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Increasing student engagement

Tattoo design competition at Texas State University's Alkek Library

The Albert B. Alkek Library is part of the University Libraries system that serves Texas State University (TSU) in San Marcos, Texas. University Libraries has a Promotions Team to increase student engagement with the library. A smaller group within the Promotions Team, the Tattoo Design Contest Team, created a contest inviting students to submit original tattoo designs inspired by TSU or the Alkek Library. The team wanted to create an innovative way to increase student engagement with the library while creating a fun promotional tool—free stickers of the winning tattoo designs.

Alkek Library has a history of strong outreach efforts to encourage students to come to the library and to reduce student library anxiety through events and promotional materials. Reducing library anxiety breaks down barriers between students and information resources. It also encourages students to become more comfortable in the library by humanizing library staff and familiarizing students with information resources, leading to an overall improvement of student academic success.

Building on previous success of promotional material giveaways, and through a shared interest and appreciation of tattoos, the Tattoo Design Contest Team formed and began work on the Tattoo Design Contest. Library management required the team submit a formal proposal for approval. To forecast the success of the promotional event, the team researched previously held tattoo design contests, tattoo styles, and copyright.

Proposal

The submitted proposal included the project scope, team objectives, a Gantt time management chart, and the historical background of tattoos. The team's intended outcomes included positive social media interactions with the campus community, positive personal interactions with the students participating in the contest, a robust response to the call for voting, and a new promotional tool to connect the library with its users.

The proposal projected that the competition would increase student engagement and empower and support students' educational goals. The competition's intended audience was incoming freshmen during the first few weeks of the fall 2017 semester. The team planned to measure success of the promotional event through submission numbers and total contest votes.

While the team did find tattoo-related programs like Tattoo You @ the Covington

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Library at Kenton County Public Library (2014),[1] where tattoo education was provided and Durango Public Library's Reader's Advisory (2016),[2] which used social media, the team did not find any academic library tattoo design competitions in their research.

The Tattoo Design Contest Team chose to solicit designs in the American Traditional style of tattooing because of the style's widespread popularity and ubiquity as "tattoo flash" in tattoo parlors. The "tattoo flash" style was developed in the 1970s by Norman "Sailor Jerry" Collins and tattoo master Horihide[3] and was introduced to popular culture by Ed Hardy, tattoo artist turned fashion merchandiser. The team chose the American Traditional style because it is one of the most identifiable tattoo styles.

In order to communicate the mission of Alkek Library to the broader campus community, the team decided to incorporate the new University Libraries tagline, "Explore. Create. Discover," into contest submission rules.

Copyright

The team researched how to write contest submission rules and consulted with the university copyright officer. The team chose submission rule language that was inclusive in design quality and that prohibited obscene designs or sensitive subject matter. Contest rules also contained information on Creative Commons licensing.

The Tattoo Design Contest Team wanted students to retain their copyright, but the team wanted to be able to use the designs for library stickers and other marketing materials.

The copyright officer recommended the contest submission forms contain language granting the library a nonexclusive license to use the submitted art for marketing and educational purposes. A nonexclusive license is a limited license that does not transfer the ownership of the copyright, allows the licensee the right to use the work, and allows the licensor to continue using the work in the same way.[4]

Once the contest submission period ended, the team reviewed submissions and noticed some designs were very detailed drawings that would not translate well to tattoo flash, which is traditionally simple and easily replicated. A member of the group suggested modification of the drawings to simplify the linework, which would allow the designs to be reproduced as small stickers. The team discussed the implications of modification, chiefly whether the group needed to ask permission of the student artists to modify their art and whether modification of the submitted art was ethical.

The copyright officer reviewed the license and suggested the team seek permission to modify the art. Because one of the exclusive rights of copyright owners is the right to make derivatives, the original license language might not have been broad enough to allow modification.[5,6] The team requested permission from the entrants via email, and all entrants responded granting permission.

Resources

In consideration of the limited budget, the Tattoo Design Contest Team used several online tools already in use by the library, including Springshare LibWizard and LibGuides, Canva, and Adobe Photoshop.

The team created printed promotional tools including flyers and posters designed to advertise the contest, and direct foot traffic inside the library and digital signage was displayed within the library, the Undergraduate Academic Center, and the Student Center. The group used Bitly to create a customized shortened link and placed the link on all promotional materials to direct students to the LibGuide. Facebook and Twitter were used to advertise the contest because they are the social media platforms with the highest student engagement at Alkek Library.

Contest

The debut of the contest aligned with the fall 2017 Weeks of Welcome, a three-week initiative by TSU to promote all campus events to incoming freshman.

Once the contest closed, the team combined submissions into a "tattoo flash sheet," to mirror

the way tattoo designs are commonly displayed in tattoo parlors. The team assigned numbers to each design to make voting for the preferred design simpler on social media.

