

MINITEX

Reference NOTES

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Information Bits

Virtual Reference Teleconferences available on tape!

If you missed one or all of the three virtual reference teleconferences presented by the College of DuPage on Feb. 7, April 11, and May 22, MINITEX has them on tape. If you're interested in viewing them, please contact Elly Gustafson-Held (ellygh@umn.edu or 612-624-1081 or 800-462-5348).

Promoting Reference Services Benefits Library Users

By Mary Struckmeyer, Coordinator, Reference and Interlibrary Loan Services, Wisconsin Reference and Loan Library

Last August I gave a presentation to members of the Southwest Wisconsin Library System on Promoting Reference Service. This article is based on that presentation. While I do not claim to be an expert on public relations, and I did not develop most of the ideas in this article, I do believe passionately in the value of reference services and the importance of reference librarians as the human intermediaries between library users, technology, and the variety of information resources available today. I have consciously chosen to use the word promoting reference service, rather than marketing. To me, marketing implies developing a detailed plan and spending money and energy on sophisticated products and activities. Promoting, I believe, is something that we can all do without a plan, without a lot of money, and without a lot of time.

Why Publicize Reference Service?

According to Anne Lipow, an ardent advocate for digital reference and serving remote users, "Reference librarians are endangered species....assistance to information seekers at their point of need...is in deep trouble." On the other hand, a 2002 poll conducted for the American Library Association found that 91 percent of respondents expect libraries to be needed in the future, despite the increased availability of information via the Internet. So while some librarians are worried about their jobs and workplace disappearing, the public expects libraries to continue to exist. I assume this means libraries as physical buildings.

Mary Ellen Bates, principal of Bates Information Services, succinctly describes the skills and responsibilities of today's reference librarians; "These days, the ability to gather and disseminate information is not what is needed. Rather, we need people who can address the TMI (too much information) syndrome...people who can clear out the haze and who can educate clients on how to intelligently search the web." This is a recurring theme in the literature and an argument that many of us often make.

I agree with Ken Dowlin, a professor in the School of Library and Information Studies at San Jose State University, that we need to change the image of the library from "a fortress to a pipeline," or as W.D. Penniman, dean of the School of Informatics, University at Buffalo, puts it from "a warehouse to an information delivery system." Library services do not have to be provided from a physical reference desk or building. Staff at the Sarasota Public Library used the image of a message in a bottle to convey the idea that they would get information to anyone, anywhere. We can embrace the concept of "virtual libraries" without abandoning our commitment to traditional library services-becoming the conduit or pipeline to information, whether it is in books, on CD-ROMs, or the Internet. We are not "guardians of data" but people who embody the Wisconsin idea of "sifting and winnowing" to guide information seekers to accurate, reliable, and clearly presented resources.



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How Can We Promote Our Image?

"Cultivating the Human Moment in a Digital Age," an audiotape of a session at the 2002 American Library Association (ALA) Conference, offers insights from a psychologist and lively comments by librarians on the role of today's reference staff. Librarians, in effect, provide "information therapy" by finding out what patrons really want then they come up to the desk and ask for information on "plants" or "two-door castles" or "antique cutters." Electronic resources and technology are here to stay, and we now need to cultivate our skills to bridge the gap between customers and technology.

Joan Frye Williams, a librarian and consultant specializing in information technology planning, makes this comparison: "The Internet, rather than being like a highway, is more like a flea market. Libraries are like department stores and librarians are like personal shoppers at Nordstrom's Department stores." Customers at the reference desk are information shopping. Will we help them find the best deals? Can we sell the library as the best information source in town?

What to Promote?

- Libraries make available databases that individuals can't afford. EbscoHost and ProQuest. newspapers provided through BadgerLink are prime examples of proprietary databases that are not available for individual subscriptions and that individuals could not afford. By making them available through a statewide subscription, even the smallest rural library can expand its users' access to a wealth of information resources. Reference staff provides group and one-on-one training to help patrons locate needed information. Some of these resources may be made available to remote users in their homes or offices, but many libraries offer additional electronic resources that are available only at the library.
- Library computers provide high-speed access. Thanks to TEACH and other grants, library computers dedicated to public access often offer faster connections than users have at home.
- Libraries are natural gathering. In small communities, they can become "de facto town squares" where people connect with others in the human sense, not electronically. Many libraries now include meeting rooms where civic and other groups meet.
- Staff in small libraries often know their users personally, the human connection to the information or materials individuals want. At a small campus, when a reference librarian took a class in Spanish, she talked about her job and soon students began coming to the library to ask her for help.

- Library staff members are experts at identifying reliable and accurate information sources. Electronic resources have added a new dimension to research, and librarians know how to integrate them into the research process. They can help users understand these are just one of many research tools.
- Libraries are part of a global network of information resources. Collaborative reference services like QuestionPoint (known in Wisconsin as AskWisconsin) connect local library users to the resources and expertise of librarians worldwide, including the National libraries of Canada and Australia.

How to Promote

The following list of ideas was compiled from reading articles, asking for ideas on the WIPUBLIB list, and listening to audiocassettes.

