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RESEARCH

Public Library Marketing: Methods and Best Practices

In November 2012, *Library Journal* surveyed library professionals from 471 public libraries to gain insights about how they market themselves, the effectiveness of those marketing initiatives, and the resulting engagement within their communities. The results indicate a disconnect between what librarians believe should be happening and what is actually happening.

The majority of the individuals who responded were public library directors and managers. When asked about the marketing and communications channels their library used to sustain a presence in their communities, the usual contenders were ranked the highest - library website, printed materials in the library, the local newspaper and social media. However, when asked to relay how effective these channels were felt to be, the percentages dropped astonishingly low.

- 77% of respondents completely agree that library marketing increases overall community awareness of the library
    - 47% measure the effectiveness of their communications
    - 46% of libraries say evaluation/measurement is "a great idea, but we don't have time to do it"

Most notably, fewer than 20% of all libraries reported having a marketing plan in place, and only 11% of those were current and up-to-date. Another 16% are in the process of creating a marketing plan.

Library Journal presents key findings of the survey, broken down by library size, in the hopes that it will help identify which marketing initiatives may be implemented to effectively communicate their value to all stakeholders, from patrons to policy-makers.

For more coverage of this area, bookmark the Marketing section LibraryJournal.com, or subscribe to the RSS feed.
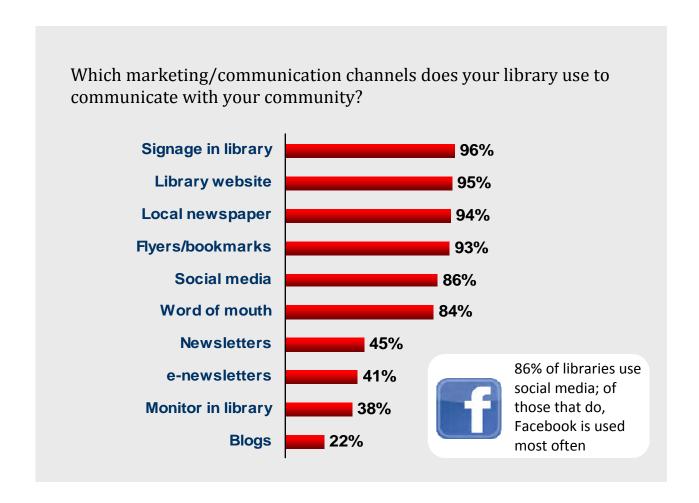
Public Library Marketing:
Methods and Best Practices

LIBRARYJOURNAL.

Responses from 471 public libraries surveyed in November 2012

MARKETING CHANNELS The most commonly used library marketing channels are signage in the library, the library's website, the local newspaper, and handouts such as flyers and bookmarks. Blogs, computer screens in the library, and e-newsletters are the least often employed.

The most effective library marketing channels vary by size of library. For smaller libraries (under 25,000 population served), the most effective marketing channel is the local newspaper. For libraries serving populations over 25,000, the top channel is the library website.

Which marketing/communication channels does your library use to communicate with your community?

Channel	%
Signage in library	96%
Library website	95%
Local newspaper	94%
Flyers/bookmarks	93%
Social media	86%
Word of mouth	84%
Newsletters	45%
e-newsletters	41%
Monitor in library	38%
Blogs	22%

86% of libraries use social media; of those that do, Facebook is used most often

What marketing/communication channel do you feel is most effective for your library?

	Total	Population Served			
		< 25K	25K – 99K	100K – 499K	500K +
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Local newspaper	24%	27%	15%	14%	14%
Library website	14%	10%	23%	26%	40%
Word of mouth	16%	18%	10%	15%	14%
Flyers/bookmarks in library	10%	11%	10%	14%	5%
Newsletters (printed)	10%	8%	16%	11%	2%
Signage in the library	11%	11%	12%	7%	2%
e-newsletters	6%	6%	6%	8%	9%
Social media	4%	4%	6%	3%	9%
Monitor in library	1%	1%	0%	0%	0%
Blogs	0.3%	0.4%	0%	1%	0%
Other	4%	5%	1%	0%	5%

TARGETED MESSAGES One-third of public libraries (33%) currently target outgoing marketing messages to specific audiences. Larger libraries are more likely to target communications.

When you send out your communications, do you target your messages to specific audiences?

	Total	< 25K	25K – 99K	100K-499K	500K+
We send specific messages to specific audiences	33%	33%	29%	50%	64%
We send our messages to everyone	67%	67%	71%	50%	36%

WHAT IS COMMUNICATED Standard information shared with library communities includes listings of upcoming programs and events, library location/hours, and news/photos of library events. The least commonly offered communications are a reference question forum and librarian blogs. Larger library systems provide more types of information to the community.

