
National Library Week at work

By Janis Apted

Use this annual event to your advantage

This is a critical time for libraries—indeed, a watershed time when libraries are at great risk. Part of the reason our libraries, including the academic libraries, are suffering is that we are so invisible on our campuses and in our communities.

At the University of Michigan, we know that this is not the time to be a multi-million-dollar invisible elephant. Within the last 18 months, we have completed a major user study that included three different series of focus groups with our various target audiences.

We also actively sought the advice of marketing, PR, and strategic planning specialists. From all this we've concluded that the library is not well-positioned to attract and maintain

44% of American adults do not read even one book in the course of a year.

—U.S. Dept. of Education

the financial support required to take it successfully into the 21st century.

It means we must get the attention of university administrators, deans, faculty, students, and potential donors—a highly diverse group, to say the least.

It also means that in a market highly competitive for dollars, the library's PR is going to have to be darn good. That's because our message—and the way we deliver it through pub-

lications, ads, brochures, and media coverage—must compare well with what other units on campus are doing, including the professional schools of law, medicine, and business.

What has this got to do with National Library Week (NLW)? Good strategic thinking meant that we had to decide what kinds of PR we were going to do throughout the year, and we selected NLW as an excellent opportunity to create some terrific media attention.

The advantages of celebrating NLW are enormous. Because of the superb materials produced by ALA, including the press materials and merchandise, putting together a series of events is relatively easy and painless.

Here's what we typically do:

We get the *ALA/Library Campaign Book* early in the year and design a major exhibit using material from the kit. The exhibit goes up in the lobby of the Graduate Library during National Library Week.

We produce some of our own materials using ALA clip art for design help. We print thousands of bookmarks, adding information on the back that we think would interest our users. For the READ/SUCCEED campaign we did a series of three different bookmarks—one on the extent of illiteracy, another on the cost of illiteracy, and a third on literacy and the global perspective.

We prepare signage with pertinent facts about reading, literacy, and libraries. *[Ed. note: examples are shown as pull-quotes in this article.]*

We also produced fabulous buttons that simply said READ/SUCCEED in black with red letters (they were a take-off on the ALA buttons but we've found we can produce our own cheaper). Buttons are a *huge* hit with students on any campus; even faculty like them and pick them up when they're in the library.

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We use *lots* of colorful ALA posters in our exhibits including the "Celebrity READ" posters and the National Library Week materials.

But do you know what attracts the most attention? It's the ALA children's posters! Who would think that on a campus like the University of Michigan, professors and students would stop to gaze at children's posters? But they do.

To capture the media's attention, it's necessary to create some fun.

One of our best events for the READ/SUCCEED week was a raffle in which the prizes were an assortment of ALA merchandise from "Born to Read" T-shirts for infants to sports bottles, stuffed animals, and posters. We had an entire glass exhibit case filled with this stuff.

On the raffle card we said (this is straight from the *ALA Campaign Book*): "The ability to read and understand remains the most basic skill for success in life. Yet, illiteracy is devastating our society. It costs the U.S. an estimated \$237 billion annually in welfare payment, crime and loss of tax revenues. The lack of reading skills is an even greater handicap in an increasingly service/technology-based economy.' Help us celebrate READ/SUCCEED week and win one of our great prizes—T-shirts, book bags, and more!"

In addition to name and address, the raffle card asked for the name of the entrant's favorite book and the title of one book he or she intended to read that summer. We had close to 1,000 entries the week before final exams. As raffle cards came in, we posted a list of favorite books and summer reading in the exhibit case.

Working with the media

Along with exhibits and handouts, we produce half-page ads for the student newspaper. Usually, these are reproduced from camera-ready art or based on information from the *ALA/Library Campaign Book*.

All these things are part of our NLW program that we then outline to the press. We know our local press well—a basic part of any effective PR program. We send them a media packet that includes a fact sheet based on the ALA's sample press materials in the campaign book, ad copy, buttons, bookmarks, and information about the exhibit.

We include a compelling letter that says why we think the issue deserves coverage, and we list the names of library staff who can speak on the issue being addressed. Then we always follow up with a phone call.

This past year we personally delivered our packet of "Right to Know" materials to the university's major radio station. We talked through programming options with the station manager, who was extremely excited and agreed to run the Public Service Announcements we supplied straight from ALA.

The station manager urged us to have one of our professional librarians do a five-minute commentary which Anne Beaubien, our head of cooperative access services and immediate past-president of ACRL, did beautifully.

The average kindergarten graduate has already seen more than 5,000 hours of television. This is more time than it takes to obtain a bachelor's degree.

—*The Read-Along Handbook*
by Jim Trelease

Getting the attention of the media is easier if you remember the following:

1) Know your local press personally and feed them lots of good story ideas. We keep in regular contact, faxing releases and sending all our publications. We also invite them to lectures, receptions, and other special programs.

2) Be excited about your library and its services. In dealing with the media, it helps to have conviction. If you're excited and know what you're talking about, it helps in getting them interested.

3) We've toured media people through some of our really exceptional collections. Those personal tours pay off continually.

You can't go wrong using the National Library Week and other ALA-sponsored themes. The materials are great, the press pays attention to them, and you can save yourself a lot of time and effort by using what's already been beautifully prepared by ALA. The issues selected by ALA are important ones which communities are interested in. You *will* get coverage.

Ed. note: Reprinted with permission from the 1993-94 *Libraries Change Lives Campaign Book* published by the ALA Public Information Office. Available from ALA Graphics (\$8). Item #905. ■