

2015

Your Key(tag) to Success: A Creative and Customizable Method to Promote Research Guides

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Your Key(tag) to Success:

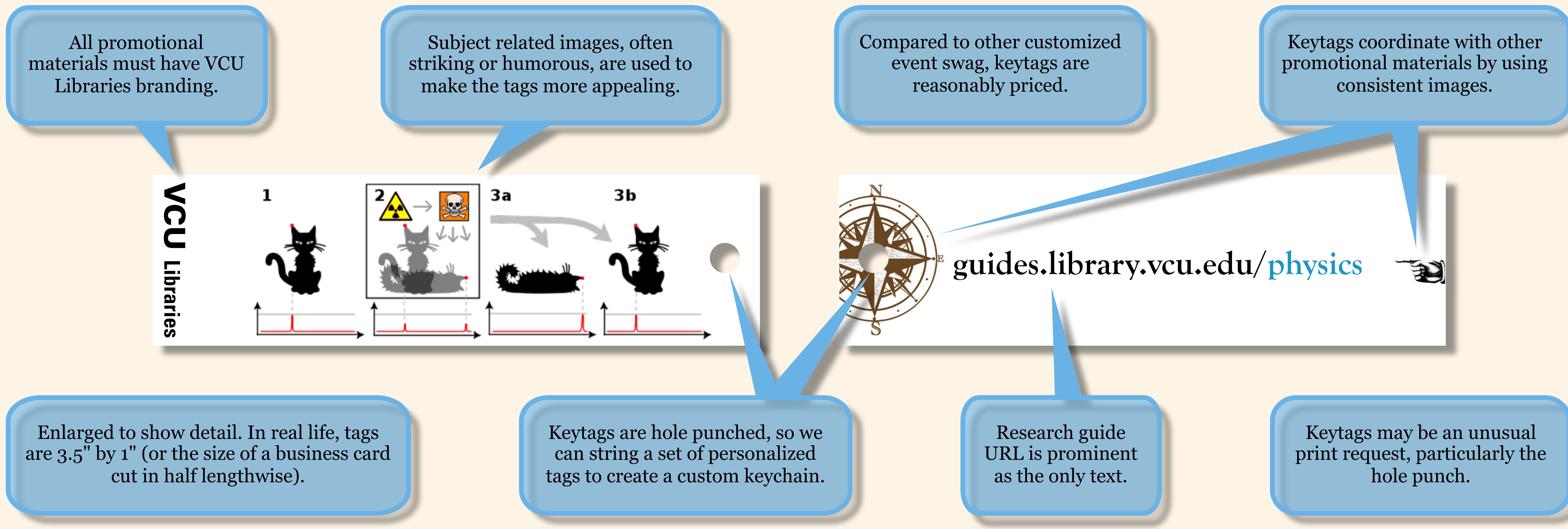
A Creative and Customizable Method to Promote Research Guides

Martha Roseberry and Bettina Peacemaker • VCU Libraries, Virginia Commonwealth University, Richmond, Virginia

Introduction

The research guide is one of the most common tools librarians use to communicate with and instruct their audiences [1,2]. Despite the prevalence of research guides and some consensus that they are useful [3-5], research guides remain underutilized [6-7]. The literature offers many examples of efforts encouraging guide use but little work exists measuring the effectiveness of that promotion. Not surprisingly, there is a focus on web-based marketing tools [8], and the impact of print promotion receives almost no attention in a world of online guides.

The VCU Libraries Academic Outreach department promotes its guides through inexpensive and small keytags--similar to retail customer loyalty keychain tags. We have tags for a variety of guides in many disciplines, which allows us to customize our promotion and message for the needs of users from different disciplines with different focuses. The objective of this research is to measure the effectiveness of this approach, using both quantitative and qualitative evidence.



Timeline

Spring 2013	Fall 2013	Spring 2014	Fall 2014	Spring 2014 - present
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Created test tag for math guide. Displayed tags over finals week to see if students took them. They did! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Made 10 tags with broad appeal for Library Fest. Gave out ~400 custom keychains during the afternoon event. Made 19 more tags after initial success. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Used tags at other events, orientations, instruction and consultations. Created 11 new tags and reordered 12. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distributed ~350 keychains at second Library Fest. Gave away more than 20,000 tags by the end of the fall semester! 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Gave away tags at Graduate Orientation, New Faculty Orientation, VCU's Graduate Research Symposium and more. Tags were popular at all events. Distributed through partners, such as the Diversity Office. Now have 44 different keytags, with 4 more planned.

Qualitative

Positive Response

- Customized keychains are popular with students.
- Ability to select tags to meet individual needs is appreciated.
- Students slip the tags onto their keychains for safekeeping.

