Analyzing Library Marketing and Communication Efforts at Liberal Arts Colleges

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**Introduction**

Marketing & communication in academic libraries is an area that has received growing attention in recent years, with many institutions devoting increased staff time to these efforts, but most research focuses on larger institutions. This study focuses on the results from a survey regarding small liberal arts college libraries' usage of social media & other promotional materials for outreach, communication, & marketing as well as the staffing levels needed for this process, & documents how it impacted practice at one liberal arts college.

**Method**

**Participants:** 33 members of the Oberlin groups completed the survey

**Procedure:** An online survey was administered to a convenience sample of participants through email. The questions addressed how the libraries handle social media, newsletters, & marketing materials.

**Results: Marketing Material**

- 84.38% responded that yes, they do use marketing materials of the following types:
  - Brochures (73.08%)
  - Physical displays (80.77%). Many also used brochures (73.08%) & digital displays (65.38%)
  - The most popular marketing material is the usage of signs at 92.31%, & then posters (88.46%) followed closely by promotional items (84.62%) & physical displays (80.77%). Many also used brochures (73.08%) & digital displays (65.38%)

- The majority of those involved in marketing materials, managing social media accounts, & the newsletter are staff & librarians. Others leveraged the help of students, outside help (communication/marketing department, design services, etc.), or a committee was formed
  - 11 out of 31 libraries stated they had a budget
  - 5 libraries said that their budget was less than $1,000, another 5 said it was between $2,000 & $5,000 & only 1 said that their budget was between $3,000 & $10,000
  - The remainder of the libraries stated either that the budget was flexible, informal or that the library used the program's general budget or the budget for printing & supplies. The rest stated that they did not have a budget for this area

- 13 out of 31 (46.67%) do publish a newsletter.
- In regards to how much time per week a library spends on the newsletter, write-in answers included:
  - 15 hours once a semester,
  - 40 hours per issue (per semester)
  - 10 hours per week for two to three weeks
  - 20-30 hours preparing a seasonal publication

**Success & Challenges**

- Many of the success stories revolved around events that the libraries had done, promotional videos, working with different departments or administrators on campus & hiring students to help
- A lot of the answers for the challenges consisted of time, money, coming up with creative content, staying consistent, & getting librarians & staff involved as well as developing interest with students

**Future Research:**

- Look into other social media platforms (Instagram, Snapchat, etc.),
- Continuing interaction with various departments on campus via social media – connecting what we have with what they’re doing

**Moving Forward**

Moving forward with Van Wylen Library’s communication & outreach to Hope College’s campus, a User Experience committee has been formed, comprised of 1 librarian & 3 staff members that meets monthly & the following has been implemented at the library:

- One staff member & a student oversee the Facebook page, the Twitter account & the blog
- Time spent creating, posting, & managing social media content is approximately 5 hours a week