Engagement

By using a Bitly website link in promotional materials, the Tattoo Design Contest Team was able to track how many times and through what platform students accessed the submission form. The Bitly link was accessed 30 times over the duration of the competition.
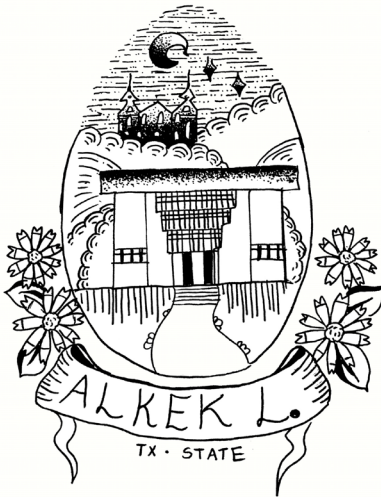
Winning design.

There were five submissions received between September 21 and October 7. Students provided their name, explanation of the design and a .jpeg file format of their design. While the five submissions were only 20% of the team's initial success goal, the social media response far surpassed the team's expectations. The team set a goal to receive 100 voting responses. Final voting responses tallied at 520 unique votes across the Facebook and Twitter platforms. This amount of student engagement was more than the library had ever experienced.

According to Facebook page analytics, 15,200 people were reached, and 1,131 reactions, comments, or post shares occurred. There were only four instances of Hiding the Post, and two instances of Hiding All Posts from Alkek Library Social Media. This shows that while the page

was seen by many people, only a small group decided they did not want to see the post on their newsfeeds.

There were 2,591 photo clicks on the post. The Alkek Library Facebook page gained 34 new followers during the seven-day contest period and on the day immediately after the contest ended. There were 1,918 impressions and 560 total engagements on Twitter, 27 post replies, and one voting post retweet. On Twitter, 29 users clicked on the Alkek Library profile link, showing an increase in user interest on the

Winning design as a tattoo.

page conducting a tattoo flash contest. Sixteen new Twitter followers were gained during the contest, as well.

Student response

The majority of responses received regarding the Tattoo Design Competition were positive. Two patron interactions stood out as being especially positive. One student approached the Research and Information Desk to seek reference assistance. And at the end of the reference interaction, the student mentioned that the competition inspired her to reach out to her own tattoo artist mother after a long semester of little communication. She expressed hope that the library would conduct the competition again because she did not have enough time submit her own design before the contest submission period closed.

Another positive encounter was five months after the announcement of the Tattoo Design Contest winner. A student visited the Research and Information Desk to show the staff member that he had chosen to get the winning tattoo tattooed on his arm. He told the staff he had always wanted a library-related tattoo, and he chose this design because his campus library was meaningful to him.

The team did experience one negative comment, also at the Research and Information Desk, when a San Marcos community patron commented on just how disappointed he was that the library not only supported but promoted tattooing.

Winner

Valeria Sanmiguel created the winning design that featured well-known campus symbols in addition to the Alkek Library building, Old Main, Gaillardia flowers, and the night sky. Old Main is the original building built on the San Marcos campus, and Gaillardia flowers are TSU's official flowers. Sanmiguel's design combined elements of the library and university, completely encapsulating the spirit of the tattoo design contest.

The winner's prize was a bookplate with her name, design, and dedication that commemorated the contest, placed in a book of her choosing within the library's collection. The team designed the bookplate and coordinated with the library staff photographer to take pictures of Sanmiguel with her winning design and the art book of her favorite artist, Michelangelo, written by Claudio Gamba.

Final thoughts

The team printed stickers of the winning tattoo design as a promotional giveaway item. They placed the stickers at the Research and Information Desk, easily accessible to all students, staff, and faculty. The library advertised the stickers on social media along with contest winner announcements. The library website featured Sanmiguel's photograph. The stickers proved to be popular with the students, and it was necessary to reprint more stickers twice.

The library is discussing a future competition and possibly another iteration of the Tattoo Design Competition. When the library does another promotional event like the Tattoo Design Competition, the team will look to existing library and campus events to influence the theme of the tattoo design, provide a longer submission period in order to allow more students the opportunity to submit a design, continue to use best-performing social media platforms for maximum online voting opportunities, perform additional outreach to the campus community, and enhance community outreach and partnership with local tattoo parlors.

Notes

1. Kenton County Public Library. (2014). Tattoo you @ the Covington Library, retrieved from https://www.kentonlibrary.org/2014/tattooyou.

2. A. Butler, "Durango public library offers reading recommendations based on tattoos," *The Durango Herald,* retrieved from https://durangoherald.com/articles/111734 -durango-public-library-offers-reading -recommendations-based-on-tattoos.

3. D. McComb, *100 years of tattoos (*London, UK: Laurence King Publishing, 2015).

4. M. B. Nimmer and D. Nimmer, *Nimmer on copyright* (New York: Matthew Bender, 2014).

5. M. Hatic, "Who owns your body art?: The copyright and constitutional implications of tattoos," *Fordham Intellectual Property Media & Entertainment Law Journal* 23(1), 396–436, retrieved from https://ir.lawnet. fordham.edu/iplj/vol23/iss1/7. The limited modification by the team—simplification of tattoo art lines for reproduction of the flash on small stickers—would probably not infringe the students' copyright. Hatic describes the Second and Ninth Circuits' tests to evaluate the copyrightability of derivative works: [T]he original aspects of the derivative work must be "more than trivial"… [T]o create a derivative work of an original tattoo, an artist would need to do more than simply "touch up" the work (p. 406–7).

6. Copyright Act of 1976, 17 U.S.C. § 101 et seq. (2010).