

# Building a better mousetrap

## Using a mousepad to publicize products and services to faculty

by Nancy Moeckel and Joanne Goode

Keeping up with new databases, interfaces, and the myriad of other information tools academic libraries provide has always been a challenge for librarians, even though we all work with those products and services every day.

The additional challenge of publicizing these new products and services to users is an ongoing one. This challenge has become much more complex since many users, especially faculty, are not coming into the library anymore, now that research databases, full-text materials, and even reference assistance are increasingly available in the office or home. How then can university libraries most effectively market to their remote users in this new environment?

In an ARL SPEC Kit published in 1997, GraceAnne DeCandido summarized survey findings of eight university libraries. Although the responding libraries were already proactive in marketing their services, DeCandido reported that the key finding, common to all the survey results, was "First, always, and most crucially, there is a persistent and widespread lack of knowledge among faculty and students alike as to programs and services the libraries already offer."<sup>1</sup>

Though this SPEC Kit was published in 1997, we would suggest that the findings today would not be remarkably different. Mi-

ami University (MU) librarians are beginning to analyze the results of our own user survey distributed in February 1999.

This survey attempted to record usage of various services from within the libraries as well as remotely from dorms, faculty offices, and other locations.

Although the analysis is still preliminary, one thing is certain. The number of faculty and students who chose the response "Didn't know about this service" is not acceptable. Since MU libraries already use traditional publicity methods, such as print and electronic newsletters, Web pages, print handouts, e-mail alerts to departmental liaisons, personal contacts, and instructional workshops, the need to look for additional ways to publicize our services was clear.

The strategy we are about to describe, undertaken by a project team comprised of three librarians, was inspired by a conversation about how to promote new electronic journal products. The target audience was MU faculty. The delivery method developed is actually very low tech, but we hoped it would accomplish several things.

We wanted a method that went beyond the traditional, one that would demand attention. Naturally, we wanted to inform, to convey our message. We wanted a personal touch. Finally, and perhaps most importantly,

### About the authors

Nancy Moeckel and Joanne Goode are science librarians at Miami University in Oxford, Ohio, e-mail: moeckenj@muohio.edu and goodejm@muohio.edu

we wanted to find a way of assuring that additional messages would gain attention so that we would have a continuing conduit for communication.

### Turning our idea into reality

The theme of the project team proposed was to give each faculty member a mousepad, permanently identified as coming from the libraries by a three-color banner printed across the top. The banner provides basic information, such as the URL for the libraries' Web site and phone numbers for the help desks.

To publicize library services, the mousepad has a clear pocket which holds a removable insert that describes a service or product. Although we anticipated that the libraries' inserts might eventually be replaced by family pictures, the banner would still be present. To achieve the "personal touch," we hoped librarians would be able to deliver the mousepads in person, either at a departmental meeting or via individual office visits. To sustain interest and continually provide new information, new inserts would be mailed out on a regular basis or on special occasions.

A proposal package with a budget estimate was submitted to our dean, who supported the idea immediately. We also presented our idea on several different occasions to the other librarians in the system.

Because we hoped to use our librarian liaison system for the initial distribution, it was important to sell our idea to our colleagues and gain support. Once the proposal was approved, we had to deal with the practical matters of budget, bids, and bureaucracy.

Responses from vendor bids ranged from \$3.50 to \$4.50 per mousepad. Despite the facts that our initial marketing target was full-time faculty and that we needed to mind our budget constraints, the decision was made to order extra mousepads so that we could include some crucial additional people. We did not want to disenfranchise key departmental staff, especially secretaries or long-term, part-time faculty.

Enough mousepads were ordered so that each librarian could have some discretion in how distribution was done in his or her assigned departments. We also wanted to have some extras for special occasions, such as the arrival of new administrators, our annual new faculty orientation, inserts targeted to specific departments, in-library use at public workstations, and serendipitous opportunities that might occur in the future.

