
Marketing the library: The library media fair

By Cheryl LaGuardia and Janet Martorana

Getting the word out about library technology

In recent years our library, like many others, has gone from being a technologically static organization to one that provides a wide array of online services. Our patrons now have access to online and ondisk research tools located both on our home systems and all over the world across the Internet. Unfortunately, comparatively few of our clients know what we offer.

Patrons still tend to come to libraries for traditional types of bibliographic information in traditional formats: books, journals, tapes, etc. They go elsewhere for the exciting, cutting-edge resources: to information brokers for "the newest update," to computer centers for computer-assisted instruction, to microcomputer labs for graphics and publishing resources, and to computerized writing centers for some of their most pressing and creative needs.

Libraries offer free access to much of the same information patrons have to pay for elsewhere. But since our regular clientele doesn't think of the library as being in the vanguard of computer developments, our computerized services have been under utilized. It is frustrating and wasteful to have both information and access, but not to have much of a clientele. More importantly, given the "downsizing" going on in libraries, higher use and demand for our computerized services would help us justify our very existence.

What we haven't told them

Given the amount of time and effort it takes to plan for, develop, and implement computer-

ized systems and services, it's not terribly surprising that we've overlooked one element in our technological program, but it is key: publicity. We must get the word out to our primary clientele that we can do for them what they've been going to others for. Just as we were responsible for making the system or the service available, so too are we responsible for letting users know it's ready to be used.

Our library has a committee, the Library Instructional Services Committee (LISC), whose main purpose is to plan, develop, and coordinate instructional activities throughout the library. With our recent rapid technological advancements, this committee focused on developing strategies for publicizing our online and ondisk services across campus, and for instructing patrons in the use of those systems.

We have tried several advertising and instructional techniques: seminars for "faculty only," drop-in online instructional sessions, research consultations, newsletters, and more. These were partly successful—we got a small response—but none of them brought people into the library in the large numbers we need to reach. We have a potential primary-use clientele of over 20,000, and those programs were reaching only 20 or so people at a time.

So when we heard that the university was sponsoring a campus media fair for computer projects, several of us took part in it. We had no portable systems we could transport to the fair, but we reserved an exhibit booth and took boxes full of printed literature and guides describing our computerized services and programs to distribute.

Going to the fair

In that one day by participating in this fair we reached more graduate students and faculty

Cheryl LaGuardia is coordinator for computerized information services and Janet Martorana is coordinator for library instruction at the University of California, Santa Barbara

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than we had in any five of our other special library sessions. The very nature of the fair invited mass participation: it was set up in the University Center (a focal point on campus), it was arranged so people could wander in and out at will—strolling past exhibits but not necessarily devoting their attention to any one item—and it offered a variety of individuals demonstrating their special interests: projects they had been working on daily for months or years, about which they were enormously enthusiastic. Watching the excitement generated by this fair, it occurred to us we could adapt the concept for our purposes.

We wanted to show off the library with an eye toward its most favorable, forward-thinking functions.

We wanted to show off the library with an eye toward its most favorable, forward-thinking functions. We wanted to let our potential users know that we had the means to respond to their individual research needs, and that we could show them how to get easy access to very current, valuable information. What better way than by having our own media fair in the library?

Making it our own

LISC decided to replace several other planned programs with a high-profile Library Media Fair. We did extensive publicity for the event: we placed color ads in the campus newspaper, plastered bulletin boards with bright, inviting posters, got some public-service announcements on the campus radio station, and hand-distributed a snazzy flyer describing the event to all faculty and graduate student mailboxes. We called faculty colleagues (at UCSB, every public service librarian is also a manager of one or more library collections) and urged them to get the word out, too.

LISC committee members assembled the fair in our largest, most accessible library meeting room, and staffed the various computer workstations and booths. We had plenty of technology to showcase. In addition to our new online public access catalog, we made over 50 CD-ROM databases available. The University

of California systemwide online catalog, MELVYL, also runs many journal and newspaper index databases. We had plenty of free passwords ready to issue to faculty and students for searching these databases remotely, as well as step-by-step instructions for calling in, making connections, and searching.

We were ready to show interested travelers maps and pathways through the Internet. We had six workstations in place to access the CDs, OPAC, and MELVYL. We'd done all the advance work, next we waited to see the results.

Opening day

The first to arrive were other librarians who wanted to see what we'd done and offer moral support. Next members of the library administration wandered in—the pressure was on us for a high-volume turnout. They took up strategic positions for counting heads. If the fair did not pull in the numbers, we wouldn't be repeating it.


Then the clients starting coming in. By ones and twos, they strolled through the fair, going from station to station picking up guides and information sheets, stopping to watch a demonstration or talk with a searcher about their particular interests. More librarians appeared and we pressed them into service: users wanted in-depth consultations, they were ready to talk with a subject specialist, they had to get that free MELVYL password *now*, and how was it they could search Dartmouth's catalog? At several points, we had to take names and numbers for follow-up contacts—there just weren't enough of us to cover everyone's questions.

One of the most oft-repeated comments that day was: "I didn't know you had this," or its variation, "I didn't know the library could do this for me." Our keenly satisfying reply was, of course, "Let me show you this, too!"

The sweet signs of success

When the fair was over, we easily counted it a success. From talking with participants we knew we'd brought in people who had never used these services before. We also made crucial connections with faculty department heads and graduate students just starting their research. We'd distributed stacks of printed material to individuals willing to take them back to their departments and pass them around. We effectively illustrated that the library was very much

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- MPSYCH-L@BROWNVN (Mathematical Psychology)
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Grants and funding in psychology

- Abstracts of NSF Grant Awards in psychology (from 1990): Gopher to STIS.NSF.GOV 70; do a keyword search on psychology after choosing the Index to NSF Award Abstracts.
- Announcements of Grants/Funding in psychology: Subscribe to APASD-L; subscription address is LISTSERV@VTVM2.
- Also: Telnet to INFO.ACS.UNC.EDU (login INFO), choose Research, and then search keyword "psychology" in Grants and Funding Index.

Software and computer use for psychology research

The first two of these items have browseable/retrievable archives; and MacPsych is keyword searchable as well.

- Reviews of Psychology Software: Gopher to BARYON.HAWK.PLATTSBURGH.EDU 70; choose SUNY Plattsburgh Information and then COMPYCH.
- Psychology Research with the Macintosh: Gopher to GOPHER.STOLAF.EDU 70; under Network Resources, then St. Olaf Mailing Lists.
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(Marketing the library *con't* from page 504)

a part of the computerized education process.

We will hold another Library Media Fair as soon as we can allocate enough librarian time to organize and staff it. The only trouble is, just as we've been flooded with users anxious to learn how to dial in and search, we've had massive retirements and a freeze has been placed on vacant positions. The squeeze between increased user needs and decreased personnel is on.

What next?

So our next step will be to maximize librarian time and effort—we're concentrating on our publications' program and investing in more sophisticated desktop publishing equipment. Our reasoning is that if we take the time to produce an eye-catching guide once, it will be used hundreds of times (and will be available even when a librarian isn't).

That single media fair made so many users aware of our services that we're still following up with passwords and answering incoming phone calls nearly a year later. As a means of marketing the library in its most positive light, we highly recommend the fair format. ■