Librarian Acceptance

- Despite initial reluctance, all Academic Outreach librarians have requested additional tags.
- Now making keytags for other library departments and non-LibGuide webpages.

Many Interactions

- Every tag is an excuse to engage with the VCU community.
- Must ask about research and studies to create keychains.
- Recognized as an innovative idea around campus. (We've been asked for samples!)

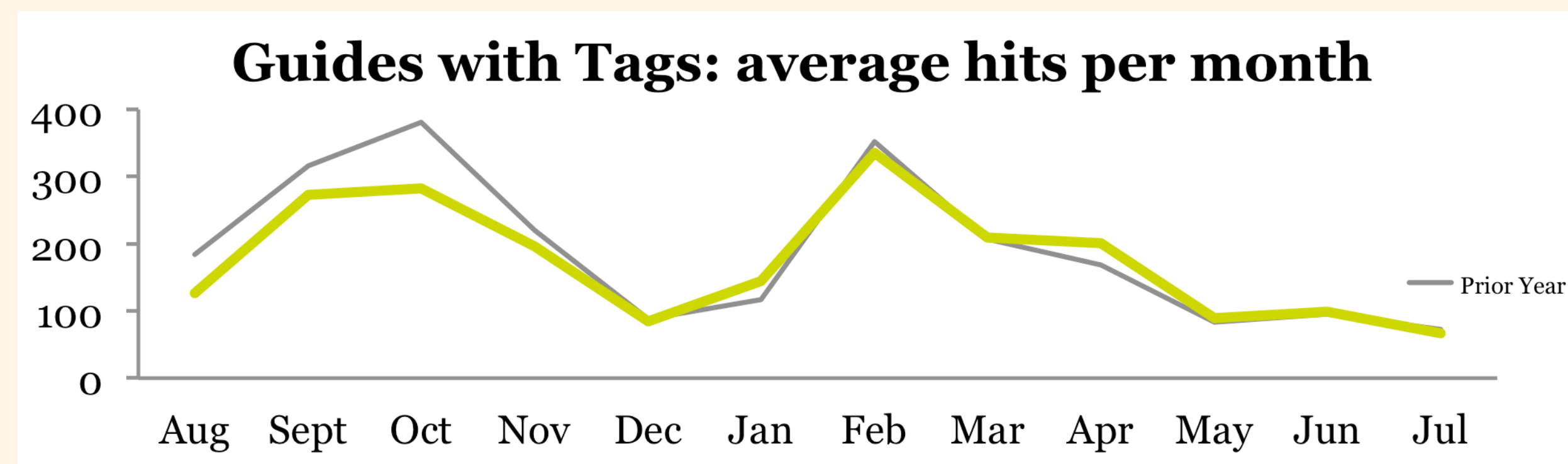
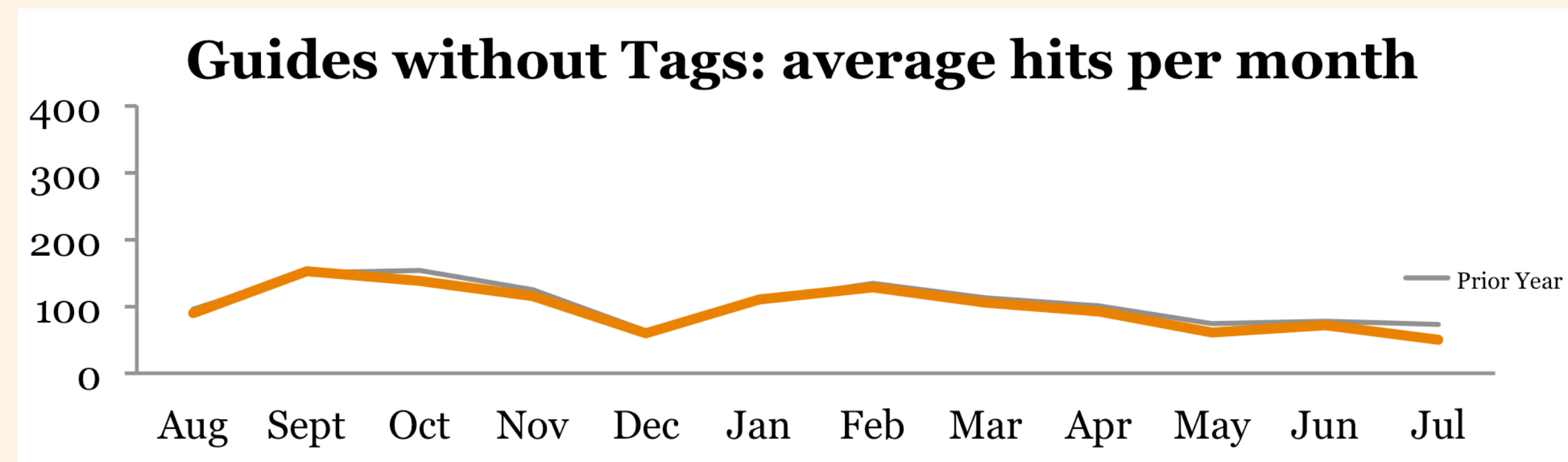
They Take Them

- Initial concern that students would not understand or want the keytags.
- However, students quickly grasp the purpose of the tags.
- No prompting required. Students pick them up wherever we put them.