What kinds of information does your library regularly communicate (through any communication channel)?
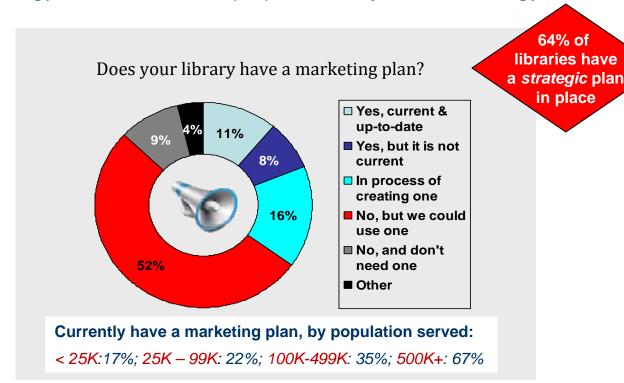
	Total	Population Served			
		< 25K	25K – 99K	100K – 499K	500K +
Total	100%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Upcoming programs and events	100%	100%	100%	99%	98%
Library location and hours	99%	99%	98%	97%	100%
News/photos of library events	90%	88%	95%	92%	95%
Library policies	78%	77%	82%	82%	84%
Databases and other resources	72%	68%	86%	94%	93%
Library services	68%	63%	86%	88%	86%
Announcements of new titles coming to library	64%	63%	66%	67%	67%
Readers' advisory	57%	51%	68%	89%	81%
Library contests/ games	52%	46%	69%	63%	72%
Community service information	53%	50%	60%	54%	77%
News/photos of community events	32%	29%	38%	36%	49%
Librarian blogs	23%	18%	32%	56%	63%
Reference question forum	17%	12%	25%	39%	54%
Other	7%	7%	8%	6%	16%

FREQUENCY OF COMMUNICATION About three-quarters of libraries share information with members of the community at least once a month. Generally, the larger the library, the more often communications are pushed out, with the exception of communications to Friends of the Library. The data suggests that small libraries provide information to Friends groups with the same frequency as the largest libraries. The incidence of library communication with elected officials and community partners particularly spikes for libraries serving populations over 500,000.

How often do you communicate with your library's key stakeholders?

NET Once a month or more often	Total	< 25K	25K – 99K	100K – 499K	500K +
Members of the community	74%	71%	81%	83%	91%
Friends of the Library	75%	74%	79%	72%	80%
Elected officials/elected town/city council	48%	46%	52%	51%	64%
Community Partners	45%	42%	53%	48%	60%

MARKETING PLAN Fewer than 20% of all libraries have a marketing plan in place, and only 11% report that it is current and up-to-date. Another 16% are in the process of creating a marketing plan. About half of libraries (52%) admit that they could use a marketing plan.

64% of libraries have a *strategic* plan in place

Does your library have a marketing plan?

- 11% Yes, current & up-to-date
- 8% Yes, but it is not current
- 16% In process of creating one
- 52% No, but we could use one
- 9% No, and don't need one
- 4% Other

Currently have a marketing plan, by population served:

< 25K:17%; 25K – 99K: 22%; 100K-499K: 35%; 500K+: 67%

EFFECTS OF LIBRARY MARKETING Not surprisingly, three-quarters of respondents completely agree that library marketing increases the community's awareness of the library. Only half completely agree that library marketing results in increased library usage, but 62% feel the benefit lies in the ability of marketing to increase the perceived value of the library. A third of libraries (35%) believe that library marketing results in increased library funding. These benefits are so great that 41% of libraries completely agree with the statement that strengthening their library's marketing efforts is a priority this year.

The larger the library, the more likely it is to have a positive perception of library marketing effectiveness.

Do you agree or disagree with the following statements about library marketing?

		Population Served			
% COMPLETELY AGREE	**Total**	**< 25K**	**25K – 99K**	**100K – 499K**	**500K +**
Library marketing increases community awareness of the library	77%	76%	82%	89%	93%
Library marketing increases perceived value among elected officials and the community at large	62%	61%	65%	68%	84%
Library marketing increases library usage by existing cardholders	50%	47%	59%	58%	84%
Strengthening our marketing efforts is a priority for us this year	41%	39%	49%	56%	61%
Effective library marketing results in increased library funding	35%	34%	39%	41%	70%
% COMPLETELY DISAGREE	**Total**	**< 25K**	**25K – 99K**	**100K – 499K**	**500K +**
Marketing is not an essential function for libraries	72%	69%	85%	85%	91%

WHO DOES LIBRARY MARKETING? Marketing duties fall on the shoulders of library staff at 88% of libraries. The average number of library staff members with marketing added to their job responsibilities is 3.5. Twenty percent of libraries have *dedicated* public relations/ marketing personnel.

