



Chapter Council Presents Sharing Roundtables

MLA Annual Meeting
Phoenix AZ
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Table 15a: Marketing & Public Relations

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Topics Discussed/Ideas Shared:

We began our roundtable discussion by introducing ourselves. Since most participants were looking for new ways to promote themselves, we talked about how to develop better strategies for internal communication.

One library worked with a graphics template form for branding. Many of the participants were part of public relations type committees. One person suggested applying for the NLM exhibit grants as a way to get exposure. One library had a Quality Improvement Fair where vendors gave away free gifts. Another library held a contest in which patrons entered a prize drawing by giving a resource or information that changed their world or had significant impact on their field.

The group acknowledged that patrons are not actually coming to the library building as much these days, so we want them to think of the library first for information rather than Google. One person reminded us about the need to remarket things since hospital/medical center staffs are coming and going all the time.

A survey of users at one library revealed that face-to-face interaction was often better. Although most of the residents and physicians responded to the survey that they were aware of the catalog, 78% of internal medicine staff refused to use it. Other departments were not as negative.

The question was posed to the group: Are we doing what our users want or what we think is easy for us to do? Sometimes vendors make our jobs more difficult by marketing directly to our patrons instead of coordinating efforts through us. They may use this strategy to try and force us to make decisions through pressure exerted by our patrons, but often it backfires. For one library, cooperative arrangements with vendors resulted in the production of a "Database Testing Zone," where patrons can review trial databases via the Web and give their feedback based on review criteria.

Do we go to our patrons where they are? Yes - most libraries did - through classes and other types of training initiatives.

One attendee defined a marketing plan as "throwing as much garbage on the wall as you can and letting it stick." Although most participants didn't have a formalized marketing plan, we learned that lack of one could lead to being more reactive than proactive. Joy, the group's facilitator, relayed that she had taught an MLA continuing education class on how to write a business plan.

One library was teaching classes on how to use Google. Since most people have access to the Internet, we were urged to use Google to our advantage - as a hook - to explain "the good versus the not so good" aspects. It was also noted that PubMed records were retrievable via Google Scholar but only 10 years worth.

As is often the case, one library had no control over how they were represented on their institution's Website. Since it was used primarily to recruit students, everything else was placed more levels down in the site structure. In order to get some exposure, the library would have to be promoted as an attraction to students.

For another library, patrons had to be routed through the Intranet to get to UpToDate and Ovid, instead of being able to go directly to the sites. On most hospital Websites, the presence of the library on the front page is for marketing purposes only. Usually the library's Intranet is more extensive. In academic institutions, libraries usually have more control over their Website representation.

One participant's library put a counter on their Website and had their staff go to site to produce more hits. The results were used to get a link added for the library on the front of the institution's Website.

The group next discussed library orientations. A reoccurring question for most of the attendees was how much to do and when. One participant felt we probably give too much information during orientations as a rule. Ideas were offered on how to do more at a later time, including doing 15 minute orientations initially and waiting until the class's first assignment. At one library, a 30-minute drop-in orientation (lunch and learn) was offered on the first Tuesday of the month. This library also provided a weekly "Morning Report" where librarians addressed specific search queries with residents and fellows.

How did participants get people to their Websites? Email marketing had been successful at a lot of the libraries (one had specific lists in Outlook), but there were restrictions at some institutions for mass emailing. For those who used email, it was suggested to put a

concise message in the subject line and send messages out on Friday afternoon (if possible).

One attendee commented that for all the banging against the wall (in terms of marketing ideas), he didn't hear "no" a lot. His motto was "fear it but don't hear it." For another participant, taking a risk was an issue, but the group encouraged him to do just that.

The roundtable ended with the following suggestions to improve public relations: work on internal and external relationships, listen to find out what problems may exist, and identify individual consultants from the library.