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News

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Libraries Need Public Relations

By Padgett S. Lewis, APR

Library usage has increased dramatically in the last few years, especially with the downturn in the economy. However, tight economic times also mean reduced funding, making public relations even more crucial. Public relations is defining and maintaining the image of an organization by using several communications tools, such as press releases and media coverage, calendars of events and print materials, speaking engagements, Web sites and, most importantly, library staff. Since most libraries do not have full-time staff dedicated to public relations, it's important to remember that **all** library staff—from the director to the circulation department—have a role to play.

There are several ways to address public relations needs without full-time staff devoted to this task and without a budget for promotional items. Consider developing a committee of staff interested in promoting your library and specific services. Having a committee to brainstorm ideas and solutions to communications problems helps ensure that basic things are done, such as keeping staff informed via e-mail or other methods, posting information on events in your library locations, and providing information regularly to the local newspaper and other interested groups.

Also try to identify a Friends' member or other library supporter who could volunteer their services. You may already have a strong graphic designer, writer or public relations person among your volunteers. If not, ask your Board of Trustees and Friends' Board members to help identify people who might be willing to help.

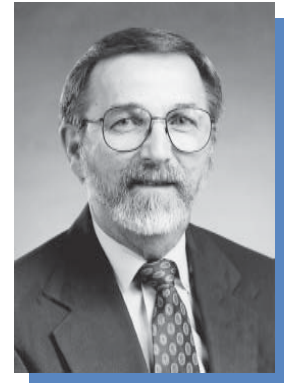


Regardless of who does the work, the first step is identifying the many audiences to whom you need to communicate, including regular users and community groups who rely on the library for meeting rooms or resources. Remember those who are responsible for your funding, including state legislators, local government officials, sponsors, donors, and Friends' members. Consider those people who are not using the library and any special demographic groups in your area. Be sure to list your staff as a key audience as well.

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FROM THE DIRECTOR.....

James B. Johnson, Jr.



This issue of *News About South Carolina Libraries* is devoted to public relations. Padgett S. Lewis, public relations manager for the Richland County Public Library, presents libraries with a number of excellent tips on how a library can increase its visibility, even without full time staff and a budget devoted to public relations.

Elsewhere in this issue are Concurrent Resolutions from the South Carolina General Assembly. One of these resolutions commends the Palmetto Book Alliance, a partnership between the State Library and USC's School of Library and Information Science, on the publication of *the South Carolina Literary Tour*. The other resolution commends the State Library and public libraries for sponsoring summer reading programs. These resolutions are good public relations tools. They can be reproduced in many different venues letting people know that these library programs have the support of the General Assembly. This same thing can be done with county councils. Pick out a particular library program and approach a county council member and request that they introduce a resolution commending the library for providing that program or service. It won't cost your county council anything, but it will provide them with an opportunity for a "feel good" moment.

Public relations, like lobbying, should be a yearlong endeavor. Like lobbying, every staff member, trustee, and friend should be involved in public relations for the library. Library funding is dependent on the community having a positive image of the library. It is up to us to ensure that all library customers have a positive experience at our libraries. Satisfied customers will become promoters and advocates for the library.

Library Web Sites - Worthy Investments by Lisa Kling

I remember creating public relations materials as a new librarian back when clip art was simply drawn art, clipped and pasted on pages for photocopying. Today public relations extend to a vehicle that is arguably the best tool available to any library: its web site.

We at the Dorchester County Library view our site as having infinite possibilities. New titles, Internet links, databases (including DISCUS), bookmobile and programming schedules are all there, along with our online catalog and homework help. Our Public Relations team and Information Technology team work diligently to add new and better information for our patrons, and their work has provided us with a site

recognized by the South Carolina Library Association as the Best Public Library Web Site in 2001.

In looking at other library web sites, I am reminded that any library (small or large), with good teams and hard work, can create an excellent web site. A web site can change as a library redefines itself. It can be continuous, immediate, attractive, far-reaching, and contain far more information than any radio or TV ad, newsletter, flyer, bookmark, or newspaper article. Use your library's web site to represent your services for your community. It's definitely a worthy investment.

Lisa Kling is the Headquarters Librarian and PR Coordinator for the Dorchester County Library.



