

Developing Marketing Strategies for Public Libraries

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Abstract: The objective of marketing is to demonstrate the unlimited possibilities an institution has to offer to its target audience. For public libraries, this means engaging current and new users to attend programs, use resources and view the library as a community center. This article provides an overview of the importance of marketing in public libraries, the challenges that arose throughout the campaign, and the solutions Anaheim Public Library (Anaheim, CA) developed to meet community needs. The communications team at Anaheim Public Library extrapolated on existing practices for developing marketing campaigns for public libraries. Their goal was to transform the library's branding by showcasing the innovative resources and services they provide to the community during National Library Week. This article discusses the campaign results, which can help illuminate the future of patron focused marketing and support advocacy for the developing information environments in public libraries.

Keywords: digital divide, guerrilla branding, branding identity, National Library Week, external marketing, marketing campaigns, social media

Introduction

Over the past decade the rapid growth of technology has spurred an expansion of various communication and information systems. Along with these developments, libraries and other information providers have altered their positioning, services and most importantly, their methods of information dissemination. As large and complex entities, libraries must plan meticulously to achieve the implementation of an effective marketing strategy. This implementation requires an evaluation of current and emerging trends in order to provide channels of communication and visibility to their community.

Public libraries are becoming increasingly aware of the positive effects marketing has on program attendance, circulation, and presence in the community. Many libraries use unique methods to promote library services, increase circulation and improve brand awareness.

Unfortunately, not every library is fortunate enough to have a budget or a team dedicated solely to developing communications and marketing tactics.

Anaheim Public Library sought to share their tactics and strategies in order to develop a dialogue around the importance of patron focused marketing. Operating with 10 facilities and a population of 351,043, Anaheim Public Library recently hired a communications team to improve communications to the internally and within the community. While there had previously been a Communications Specialist, the newly developed team had an expanded mandate and scope of responsibilities. The communications team consists of a library technician, who has copywriting and graphic design skills, a management assistant, who is a graphic designer by trade, a Communications Specialist II, and one communications intern. At the beginning of the year, the team site mapped for the website a list of promotional marketing ideas. Their goal was to develop a new brand identity for the library and feature the unexpected services that public libraries provide to the community. However, the communications teams needed a campaign to bring awareness to the new identity. They planned to create engaging content that told an intriguing story to the community in order to draw in new patrons and encourage them to return to use the services.

Campaign Development

In the midst of developing ideas the theme for the National Library Week marketing campaign, the City Librarian, Audrey Lujan, asked the communications teams to research the application and rank process for the Star Library award. A Star Library is a national honor bestowed on public libraries that meet the Library Journal (LJ) Index standards on five measures: library visits, circulation, program attendance, public internet use, and electronic circulation. In order to qualify for Star Library recognition, a public library must place in the top 30 ranked libraries in their expenditure category to be recognized as a 3 stars, 4 stars, or 5 stars library. Further requirements and stipulations regarding the process of obtaining Star Library recognition can be found online in the *Library Journal (LJ)*, as well as information about the current ranking of your library (Lance, 2017). Measurable data from the LJ Index detailing ranking statistics can support a team's plan for a marketing campaign as it addresses a need in the community not currently being met.

The report that the communications team compiled for Lujan discussed the requirements of being a Star Library and discovered that in order to qualify, Anaheim Public Library needed to improve program attendance. Understanding the application process for the award enabled the team to develop the campaign focus that was effective and relatable to the community whereas in previous campaigns, the communications team focused on the variety of services the library offered to the community. The communications team knew they wanted to represent Anaheim Library as a unique community space by showing the public the variety of services and materials they offer. Their goal was to engage the community visually, present tangible reasons to visit the library system, and erase the misguided notion that libraries are quiet places. Anaheim Library wanted to transform the assumptions about public libraries and foster engagement within the community.