Who does the marketing/communications work for your library?

		Population Served			
	Total	**< 25K**	**25K – 99K**	**100K – 499K**	**500K +**
Staff members take on marketing duties in addition to other responsibilities	88%	93%	79%	64%	31%
Avg # staff:	3.5	2.9	5.1	7.6	24.0
Dedicated public relations/marketing staff	20%	9%	39%	61%	95%
Avg # dedicated mktg. staff:	1.8	1.4	1.3	2.6	4.2
Contract public relations/marketing consultants	1%	1%	1%	3%	10%
Other	9%	9%	9%	7%	7%

DEDICATED MARKETING BUDGET Half of libraries (52%) budget money specifically for marketing, promotion, advertising, printing, etc.

Does your library budget money specifically for marketing, promotion, advertising, printing, etc.?

Population Served	Budget Specifically for Marketing
Total	52%
< 25K	44%
25K – 99K	72%
100K – 499K	76%
500K +	81%

MARKETING GOALS AND MEASUREMENT Fewer than one-third of libraries (29%) set desired outcomes such as attendance or new user goals prior to an event or program. Not quite half (47%) measure the effectiveness of their communications. Some examples of measurement include tracking open rates for electronic communications, conducting a website user survey, or simply asking program attendees where they heard about programs.

As would be expected, goal setting and marketing effectiveness measurement occur more frequently at libraries with dedicated marketing staff.

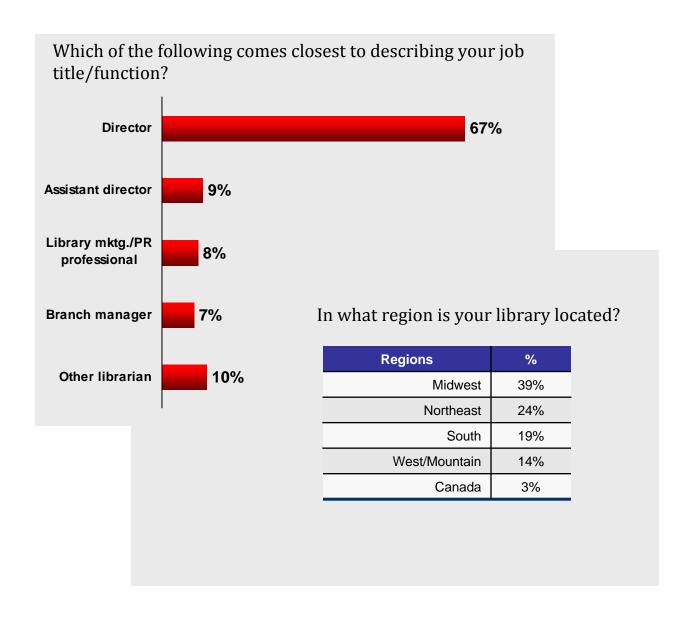|		Population Served			
	Total	**< 25K**	**25K – 99K**	**100K – 499K**	**500K +**
How often do you set desired outcomes for your programs (e.g., attendance goals, new user goals, circulation goals, etc.)?					
NET Always/Usually	29%	26%	34%	35%	40%
Do you measure or evaluate the effectiveness of your communications?					
Yes, we evaluate/measure	47%	46%	47%	61%	86%

46% of libraries say evaluation/ measurement is "a great idea, but we don't have time to do it"

MARKETING EFFECTIVENESS Most libraries (59%) believe their marketing efforts are only somewhat effective. The largest libraries–libraries where they are more likely to maintain dedicated marketing staff and measure marketing effectiveness–are more confident in the effectiveness of their communications.

How would you rate the overall effectiveness of your library's marketing efforts?

	Total	< 25K	25K – 99K	100K – 499K	500K +
Very effective	4%	4%	5%	7%	24%
Effective	28%	26%	33%	42%	45%
Somewhat effective	59%	61%	57%	43%	29%
Not too effective	9%	9%	5%	8%	2%

Which of the following comes closest to describing your job title/function?

Job Title	%
Director	67%
Assistant director	9%
Library mktg./PR professional	8%
Branch manager	7%
Other librarian	10%

In what region is your library located?

Regions	%
Midwest	39%
Northeast	24%
South	19%
West/Mountain	14%
Canada	3%

METHOD A survey invite was emailed on November 16, 2012 to a *Library Journal* list of 3,343, with a reminder to non-responders on November 30. The survey closed on December 10, with 471 completed responses.

Data shown in total was weighted to represent the national sample based on population served as determined by the Institute of Museum and Library Services.