The next step is to prioritize the audiences, and identify methods for communicating with each one. At certain times during the year, it may become more critical to communicate with specific audiences (government officials prior to funding decisions, for example). Each committee member could be responsible for handling a specific audience and serving as a library contact for that group. The basic principle behind public relations is establishing clear channels of communication with your target audiences. When you increase interaction with those groups, you help ensure that you are meeting your community's needs.

Finally, be sure to establish benchmarks to determine if your efforts are successful. Know how many people are attending programs and using specific services. Then, look at those same numbers after completing a specific public relations effort. Track work done, as well as the responses and results, and share this information with the entire committee.

Here are a few ideas to use as a starting point to brainstorm what will work best in your community. Remember to be creative, thorough, and consistent.

- * **Use a simple program evaluation form** to get feedback from program attendees. Ask how they heard of the program (flier at library, media, friend, library staff or other) so you can determine what method is working best. At Richland County, we also use this form to ask patrons if they want to be added to the distribution list for our e-mail newsletter.
- * **Display materials** (calendars of events, Friends' membership information, and fliers about specific services) in the Chamber of Commerce or other public places that are centers of activity for the community (visitors' centers, museums, family restaurants, bookstores, etc.). Remember that these organizations may also have Web sites with calendars of events. Many will link to your Web site if you simply ask.
- * **Increase your media coverage** by knowing the media in your area, and always being on the lookout for coverage opportunities. Supply information in the proper format well before deadline. Be sure to have a policy in place for responding to the media. Identify a spokesperson and make sure your staff knows that only that person should speak to the media.
- * Consider asking your local newspaper or other publication to **include a column from a children's librarian** on suggested summer reading selections. Use the kickoff of your summer reading club or other special program as a timely hook to interest the media.
- * **Develop an e-mail distribution list** for schools and daycares in your area. Most have newsletters and will pass information on to the parents.
- * **Work with your local Chamber of Commerce** to promote the resources you have that are useful to small business owners. Provide brief articles for the Chamber's publications or Web site.

Enhancing your library's public relations efforts may seem daunting. By taking it step by step, however, you can determine specific tasks that are manageable. The result will be better awareness of all the services and resources you provide and increased support for your library.

Padgett S. Lewis, APR, public relations manager for the Richland County Public Library, has more than 13 years of experience in public relations and is a past president of the South Carolina Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America.



Promoting DISCUS at Your Library

How can we make our users more aware of the valuable resources available to them through DISCUS? And how can we let them know that these online library resources are available to them 24 hours a day, 7 days a week? Even simple strategies can help make your users more aware of DISCUS. Here are a handful of ideas that libraries and media centers have shared with us.

- **Post a news article** about a timely topic or homework assignment on your library, campus, school or district web site and direct users to the appropriate DISCUS resource to learn more about it.
- **Print bookmarks** with the DISCUS home access instructions & include one each time your patron checks books out or distribute these to every teacher & student.
- Schools - **set the DISCUS K-12@School site as the start page** on media center PCs.
- Public libraries and colleges - **make a prominent link on your web site** to a "featured database of the month."
- Schools - **email teachers or administrators** with brief descriptions of the DISCUS databases relevant to their courses or interests.

A number of free support materials are available to assist you in promoting DISCUS. Your first stop for them is the DISCUS web site and the "Librarian's Toolbox." Get brochures, PowerPoint presentations, promotional handouts and training resources at: <http://www.scdiscus.org/toolbox.html>

The State Library usually has a supply of promotional items that schools and libraries may request to use as giveaways during DISCUS promotional or training events. Request these by emailing: DISCUSoffice@leo.scsl.state.sc.us

The database vendors also offer online support materials that are useful for promoting the DISCUS databases and other library services:

SIRS provides bookmarks, flyers, press release templates, PowerPoint presentations, training handouts and more: <http://www.sirs.com/>

Grolier's *Go Guide* and *Go News* help librarians and teachers see ways to use the Grolier databases to support learning and teaching. These are available from Grolier's start page: <http://go.grolier.com>

Gale offers database training and promotional materials on its web site: <http://www.gale.com/>
Choose "Customer Service & Education", then "Product Education." Gale also offers general library marketing materials in the "Free Resources" section of its site.

Please share your DISCUS promotion ideas and suggestions.