Creating a Strong Tagline

Based on the criteria of the Star Library award and program attendance statistics, the communications team developed a campaign that would educate patrons about unknown programs and services. In developing the campaign, they made a list of the top ten things about Anaheim Public Library that patrons may not have known. In order to effectively deliver this message, the team knew that they had to come up with a memorable catchphrase or tagline. As well, the team had many different details to consider when developing the tagline. The tagline had to be easy to connect to all “top ten things” in the list we created as well as being short and easy to remember so people could look it up as a hashtag on social media. Also, since Anaheim Public Library always strives to make connections with the city, the team had to make sure that the tagline included the city’s name. Because they wanted to represent the library as a positive welcoming environment, the team also wanted the chosen tagline to instill pride in the community, something memorable and easy to repeat. Finally, the City Librarian also asked the team to focus on representing the library as a hub of creativity and innovation. As a result, they settled on the tagline: ‘Anaheim Leads’ with an optional subheading of ‘Bring Imagination to Life.’ The team felt that this tagline could be easily woven into the “Top Ten Things You Didn’t Know About Your Library” list, that it allowed them to provide examples of Anaheim Public Library as being a source of creativity and innovation for the community, that it would heighten their brand personality, and that it would strengthen community pride. With the tagline Anaheim Leads, the team worked towards establishing Anaheim Public Library’s brand personality as a combination of sincerity, excitement, and competence.

Top Ten Things

The Top Ten Things list, guided by the story tagline Anaheim Leads, was a marketing campaign developed for National Library Week. Before the team executed the campaign, they considered how to visually represent themselves. The team planned on using images of real library patrons so the community could see themselves in the campaign. However, the team wanted all posts associated with the tagline Anaheim Leads and the Top Ten Things list to stand out from other posts, so patrons would know they were part of the same marketing campaign. The team decided to use a design involving a border and background for text displayed over images so that any text could be easily identifiable and read. In addition, they developed a color scheme of orange and blue. Orange was chosen because it evokes feelings of friendliness, cheerfulness, and confidence and blue was chosen because it evokes feelings of trust, dependability, and strength (Ciotti, 2016). Primarily, the team strived to illustrate Anaheim Public Library as a welcoming environment and the feelings that these colors evoked circled back to the message that Anaheim Public Library is a reliable community leader that patrons could trust.

The list was developed in order to bring attention to the Anaheim Public Library system. Lists are easy to follow and listicles have been very trendy on the internet as of late. Unlike a listicle, however, the list was not released to the public all at once in order to continue the conversation about Anaheim Library. On the first day of National Library Week, the team issued a post on Instagram and Facebook with the statement: “Celebrate National Library Week and the many ways #AnaheimLeads through our library services! Throughout April, we will be

sharing the top 10 reasons you should visit your local #AnaheimLibrary.” This statement was intended to inform their followers of their intent to launch a program so patrons could expect subsequent posts and follow the storyline. The team set up regular, scheduled posts on the website buffer.com. Every day, the team shared one new item from the curated list and demonstrated the many reasons why people should visit their local Anaheim Library.

The following sections include the items in the top ten list that were shared for the marketing campaign.

1: Show Your Card & Save

The point of the top ten list was to show patrons the benefits of owning a library card. The first example was the Show Your Card & Save program, in which the communications teams connected with local businesses to bring awareness to both the businesses and the library. Through this program, patrons receive a 10% discount when they show their Anaheim Library card to local businesses throughout the city of Anaheim.

The list of participating businesses is subject to change and has already changed due to some businesses closing unexpectedly. For a list of updated participating businesses, the team encouraged the public to visit the library website or look for the Show Your Card & Save window decal at favorite local business.

2: Make Studying a Breeze

The team wanted to instill in the public the idea that Anaheim libraries should be the first place they visit for reliable research. Anaheim Library is an essential resource for education and learning because it offers access to over 25 databases for research, test preparation, career guidance, and instructor-led online courses. The team wanted to highlight these facts as another reason to sign up for or use a library card, especially because patrons only need their library account number to access all of these resources from the comfort of their homes.