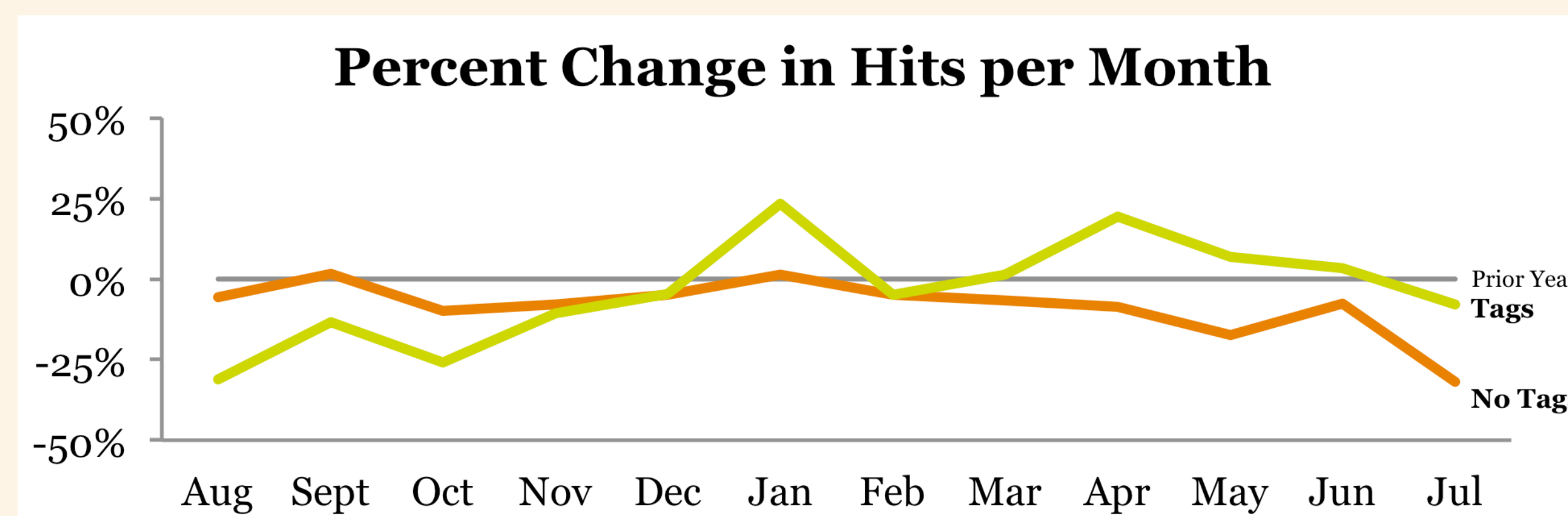
Quantitative

Using LibGuides internal statistics from August 2012 through July 2014, we analyzed the impact the keytags had on guide use. Based on a preliminary comparison between 133 guides with NO tags and 19 guides with tags, it appeared that guides with tags were outperforming those without by 145%!

However, this was misleading as one extremely popular guide, "How to Write a Literature Review," was skewing the data. With this guide removed from the analysis, both sets of guides performed roughly the same as they had the previous year.



Although both sets of guides performed similarly if we look at the year as a whole, the performance of guides with tags slowly improved during the year.



During spring 2014, guides with tags outperformed those without by approximately **16.8%**. It is not possible to conclude that this improvement was due entirely to the tags, but they may have been a contributing factor.

The Future

Uncertain Quantitative Impact

- Current evidence indicates that the impact of the keytags on guide use may be promising.
- Due to the dynamic nature of research guides, there are more variables than we can control or account for.
- Annual variations in guide use due to the academic schedule make it difficult to look at usage without many years of data.
- We intend to continue investigating the impact of the tags using data from the 2014-2015 academic year and beyond.

Continued Use Worthwhile

- Positive response to the tags makes continued use worthwhile, despite the uncertain impact on guide use.
- Immense number of one-on-one interactions that are facilitated by the tags may be as important as guide use.
- The customization of this outreach resonates with faculty and students. Our attention to their needs demonstrates the value of the library and librarians.
- We plan to continue using the keytags as an important component of our promotion strategy.
- Concept behind the tags, simple promotion of a URL, is easy to execute and replicate in a variety of formats.

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