

Multimedia Marketing: Using Technology to Spread the Word

By Jenna Anderson

Marketing your library's programs and services is vital. And with so much technology available at your fingertips, it's easier than ever to get your message out to your patrons. You just have to take advantage of it.

Using Your Own Website

Most, if not all, libraries have a website. It can be one of the most useful tools your library possesses. But you don't want your website to be just a portal for patrons to access your online catalog. You want them to stop, take a look around, *and then* access your catalog.

One of the best ways to get their attention online is to have something that's constantly changing on your home page. That could be news or program information that's updated frequently. Or maybe you have the know-how to add flash graphics to your page. No matter how you do it, it's important to have something constantly changing to give your patrons a good reason to return to your site again and again. They are a lot less likely to return to a site that never appears to offer them new information.

Your website can also be a great way to encourage communication from your patrons. A prominent Contact Us link will be used for any number of things...questions about how to use online services, a patron letting you know that he or she returned that book they just received an overdue notice about, or a complaint about the service they received at the Circulation Desk. The important thing is that you make it easy for them to contact you. It's the first step in good employee/patron relations. It doesn't matter who receives these emails. What matters is a fairly prompt response. During the day, check your emails regularly. When you're not at work or on vacation, have these emails forwarded

to someone who will be available to respond promptly.

Also on the website, make sure there is some type of link alongside the program information so that patrons can sign up right then and there. Whether you use software provided by a company to create a calendar, or you type up the information yourself in a web page and insert an email hyperlink, it's important to make it easy for them to sign up. If they do sign up via email, it's easy and convenient for you to email them back a reminder about the program a few days in advance. You also have the opportunity to thank them for signing up and encourage them to ask questions about the program.

Using Other Websites

The World Wide Web is full of helpful sites that you can use to market your library's programs and services. Facebook, MySpace, Twitter...all these and more have opened up a whole new way to get the word out.

Take Facebook, for instance. You can set up your library site as a business, so that people can link up to you as Fans. What's great is that you receive an email when someone posts to the site, so you don't have to constantly check Facebook to see if anything new is going on. It will need to be updated regularly, though, so it's important to budget the time into your weekly schedule.

Look for other businesses within your community that have already set up an account with sites like Facebook. Your Chamber of Commerce may have a site, as well as other companies and organizations in your area. Become a Fan or a Friend! Use their sites to spread the word about your library's activities. It's also a great way to connect with others in your community.

Check for local news outfits that have similar sites, too. Some will allow you to post your news at no cost. Their Fans will have access to the information you post.

Using e-Mail and Sending e-Newsletters

E-Mail is one of the best ways to initiate one-on-one contact with your patrons. What's important is that you only contact them via e-Mail if they *want* to be contacted. You can do this by adding a link to your web page, asking people to sign up to receive program information and e-Newsletters. You can also have a card available at your Circulation Desk that gives people the opportunity to sign up to receive specific information, i.e. Adult Programs, Teen Programs, and/or Children's Programs.

There are programs available to manage your e-Mail lists, but Microsoft Outlook works just fine, and chances are it's already available on your computer. If you're already writing news releases for programs, it doesn't take much additional time to e-Mail it out to your program information recipients. Just remember to use BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) so that the people on your list don't have access to the e-Mail addresses of others. Be sure to encourage recipients to reply to your e-Mail to sign up for the program or ask questions. They will certainly appreciate this small gesture of personal attention.

E-Newsletters are another great way to get information out, and it may even save you some money in printing costs, since many patrons will prefer to receive the electronic version.

There are several ways you can format the e-Newsletter. You can simply send a PDF version, purchase a program that assists you in the formatting, or simply include the information in the body of an e-Mail. There are advantages and drawbacks to each. A PDF version will allow your patrons to see your entire e-Newsletter easily, but download time could be an issue in areas where dial-up is still prevalent. A e-Newsletter program can make the process a little easier, but it also comes with a price tag. Including the information in the body of an e-Mail allows the recipient to see text right away, but the pictures may be

blocked. Not a big deal for the savvy patrons who know to right click to view the pictures or to click at the link on the top of the email to display the pictures, but others might not know this trick and will miss out on some of the graphics or information.

Using Videos

Videos can be a great tool to get information to schools or to patrons in general. Many libraries send staff members into the schools each spring to promote the summer reading programs. A video can do the same thing! There are plenty of easy-to-use video cameras and editing programs available for relatively little cost. If you have a high school or college in your area with a media program, see if they would be willing to create the video for you for little or no cost. Once you've got a video, you can make copies of the DVDs to send to teachers, or you can post it online. Sites like YouTube make it easy to upload videos and you can even post a link to the video on your website.

What this can do is save you time. Sure, the initial video will take time to complete, but it allows the teachers to show the video at their convenience. You don't have the headache of contacting each teacher and working to find a time that fits into both schedules for a personal visit.

Along with the video, you may want to send some additional marketing materials...flyers detailing your program/activity or maybe a bookmark that lists all the necessary information. Another idea would be to send a checklist to the school, so you know which teachers actually played the video for their students. Giving space for comments can allow you to tweak the video and the procedure for viewing it for future activities.

Author

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