

Public Libraries Briefcase

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Links

collection. What means the most to them, the extent of your business reference collection, or the ability to access databases remotely?

To begin promoting your business reference collections, let's start at the computer center in the library where patrons will access the databases. How about having on hand a list of your databases along with brief descriptions of what information can be found in the databases and a brief tutorial on how to search? You can provide this information in hard-copy form at the computer center and also have it online on your Web site.

An added feature of having the information on your Web site is that you can cut and paste the database logo right onto your site. Vendors often provide logos just for this marketing purpose. Combine the logo with the descriptions and you'll easily attract business information seekers to business reference collections. You can also use your Web site to feature a database of the month and perhaps connect them to an appropriate time of year. For those independent investors, how about last-minute investment opportunities before the end of the year?

Advertising

Advertising is a paid form of promotion that involves purchasing space or time from a media source -- newspaper, TV station, radio station, magazine or Web site. Libraries create their own ads and pay to place them, or have an agency do this for them. Advertising costs a lot of money -- unless your local paper, radio or TV station grants libraries free space (it never hurts to ask!) One way to try to get some free advertising is through a Public Service Announcement (PSA). This is a community service message media outlets run free to inform their audiences. If you decide to hold a free workshop to promote your business reference collection, the media may run a free public service announcement for you.

Newsletters

One of the most direct and easiest ways to promote your business reference collection is through your own library newsletter if you have one. You can include search tips, sample searches or even descriptions of your databases and other business reference tools. If you don't have a newsletter, it's easy to create one. At the end of this article is a list of resources where you can download a newsletter template.

Using Public Relations as Part of Your Promotional Mix

For students, many of their research projects are assigned at the beginning of the school semesters -- August/September and January/February. You can feature your business reference collections in a press release that includes information on how your databases can help students with their business research.

You can send the press release to your local newspapers and radio stations, the school district's newsletter or, if you're at an academic library, to your campus newsletter and radio station.

Or how about a press release on how your business reference databases can help individual investors and small businesses? This would be especially helpful during the last quarter of the year when people and businesses are looking for investment opportunities to help with taxes before the end of the year.

Right now you may be saying, "Wait a minute here. Me write a press release?" Daunting as it may sound, it's really not that difficult when you stick to the basic process and facts. To familiarize yourself with the components of a press release, go to company Web sites for examples.

Working with Your Local Media

The media -- the reporters and editors at newspapers, magazines, radio stations and TV stations -- are the gatekeepers of information. They determine whether information provided in a press release will be passed on to the public.

It's for this reason that media relations, which is developing relationships with reporters and editors, is important. Basically you're trying to form a positive working relationship and make friends with the media. The reciprocal side of this relationship is that they rely on the press releases for information to give to their readers, listeners or viewers.

So in saying that, get to know the media in your community. There's probably a person or two that covers books, libraries, community events. And they'll appreciate a phone call ahead of time – or an e-mail -- since many are very busy, asking if they are the right person.

Another item to inquire about is how they prefer to receive their press releases – through traditional mail, fax or e-mail. You're trying to make it as easy as possible to get them the information. If you have an idea, but it's not newsworthy to develop into a press release, you can develop a "pitch" instead. A pitch is a brief description of a story idea that you give to a reporter or editor.

Lastly, you can develop good media relations by inviting your media contacts to your events. Ask them to come to the library and attend a workshop, or how your business reference collection can help individual investors. The media may not always have time, but you're making the gesture and building goodwill, which are the foundations of good media relations.

Web Site Marketing

In today's world, many of your patrons will visit your library virtually, probably more often than you see them in person, so your Web site becomes an important marketing tool. This is why it's extremely important to make your site welcoming and easy-to-navigate. Whether you're The Thomson Corporation or Peoria Public Library, the same guiding principals for good website design hold true:

- Content is critical – make sure the information your community wants is easily accessible and complete

- Don't make people scroll! Keep pertinent information "above the fold"

- Everyone wants it to look/act/feel like a commercial site (i.e., Amazon.com) so keep this in mind when designing

- Keep it simple...if a user can't figure it out in the first minute, forget it

- Make sure you have good technical support – there's nothing worse than having some little technical glitch turn away potential users

- Make sure you're ADA compliant (there is specific software you can buy to help you measure compliance with Section 508)

So now that you have a great Web site design, here's what you can promote on your site:

- Ask a Librarian reference services or e-mail reference

- Database of the Month

- 24/7 Live Reference

- Overdue notices by e-mail

- Connections to statewide networks

- Mailing lists

Tax forms
Newsletters
Community bulletin boards
Search engines for the site
Access to online catalog
Instant messaging (chat)

Free Resources

When looking to market your library's business reference collection, or your library in general, you don't have to re-invent the wheel. To help you out, here are a number of free information sources available that provide guidance and tools:

<http://solutions.cengage.com/galepromo/>

Free resources to help market your library. Information for academic, public, schools, law and military libraries.

<http://www.ala.org>

@YourLibrary program section

On the promotions page, you'll find a variety of resources created by librarians and ALA staff to educate, inform and entertain children, teens, adults and families.

<http://www.infotoday.com/mls>

The Marketing Library Services newsletter provides information professionals in all types of libraries with specific ideas for marketing their services. You'll find numerous suggestions for planning, implementing, and evaluating marketing programs. You'll also find information on the latest marketing trends and techniques.