- Put excerpts from books read by local book clubs on restaurant placemats.
- Appeal to homeschoolers.
- Provide health resources lists at health food or grocery stores.
- Provide automobile purchasing information at local garages.
- Place flyers advertising reference services and resources in bookstores.
- Place flyers in pizza boxes-this was used in Sarasota, FL, to appeal to teens.
- Rewrap candy bars in sheets of paper with library facts on them and give them to government officials.
- Work with professional organizations that provide PR materials. The Wisconsin Library Association is developing a "tool kit" website with ideas to help promote all types of libraries. The American Library Association offers materials and ideas using the "@your library" theme.
- Write articles for newspapers featuring a "reference question of the week."
- Volunteer to appear as an expert on a radio program or "Ask Your Neighbor" talk show.
- Offer computer-training classes and include information on reference services. When groups come in to use your meeting room, ask for five minutes to talk about current activities or services of the library.
- Offer orientation sessions on the public library at schools and include a picture of the reference staff.
- Talk about your job with friends and in groups that you belong to.
- Send mailings to local businesses listing useful resources, including directories, databases, and meeting rooms.

If we are successful, more users will join Hermione Granger in saying "When in doubt, go to the library," (J.K. Rowling, *Harry Potter and the Chamber of Secrets*, Chapter 14) and we will be appreciated as the information wizards that we are.

Question of the Month: St. Thomas Aquinas quote

Our "question of the month" came from a public library. The patron wanted references (e.g., from a concordance) to the phrase "ex opere operato" in the works of St. Thomas Aquinas. Sounds straightforward, right? Once it sank in that St. Thomas Aquinas was a rather prolific writer and that he wrote in LATIN, the confidence of this reference librarian waned a little (in spite of seven quarters of college-level Latin that now seem like ancient history).



The search began with the resources at the University of Minnesota Libraries. Unfortunately, what was available did not offer the quick-and-easy concordance access for which I had hoped. With some WorldCat and MnLINK searching under my belt, I thought that the libraries at the University of St. Thomas would be the ticket. After all, they had more volumes of the Index Thomisticus (a.k.a. Sancti Thomae Aquinatis Opera Omnia) than I had found here. A helpful reference librarian set me on the trail of Jan Malcheski, UST's theology librarian. A few phone and email exchanges with Jan brought the suggestion that I contact Marquette University, one of several libraries in the country that owns or has access to an electronic version of Index Thomisticus or The Collected Works of St. Thomas Aquinas.

I contacted Marquette's Memorial Library reference staff using a web form on their Ask-A-Librarian service. With a clear yet detailed description of what was needed, a Marquette reference librarian was able to send the results of her search (29 hits). She had broadened the search slightly to find minor variations in the form of the phrase.

According to the librarian who referred the question to us, the patron was happy with the results. She added, "We're thrilled--or should be--about having a challenging patron!"

For free-but-not-as-easily-searched access to the works of St. Thomas online, connect to <<http://www.tacalumni.org/aquinas/index.php>>. Although some of the works are divided into multiple parts, you can download the complete text of a work in a single file with a link on the bottom of each page. Thanks to Jan Malcheski for this website suggestion!

State Association Plans Marketing Campaign

By Chris Olson, Executive Director
Cooperating Libraries In Consortium (CLIC)

The Minnesota Library Association has received an LSTA grant to fund the first of a two-phase marketing campaign utilizing the "@ your library" brand (developed by the American Library Association). Phase One of the project includes 1) market research and planning for a statewide campaign, and 2) advocacy skills workshops designed to teach local librarians on how to use the ALA campaign in their own settings. Phase Two of the project will consist of the actual statewide marketing/public relations campaign.

A task force, consisting of representatives from libraries and other groups, identified the purpose of the statewide publicity campaign to be a shift in attitudes about libraries. Decision Resources, Ltd., a market research firm, conducted a statewide survey in early-2003 to analyze citizens who are non-supportive of library services and how best to send a message to them to increase their values for libraries.

The findings of the market research are interesting... "By an 86%-6% margin, non-users supported local governments funding public libraries. In fact, this level of support for local funding was virtually indistinguishable from public library users. Similarly, by a 54%-26% endorsement, with 21% undecided, non-users supported a property tax increase to maintain local public library services at their current level"

The executive summary and other information about the market research is now available on the MLA website: <<http://www.mnlibraryassociation.org>> .

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@yourlibrary for Minnesota Academic Libraries

By Kate Borowske, Reference Librarian at Hamline University

The national @yourlibrary campaign for academic and research libraries had its debut at the recent ACRL conference in Charlotte, North Carolina. Part of the kickoff was the official release of materials to assist librarians in developing their own campaigns; a significant part of it was the preconference, Strategic Marketing for Academic and Research Libraries:

Train the Trainer. Participants of this daylong session went through the process of setting goals and objectives, identifying target audiences and key messages, and designing strategies to deliver those messages.

Librarians in Minnesota who attended this train-the-trainer session are in the process of planning local and regional events to facilitate the marketing process for librarians in our own area. For starters, there will be a session providing an overview of the campaign at the MLA annual conference in

Rochester this fall (conference website: <<http://www.mnlibraryassociation.org/Annual%20Conf.htm>>). There will also be one- or two-day workshops scheduled in the near future. Watch for more information.

In the meantime, you can view many of the outstanding materials that were created for this campaign at www.ala.org/@yourlibrary <<http://www.ala.org/@yourlibrary>> (click on Academic and Research Library Campaign). The site includes case histories, potential slogans, and sample publicity materials. It also includes a .pdf version of @yourlibrary Toolkit for Academic and Research Libraries, a handy, to-the-point booklet to help your library start the process.

You might also consider joining the new ACRL @yourlibrary electronic discussion list, ACADEMICPR, specifically designed for academic and research librarians. The purpose of the list is to "share ideas about marketing, advocacy, development, outreach strategies, recruitment and other related topics." To subscribe, send a message to: listproc@ala.org. Leave the subject line blank. In the body of the message, type: subscribe ACADEMICPR your first and last name.

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