Contact: Mary Bull, DISCUS Project Director, mary@leo.scsl.state.sc.us, DISCUS - South Carolina's Virtual Library <http://www.scdiscus.org>



General Assembly Recognizes the Work of Libraries with Resolutions

The South Carolina General Assembly has recognized the work of the State Library and the Palmetto Book Alliance for work on *The South Carolina Literary Tour* with a Concurrent Resolution. The resolution was introduced by Senator Hugh Leatherman of Florence and adopted by both the Senate and House in June. This concurrent resolution reads:

Be it resolved by the Senate, the House of Representatives concurring:
That the members of the South Carolina General Assembly, by this resolution, express their appreciation to the Palmetto Book Alliance for its outstanding effort in creating the South Carolina Literary Tour.

For more information on the SC Literary Tour, visit <http://www.scpalmettobookalliance.org>

The SC House of Representatives has recognized the work of the State Library and the state's public libraries for sponsoring the statewide Summer Reading program Books Ahoy! H. 4384 was sponsored by Representative Vida Miller of Georgetown and adopted by the House in June. It reads:

Be it resolved by the House of Representatives:
That the members of the House of Representatives, by this resolution, congratulate the South Carolina State Library and the state's public libraries for sponsoring a statewide reading program in 2003 with the theme "Books Ahoy" that is designed to encourage children to use their summer vacation time to enhance their reading skills and to expand their personal reading interests.

For more information on the State Library's Summer Reading Program, Books Ahoy!, visit <http://www.state.sc.us/scsl/BooksAhoy/>

A PR tip all the way from Kazakhstan:

On a recent visit to the United States, three librarians from Kazakhstan visited the South Carolina State Library. Ms. Tussupova Bakhyt Symkovna, Deputy Director of the Universal Scientific Library in Semipalatinsk, left not only her business card, but also a small card with a color picture of her library. The back of the card provides contact information for the library. Although her card was laminated, this effect could be easily achieved at relatively low cost with a digital camera, color printer, and business card blanks.



Voicemail is an excellent tool, but requires diligence. When the library closes for a holiday or special event, change the outgoing message to indicate the closure. This extends to those of us with personal voicemail as well. If you are unavailable all day or going on vacation, don't forget to change your outgoing message to announce your absence.





Children and Youth Services.....

Tell Your Library Story

Children's librarians often have an advantage in getting good publicity—pictures of children are appealing. Children's librarians are generally good storytellers, and by applying some storytelling techniques to public relations efforts, the library story can really come alive.

Take a different approach to newspaper stories. Instead of just listing times for story hours, describe a story hour and the impact it makes. Use one or more of these approaches:

- Let parents know that story hour is designed to help their child learn to enjoy books and reading.
- Get a quote from a parent who has brought a child to story hour.
- Include a picture from a previous program.
- Ask children to tell you something they liked about a program. Collect these personal stories for use in future publicity.

Look beyond programs and special events, and find ways to publicize regular services.

Reach out to the many families that do not read the newspaper or come to the library regularly.

- Put fliers out around the community.

- Make a short talk at a PTO meeting in a few schools each year.
- Teachers can be good library promoters if they are library believers. Ask to be on the agenda for a teacher in-service day to talk about library resources.
- Provide information to local cable companies for their community station.

Developing a good relationship with local media specialists and teachers is important. When educators see the library as participants in their students' education, they will encourage children to use your library more. Instead of complaining when twenty children come with the same assignment, use it as an opportunity to make contact with the teachers to tell them you want to help, but need some advance notice. Provide them with your e-mail address.

The best public relations come from providing the best service at all times and ensuring the children's area is attractive and inviting. Be sure to advertise your "product" (the books and other materials) with displays and printed material. Don't assume people know what the library does for children.

You have a great story to tell—so tell it often.



Laurens County Library staff members have made their own versions of the popular ALA READ posters. Instead of famous celebrities, the staff appears in the posters, reading a favorite book. The posters were created using Microsoft Publisher and a digital camera. The sheets were then printed on a color printer and used to make a display in the library. The image you see here recreates one of the posters, using a graphics program to add text to the digital photo. The image was saved in a file format (.jpg in this case) that can be used on a web site or sent to the local newspaper.