3: A Better Commute

As with all topics in the top ten list, the communications team strived to portray how Anaheim Public Library is working to make patrons’ lives easier, and so the communications team wanted to highlight the Overdrive application which enables patrons to check out digital books easily. With this app, patrons can bring the Anaheim Public Library collection with them by downloading eBooks and listening to audiobooks on their commute.

4: Access for All Students

Another benefit Anaheim Public Library offers to the community’s young patrons is Access for All Students wherein Anaheim students can connect to library resources with their student ID or school username. This program needed to be featured in the top ten list because many students in the community were unaware of it. Similarly, A Card For Every Student, commonly referred to as ACES, simplifies the library card application process and provides students with free resources that they can use at home or at school when working on assignments.

5: More Than Books

It is a common misconception in the community that the library's offerings are limited to only books. This assumption that the library only offers books means that patrons miss out on a host of services and programs that the library offers. For this reason, the communications team needed to address that there is much more than just books at the Anaheim Library branches. Some of the most popular materials in the library system's diverse collections checked out by patrons - who are in the know - are not books at all. This item on the list gave the team the opportunity to bring attention to Anaheim Library's selection of movies, graphic novels, manga, and video games available at local branches.

6: Fun Events for Everyone

Another misconception that the team wanted to change in creating the top ten list was the notion that libraries are quiet, boring places, where patrons will inevitably get 'shushed'. The team encouraged patrons to visit their local Anaheim Library and experience it transform from a quiet work space to dynamic events venue. This topic in the top ten list allowed the team to highlight the library's seasonal events, including AnaCon, the Orange County Zine Fest, Indie Author Day, Romance Author Day, and Dia de Los Niños. Most importantly, the team wanted to impart the idea in the community that the library is a hub for fun activities.

7: Get Your Mental Snack On

Next, the communications team wanted to call attention to one of Anaheim Public Library's more unique services: a book vending machine. When patrons are passing through ARTIC (Anaheim Regional Transportation Intermodal Center), they can visit the library's first self-service branch, a book vending machine. A touchscreen with the library catalog is also installed next to the book vending machine. This unique branch was included in the top ten list for traveling patrons who may not have time to visit a local branch and prefer the feel of a physical book as opposed to using OverDrive when they travel.

8: Making Learning Fun

Branding the library as an appealing facility for all ages was a priority for the communications team when they developed the Top Ten list's content. This heading, Making Learning Fun, provided the team with an opportunity to explain how the library can be fun for people of all ages through the many programs offered. Anaheim Public Library's programs come in many forms with daily storytimes to engaging book clubs; each branch has something for everyone.

9: Become a History Buff

One of Anaheim Public Library's branches, the Heritage Center, is dedicated primarily to exploring history, and the team wanted to highlight this topic for both students and history lovers. Although the Anaheim Library system has 25 databases, the team thought it important to point patrons in the direction of the Heritage Center for all their local history inquiries. At the Heritage Center, patrons can further discover information about the City of Anaheim through historical artifacts, original street maps, directories, and microfilm of the local newspapers.

10: Full STEAM Ahead

Having recently received a grant for NASA programming, the Anaheim Library branches are coming up with more STEM and STEAM programs for children and their families. The grant involved lesson plans for programs, instructional tools, and fun, learning games. Since this grant is bringing new programming and activities, the communications teams had to inform the public of new learning opportunities, like exploring the world of virtual reality, building objects with a 3D printer, and many other science-based activities.

Keeping the Story Going: Engaging with Different Content

After delivering the top ten list, which was the main content the team planned to use to tell the community how Anaheim leads, the team faced the issue of how to keep the story going. The team needed to continuously demonstrate to the community the story that was told: how Anaheim Library leads in providing creative and innovative programs and resources. The team realized that the story didn't have to end with the list and in fact could be continued by engaging the community with different content that could all be tied back to the story tagline. The team chose to do this through stop-motion videos and patron testimonials.

