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Analyzing Library Marketing & Communication Efforts at Liberal Arts Colleges

Laurel Post
Hope College

Jessica Hronchek
Hope College, hronchek@hope.edu

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Analyzing Library Marketing & Communication Efforts at Liberal Arts Colleges

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; however, most literature focuses on projects at larger institutions. This study surveyed 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 work, & documents how it impacted practice at one liberal arts college.

Method
Participants: The 80 members of The Oberlin Group Consortium of Liberal Arts College Libraries.

Procedure: An online survey was administered to a convenience sample of participants via email. A total of 33 surveys were completed, for a response rate of 41%.

Results: Marketing Material
- 84.4% responded that yes, they do use marketing materials of the following types:
  - Signs: 92.3%
  - Posters: 88.5%
  - brochures: 73.1%
  - Digital displays: 65.4%

- The most popular marketing material is signs at 92.3%, then posters (88.5%), followed closely by promotional items (84.6%), & physical displays (80.8%). Many also used brochures (73.1%) & digital displays (65.4%).

- Out of the 33 libraries who completed the survey, 97% use social media as an outreach tool.
- 30 out of the original 33 stated that they use Facebook, the next popular being Twitter (66.7%) & then Instagram at 60%. Following Instagram libraries were most likely to use a blog (50%), then YouTube (33.3%), Pinterest (26.7%), & lastly Tumblr (13.3%).
- It was found that most libraries (73.3%) spend five hours or less weekly creating, posting, & managing social media.

Results: Social Media
- The majority of those involved in marketing materials, social media accounts, & newsletters are staff & librarians. Others leveraged the help of students, outside services, etc., or a mixed committee.
- 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 $5,000 & $10,000.
- Some libraries stated 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.

Results: Staffing & Budget
- At Hope, a User Experience committee has been formed, made up of 1 librarian & 3 staff members that meet monthly.
- One staff member has had 25% of her time reallocated to devote to marketing & outreach, including creating content for new digital displays.
- This staff member & a student oversee the Facebook page, the Twitter account, & the blog.
- Student spent 2-4 hrs. per week creating, posting, & managing social media content.

Results: Newsletter
- 13 out 31 (46.7%) 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, collaborations with different departments or administrators on campus & hiring students to help.

Moving Forward
- 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.