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## Use Best Practices to Promote Your Library

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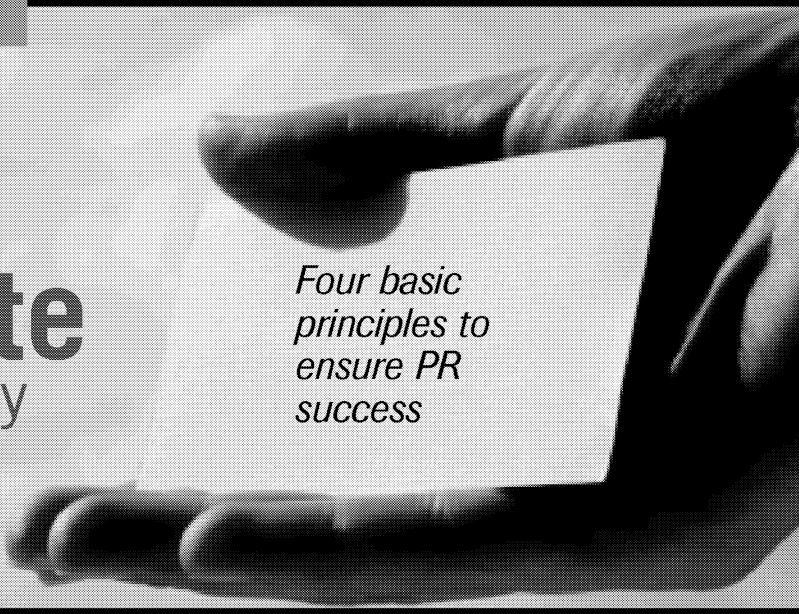
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# Use Best Practices to Promote Your Library

by Adeen Postar



*Four basic  
principles to  
ensure PR  
success*

**B**est practices is a term dating back to the 1980s that was popularized by business writers, most notably Tom Peters and Robert Waterman in their bestseller *In Search of Excellence: Lessons from America's Best Run Companies* (1982). Essentially, the term implies success; that certain actions, attitudes, and programs are the most efficient and effective way of doing business and that the same measures can be used with successful outcomes in all similar organizations. But are there really best practices that can help enhance public relations for every type of law library? I believe that there are.

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I have used four best practices basic principles in law school and law firm libraries that can be used by libraries of all sizes and types to help enhance our image and promote the many services we provide to our patrons. The following are my top choices for best practices for PR in libraries.

## **1. Know Your Patrons and Give Them What They Want**

Do you really know what your patrons want? We spend so much time, money, and effort purchasing, processing, and providing access to print and electronic materials that we can sometimes lose sight of our patrons' needs.

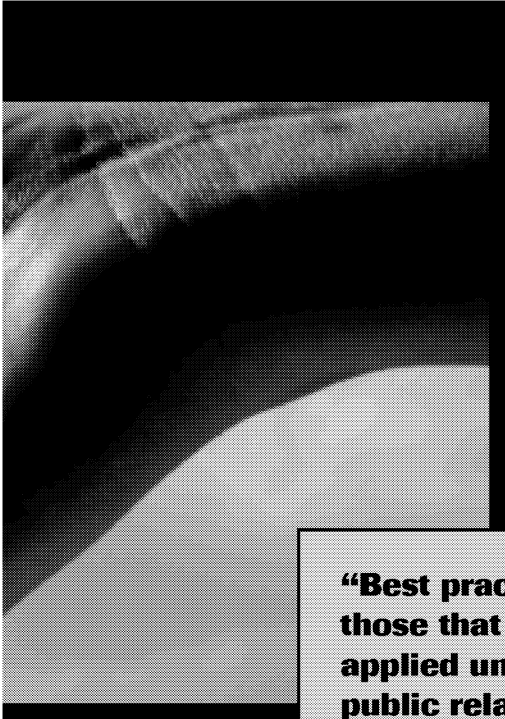
Not sure if you know what your patrons need and want? Do a survey. Last year the Pence Law Library at the Washington College of Law surveyed its faculty and students and learned that a major concern of our students was that the library chairs were uncomfortable to sit in for any length of time. The solution? We now allow students to check out seat backs, seat cushions, and foot rests, which have proven to be very popular.

The students simply rave about this simple new service. To know your audience, ask your patrons what they most want from your library and be willing to meet that need.

## **2. The Customer is Always Right**

Are you groaning with frustration at the mere mention of this old chestnut? Stop and look at its underlying message. It really means that we should trust our customers and believe that their opinions, desires, and experiences are valid.

If someone comes to a service point in your library and either can't find what he or she is looking for or is met with a rigid,



impersonal, or punitive response—even if the response is a technically correct representation of library policy—is that adequate, let alone good, service?

Check your hiring and training processes to make sure the people you have at service points are capable and trained to really listen to your users and their problems. There are lots of customer service classes, articles, and books for staff that will reinforce the service ethic and make it a conscious part of the transaction between you, or your staff member, and the patron.

No matter what size library we work in, if our staff can't help a user, find someone or something that can. Even a simple referral to another library or another library colleague can help the user find whatever it is he or she needs. Yes, we all provide interlibrary loan service and reference assistance, but just the fact that these services are available in a library doesn't mean they are visible, so be sure all your users know about them through good promotion and publicity.

### 3. Be Creative, Try Something New, Be Proactive

Reaching out to your patrons will pay off dramatically in their positive attitudes toward you and the services and resources you offer. Start an electronic newsletter, or target a population of your users that you think might gain help by the library, which

can be accomplished by something as simple as a personal visit to an office.

When I worked in a law firm library as the sole professional librarian, I made sure to introduce myself to every partner, new associate, secretary, and paralegal and briefly let them know the kinds of support and services they could receive from the library for their practices. These visits increased the visibility of the library and paid off with increased emphasis and broad support for obtaining resources the library needed—everything from additional databases to

extra copies of the local legal newspaper.

Academic law libraries can benefit by targeting selected users, too. Most of us already have in place faculty liaison programs, but do your new, adjunct, and visiting faculty need special attention? They are either new to your community or may only come to campus for class and can benefit from your knowledge of that community and its resources. This pays off in a big way personally, too. It is very gratifying to see someone new to legal scholarship be successful in his or her teaching and writing.

### 4. Recognize and Reward Value—Especially if it's Your Own

Have you, your library, or a staff member won an award or accomplished something special? Let everyone in your organization know! Celebrating the award is more than just an excuse to throw a party—it is also an opportunity to market the intrinsic value of the library to your patrons. If they see that others value your work, they will too.

The same recognition is warranted if you just completed a major research assignment for a partner or faculty member. Let everyone in your organization know what you can do, and they will ask you to provide a similar service for them in no time at all.

No matter how small, or big, your organization is, you can use these maxims to create programs, initiatives, new policies, procedures, and customer service-focused staff training to best demonstrate your collections and services to your patrons. Good Luck! ■

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**“Best practices are those that can be applied universally in public relations with assurance that such approaches will yield the most effective, responsible, and ethical performance and results.”**

— *Encyclopedia of Public Relations, edited by Robert Heath*



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