others who could make valuable contributions too. Does your firm have a communications or marketing department? Ask someone with knowledge of your external reputation to comment. Perhaps your circulation staffers know more about what your library is like outside of

regular business hours than you do. If you want to focus your efforts on a particular group, such as judges or students, consider asking one of them to give you their inside perspective.



A table tent can be a small, subtle way of letting your target audience know about your services.

As you think about all of the unique voices in your workplace, you'll discover your list of prospective committee members is getting lengthy. Not only will you have an array of voices, but the more people you have, the more you can divide up the work, right? A large committee is great in theory, but it can lead to other problems too. Think about the logistics of bringing all those people together for meetings. Perhaps adding committee duties will put too much on someone's already full workload. Take these and other factors into account when forming your committee. One consisting of three to five members will probably be a good balance of workload and perspective. If your chosen projects would naturally involve a person (or department) who is not a full member of the committee, you can always consult with that person on a one-off basis too.

### Running the Committee

This likely goes without saying, but a marketing committee is still a committee. You will need someone to run the committee and to ultimately be in charge of its work. The most logical choice is the person directly responsible for your library's marketing materials, though you might have a reason to

choose someone else. Whoever is selected, that person will oversee meetings, create agendas, assign tasks, send deadline reminders, and ensure recording of minutes. By its very nature, public relations work will include a lot of brainstorming and choices. Agendas for each meeting will help keep the group on task, and minutes will remind you of decisions made in prior meetings. The chair can also guide with asynchronous communications, such as email, among the group as well.

### Take Time to Prepare

Once you have chosen your committee members, your first inclination may be to jump right in and start creating your marketing materials. However, if you don't take the time to adequately prepare for the task ahead, you risk making uninformed decisions. Such decisions in a public relations project can lead you to target the wrong audience, highlight resources people already know about, or otherwise not get the most valuable return for your efforts.

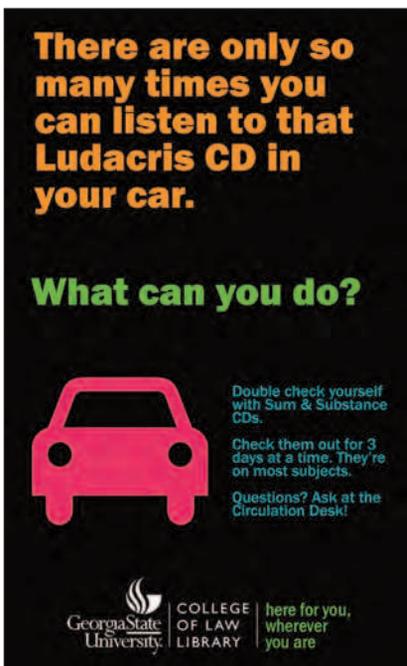


Mouse pads are an example of a promotional product that is functional and informative.

### Preparing Your Committee

The first step in preparing the committee for its work is making sure that all members have a basic understanding of marketing practices. One way to accomplish this is to have everyone do some background reading; you can then discuss the reading and any questions committee members have at your first meeting. Topics to consider in this discussion include defining terms (e.g., the difference between marketing and

public relations), the cycle of marketing, and the steps involved in creating a marketing plan. Two excellent resources for this are *The Accidental Library Marketer* by Kathy Dempsey and *Marketing Today's Academic Library: A Bold New Approach to Communicating With Students* by Brian Mathews (these are applicable for other types of libraries, as well). Short selections from those books or similar readings can lay the groundwork for guiding your committee and its activities.



Posters are a classic promotional piece. They can be placed where a large digital sign cannot. Many law schools still rely heavily on print advertising to students.

## Gathering the Information You Need

As Dempsey explains in her book, writing a specific marketing plan actually comes toward the middle of the marketing cycle, not near the beginning. Before you can decide how you're going to promote particular library resources, you first have to determine your target audience(s), find out what their needs are, and determine how you can meet those needs with your resources. In this process, it's important to look at both internal and external perceptions about the library. In other words, what do those who work within the library think about it versus those who use the library? Your research may yield surprisingly different results from these two groups.

You can gather this information in a variety of ways. Focus groups, surveys, SWOT analyses, and comment cards are just a few possibilities. Deciding exactly which to use for each target audience will depend on how you determine they can best be reached. A great deal of work

goes into this part of the process, and having multiple people to share the load is invaluable.

## Creating Marketing Plans

Once you have gathered your data and analyzed it, your committee can start writing marketing plans. These plans should start with a goal, detailing what you hope to achieve with your efforts. These goals should be as specific as possible. For example, a goal such as, "We want to get more students into the library" is pretty generic; on the other hand, "We want part-time program students to choose the library as their preferred location between when they get off work and when they go to their evening classes" is much more specific. Setting your goal will then determine the details of your marketing plan, from detailed background research to target audience, message, distribution methods, and evaluation standards. You may also decide to implement multiple marketing plans at the same time, each focused on a different goal.

## The Heart of Your Plans

Library marketing plans often focus on promoting library services or resources. The ways in which you choose to do this can take many forms. Using the data your committee collects about your target audiences, you might decide the best way to communicate with one audience is through an in-person office visit and a follow-up email and, for another audience, through a digital sign and a casual table event, when you have a designated time and location for people to drop by and get more information. Regardless of the delivery method, you will want to spend some time planning what you will say or do. For those examples, the committee could brainstorm a list of topics to cover during the office visit and table event, write the text of any print materials, and decide on layout and color scheme for a digital sign. Again, having multiple people provide their personal viewpoints and attention to detail can strengthen the final product.

## A Marketing Committee in Action

All this sounds good in theory, but how does it really look in practice? At Georgia State University College of Law, our committee implemented its first marketing plans this school year. Based on our background research, we decided to focus on three goals: (1) increasing faculty awareness of services we offer beyond research assistance, (2) promoting specific library resources and services to our first-year law students, and (3) encouraging part-time, evening students to see the library as a quiet place for them to focus on schoolwork. To tie all of the plans together as a



A digital sign can be a large, eye-catching way to highlight your resources.

campaign, we added the tagline "Here for you, wherever you are," which also served to remind each group that the library's services aren't tied to our physical location.

For our faculty, we collaborated with our faculty services librarian to hone the message each faculty member received in his or her one-on-one meeting with the librarian. To bring those points home, we also collaborated with the IT department to replace the old mouse pad in each faculty member's office with a new one promoting library services.

We created several types of materials for our part-time, evening students, including digital signs and table tents. The table tents, for example, were placed in the quiet zone of our library (their preferred place to study). These signs were designed to look like a late-night diner menu, reminding students of our evening hours and free resources.

The materials for our 1Ls were two-fold: a series of digital signs promoting various resources (with short, simple messages) that corresponded with more in-depth printed posters that were placed throughout the library and the law school.

Our initial feedback has been very positive. The reference desk recorded increased interest in the resources highlighted, and the circulation desk saw improved check-out statistics. Students requested more ongoing reminders about other products and services. One tenured faculty member emailed immediately to say how much he loved his new mouse pad. The committee continues to gather data on our current efforts and plan for new ones.

## Putting It All Together

Library public relations efforts can take many shapes. A marketing committee can be just one way to create promotional materials. Committee members not only can share the workload of a large, ongoing project but also can ensure that multiple viewpoints are represented and that the details of a project or a target audience's needs won't be forgotten in the creation process. ■

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