For more information, please contact Jane Connor, Youth Services Consultant, (803) 734-8658 or email: janec@leo.scsl.state.sc.us



NEWSWORTHY



Over 140 cyclists from six states, ranging in age from 13-68, toured Spartanburg County, South Carolina in the second annual

Lollapalooza Loop@your Library, a bicycle ride sponsored by the **Spartanburg County Public Libraries** system on Saturday, April 26. The Library offers three rides, 25 miles, 50 miles and 100 miles in length, with branch libraries and the Bookmobile serving as refreshment stops along the routes. "It's a great opportunity to show off our library system," says County Librarian Todd Stephens.

Herbert J. Hartsook has been selected to assume the position of Director of the **South Caroliniana Library** on the campus of the University of South Carolina in Columbia effective July 1. Mr. Hartsook began his professional career in 1979 as an archivist at the South Carolina Department of Archives, joined the staff of the South Caroliniana Library in 1983 as Curator of Manuscripts, and then moved into the position of the library's Curator of Modern Political Collections in 1991. While there, he inaugurated the Ernest F. Hollings papers project and identified and negotiated the acquisition of many significant collections, including the papers of Lindsey Graham, Richard Riley, Mark Sanford, and John West. He also directed an extensive oral history program to document government and politics in South Carolina and participated in outreach efforts to encourage the scholarly study of the Modern Political Collections' holdings. During Hartsook's tenure, the division has achieved national recognition as a model of its kind.

Abbeville County Library played host to poet and essayist Dr. Sterling Eisiminger, Professor of English and Humanities at Clemson University, for a lecture entitled "The Pleasures of Language: Malapropos to Rhyming Slang." Nearly 40 people attended the program on May 8th. The program was funded in part by the SC Humanities Council. Additional support was provided by the Friends of the Abbeville County Library System.

The **Charleston County Public Library** has been named one of 40 sites in the United States chosen to host a traveling exhibit titled "Forever Free: Abraham Lincoln's Journey to Emancipation." The exhibit will tour the US from September 2003 through February 2006. The Charleston County Public Library is scheduled to showcase the exhibit from May 12 through June 25, 2004.

The **Newsfilm Archive at the University of South Carolina** has been awarded a \$5,050 grant from the National Film Preservation Foundation. The grant will be used to preserve footage from the Movietone Collection of a 1930 interview with Mrs. W. P. Becker, a Civil War widow. Among her reminiscences are a meeting with General Robert E. Lee in Charleston, S.C. and the bombardment of Fort Sumter which precipitated the opening of the war.

Richland County Public Library has been recognized with three public relations awards from the SC Chapter of the Public Relations Society of America. It has won the Silver Wing Award in the Annual Report category, and the library's Internet safety project, including an 8-minute video, entitled "What's that Under Your Hair? Use Your Brain When Using the Internet" won both the Mercury Award for Special Public Relations Program and the Silver Wing Award for Other A/V Presentations. The video was funded with an LSTA grant administered by the State Library.



Carolyn Goolsby: A Librarian In Jeopardy!

In March 2003, Ms. Carolyn Goolsby, a cataloging librarian at Clemson University, won almost \$16,000 on the television game show *Jeopardy!* "This was the realization of a nearly life-long dream for me," said Ms. Goolsby. "Well, what librarian wouldn't want to go on? It's not about the money, you see. It's about the bragging rights. And librarians are indeed disproportionately represented among professions of "Jeopardy!" contestants. We're almost a cliché, and rightly so - I believe that librarians - especially Catalogers and Reference generalists - are ideally suited to the game, as far as knowledge base goes."



What's Alex Trebek like? "Alex Trebek was very gracious, polite, and intelligent. He jokes with the audience during commercial breaks, torments Stage Manager John Lauderdale by never hitting his mark until about a half second before the camera goes live, and even started a "Name that Mel Brooks Movie" contest at one point."

Do you have any advice for those who would like to try out? "To anyone who says to him or herself, "Man, I wish I could go on "Jeopardy!"...don't let anything stop you! Go online, put your name in to be drawn for an audition, and try out! If you don't make it, try again! Many, many people try for years to make it through the combination of chance and skill it takes to get on the show. But it is worth it - everything you must do - to get there, stand behind the podium, and give it your best shot. I wouldn't trade the experience for anything, even if I had lost."

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DISCUS: www.scdiscus.org

Palmetto Book Alliance: www.scpalmettobookalliance.org

SC Reference Room: www.state.sc.us/scsl/refdesk

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