Stop Motion Videos

The team's Management Assistant created a series of stop-motion videos to show how Anaheim libraries transform into a learning space every day where creative ideas come to life. The stop-motion videos were short 8-second videos that portrayed crafts being transformed from raw materials into their final product. Since the team was telling the story of how Anaheim libraries lead with creativity and strive to be innovative in programming, the stop-motion videos allowed the team to further tell that story through concrete examples. Writing appropriate captions for the videos also enabled the team to connect to coinciding programs and resources and demonstrate Anaheim Library's efforts to be inclusive to everyone in the community.

Patron Testimonials

In continuing the conversation about library resources, the team decided that patrons would be interested in hearing from other patrons. Showcasing testimonials on social media has been a useful marketing method in advertising the work of the library. This is because "instead of pitching, testimonials speak for themselves. So by just using a variety of testimonials, you'd distinguish your business from the vast majority" (Rajan, 2018). The team decided the best way to distinguish Anaheim Library was by showcasing the testimonials of children using the same colors used in the top ten list so the branding would remain consistent. The team chose to use the testimonials of children because a love of books and learning starts at a young age. These testimonials about early childhood literacy had to be instilled in the community in order to create a never-ending cycle of happy patrons who explore Anaheim Library's collections and programs.

Recommendations

The development and implementation of this marketing campaign focusing on how Anaheim Leads, led the team to discover several takeaways about planning a successful marketing campaign:

A successful campaign is dependent on organizing a team and collaborating. Most libraries don't have the resources or funds available to establish a team dedicated solely to marketing, which causes marketing responsibilities to fall on the shoulders of librarians, often times one individual. What it takes to launch a campaign that has a story worth telling the community and one that actually connects with the community cannot be done effectively by a single individual. In the end, marketing takes a lot of time and energy between planning, delivering results, and following up with continuing the story and representing the library brand. Unfortunately, not every library system has a communications team. Marketing responsibilities need not only designated staff, but supporting staff members to participate in campaign development.

Planning in a campaign is essential. Reviewing the statistics of the population a library system serves can assist in guiding planning to develop an appropriate campaign. Based on community statistics, identify what the community's needs are. Which programs and resources would have the most impact on the community? There are so many different events, programs, and resources to advertise at any library. Targeting what can serve the most value to a community before implementing a campaign is going to make a campaign more successful and save library staff time and energy from promoting aspects of the library that are valued less by the community.

Digital marketing doesn't need a big budget, but it helps. There are many free services that libraries can use to edit visual content as needed for marketing. In order to diversify content with stop-motion videos, the app [Clips](#) is free to use through iPhones. Phones are so advanced now that a team could use iPhones to take high-quality pictures with the addition of editing the photograph before posting. If a library doesn't have room for Adobe Creative Cloud in the budget, there are several free online options similar to Photoshop like [Pixlr](#). Keep track of the resources used when developing visual content, how much time a team or designated staff member spends developing the content, and the direct results of that content, such as program attendance numbers. Prepare a report and show a direct supervisor in order to provide evidence as to why more funds need to be allocated towards the marketing budget. Tracked data is needed to prove that marketing is directly improving program attendance and visibility to the community.

Finally, **storytelling should have a goal**. Marketing's goal is to drive new revenue through highly-targeted communication. There are many facets to developing a successful marketing campaign, which includes having effective tools. A good tool to use to prepare and schedule a campaign storyline is Buffer, which also sends alerts to let people know when the best time is to publish a post so that it receives the most engagement. Increasing online engagement increases awareness of programs, resources, and reasons for patrons to visit your library. There are plenty of ways to engage the community online and prove that your library is one worth visiting. Follow other libraries on social media platforms to see what they're doing and how they're connecting with their populations. If your library has a similar population, it can

help you generate marketing campaigns that speak to your community. Ultimately, find different ways to tell the same story and make it a story worth telling.

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