

TRUSTEE TOPICS

Prepared by the
Kansas State Library and the
Kansas Library Trustee Association

MARKETING ISSUES FOR TRUSTEES

GOAL:

This article is intended to help trustees understand the critical importance of marketing the library to both the community and the community leadership.

It is also intended to raise awareness of the Kansas State Library publication called *Marketing the Small Library*, published in 2002. This handbook was one of the first in the country to give specific information on how libraries can invest in marketing when they have limited time and slender funds.

BACKGROUND:

An excellent public library is not possible unless effective services are partnered with an ongoing and well planned program to market those services to the entire community.

In recent years, marketing has been one of the fastest growing library fields because library educators and leaders are beginning to realize that the lack of sophisticated marketing is crippling the public library field.

Marketing has often been the weakest part of an otherwise good library program and only regular library users are aware of the full range of services that the library offers. This has three negative results:

- The library suffers from inadequate support because the local government and community leadership do not understand what the library

contributes to the community and do not consider the library essential to the community's quality of life.

- The community suffers from inadequate information and recreation because needs that could be met by the public library either are not met, or are met at a higher cost to the citizen.

- The public library continues to serve only certain parts of the community, when it has a definite legal obligation to serve the entire community.

ACTION STEPS:

Planning

The first step to effective marketing is planning. No library can market effectively until they know what strengths they have that can be marketed and what strengths they need to develop that can be marketed. The library staff and board may decide that certain services will not be a high priority, but they should be able to justify those decisions.

Both the community and the library itself should be thoughtfully studied before priorities are selected. Help for such review is available from the regional system or from the chapter on planning in *Marketing the Small Library*.

Key Areas for Marketing

There are three primary categories of library marketing.

1. The first is marketing to community leadership so that the library can build effective support for effective library programs. The marketing handbook offers assistance in marketing to:

- local government
- community leaders

- library users
- target audiences

2. The second is marketing to the community so that the residents of the library's entire service area learn what the library can do for them. This includes making the community aware of such library services as:

- new books
- periodicals
- videos
- audiobooks
- special collections
- genealogy
- Internet access
- computer training
- telefax and copier service
- children's programs
- adult programs
- business services
- joblines

and any other essential public service offered by the library. This marketing must take place both inside and outside the library.

3. The third is to make the library and its services as attractive and visible as possible.

- The library should be an attractive, user-friendly environment that people enjoy visiting and find easy to use.
- The staff should be trained in warmth, helpfulness and impeccable courtesy.
- The library collections should be showcased so that people have a chance to discover what they contain.
- The library programs should be thoughtfully selected, heavily publicized and skillfully implemented.

Marketing the Small Library contains information on marketing facilities, collections and programs.

Tools for Marketing

Very few libraries, especially small ones, have huge amounts of time or money to spend on marketing. Plans for marketing must be feasible or they won't get done.

The marketing handbook offers advice on:

- using the media
- simple self-publishing
- using electronic information
- using focus groups
- using community fundraising as a marketing tool

By far the most important marketing resource that public libraries have is the talents and abilities of people in the community. Many public directors and trustees have thought only in terms of how they can offer the best possible service TO the community. They have not given enough thought or planning to the incredible richness that can come to the library FROM the community.

When the staff and trustees look at the community residents as both consumers and contributors, the library's ability to offer excellent service is greatly extended.

The public library is a very user-friendly public agency. It belongs to the people who choose to use it in a very personal way. They know that an excellent public library makes the community a better place to live. And many of them will be genuinely pleased if they can help.

The marketing handbook offers advice on using:

staff
volunteers
trustees
Friends

active library users
computer buffs
local artists
speakers
fundraisers
members of a target audience

CONCLUSION:

A heartbreaking number of American public libraries have fine programs and services that are not familiar to the service community and/or not valued by the community leadership. The only way to radically improve this situation is to accept that marketing the library is absolutely essential to its success, and to begin planning for an effective, long-term marketing commitment. Fortunately, there are many viable starting points for a marketing program.

SOURCES:

The material in this article is primarily a summary of what is available from *Marketing the Small Library*, by the Kansas State Library Local Library Development Division, 2002.