### Distribution

The university secretary was able to provide us with several sets of mailing labels for the full-time faculty, but not for the various additional staff we wished to include, since they didn't fit a neat category. We eventually realized that we would have to maintain our own mailing list and print our own labels, due to the mix of people we were dealing with. A mousepad sign-up sheet was enclosed with the mousepads that were distributed to anyone who was not full-time faculty requiring them to return the form if they wished to continue to receive updates. This made it much simpler for us to maintain our mailing list. Also we realized that many of the additional staff who received a mousepad might not need to receive the updates and this gave them an option that would meet both their needs and ours.

To accompany the mousepad and the initial insert, we enclosed a letter from the dean of libraries describing our purpose. Mailing labels were attached and the envelopes were sorted by department and delivered to the appropriate librarian. We hoped that each librarian would distribute the mousepads in person, taking time to chat with faculty. Of course time constraints intervened. Some librarians were able to distribute mousepads personally to faculty and staff, especially in smaller departments. Others mailed the packets to all members of the department. In all,

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mousepad insert archives: <http://www.lib.mucoho.edu/mousepads>

The Miami University mousepad.

we distributed nearly 950 mousepads in a few weeks.

### Follow-up

Once the mousepads were delivered, we wanted to get the second insert out in a timely manner. We also wanted the insert to attract attention and not be lost in a stack of mail.

Because of the irregular size, we decided to mail them in 5 x 7 envelopes. To make the envelopes noticeable, we attached a neon-colored label with the text "Here's your new Mousepad insert" in a large font. To simplify this process in the future, we plan to use a rubber stamp instead of the labels—a great project for a student worker! To assist the mailroom, the envelopes were sorted by department.

Despite the extra cost of the envelopes and the extra work in packaging, we deemed it worth the effort—at least for the first few updates. We have come up with quite a list of topics for future inserts and anticipate that new ones will present themselves on a regular basis. Our plan is to be prepared with electronic copy for several inserts in advance of distribution, but also to maintain our flexibility to add a topic immediately when we need to get the word out about an important new service.

### Mousepad WebArchive

We believe that as new inserts arrive, the old ones will be discarded, since they don't lend themselves to easy filing. We wanted a way to address someone who might say, "I remember reading something about that service three or four inserts ago, if only I could remember where I put the thing."

To address that possibility, the mousepad archive was born (<http://www.lib.muohio.edu/mousepad>). On this site, the content of each mousepad insert is reproduced and linked to more detailed information than will fit on the paper insert. Each insert includes the URL of the archive. The mousepad archive allows us to provide the additional level of detail and the easy access we wanted.

### Summary

Initial reactions to the mousepads have been

Topics for Future Mousepad Inserts
New Electronic Journals
New Databases
New Book Database
Workshop Schedules
Instruction Services
Table of Contents Service
User Feedback Survey

very positive. Receiving a "gift" from the library surprised and, in some cases, delighted our faculty. Not all librarians chose to distribute the mousepads in person, but the ones who did reported that it provided wonderful opportunities for interaction, sometimes with faculty they had not had occasion to meet.

It was time consuming to hand deliver the mousepads but it also was a motivation and a reason to get out of the library and into departments; and we would argue that it was time well spent. With comments from recipients such as, "Just wanted to let you know that the mousepad idea is a great way to communicate/inform faculty of new services etc." or

"This is a very creative way to keep in touch with your constituents," we think we have a great mechanism for the delivery of information that will continue to receive notice. And we have great expectations of reducing the number of times we hear users say, "Didn't know about this service."

### Notes

1. GraceAnne A. DeCandido, "After the User Survey, What Then?, *ARL SPEC Kit 226*. (Washington, D.C.: Association of Research Libraries, 1997).

2. The authors wish to thank Judith A. Sessions, dean and university librarian, for her support of the project and Jerome Conley, administrative assistant to the dean who is the third member of the project team. ■

### Additional readings

- Ellen Dodsworth, "Marketing Academic Libraries: A Necessary Plan," *Journal of Academic Librarianship* 24(4) (1998): 320–2.
- Ann J. Wolpert, "Services to Remote Users: Marketing the Library's Role," *Library Trends* 47, no. 1 (Summer 1998): 21–41.

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