2013

Vendor of the Month: A Marketing Collaboration

Lateka Grays
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, lateka.grays@unlv.edu

J. Cory Tucker
University of Nevada, Las Vegas, cory.tucker@unlv.edu

Vendor of the Month: A Marketing Collaboration

Lateka Grays (lateka.grays@unlv.edu)
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

James Cory Tucker (cory.tucker@unlv.edu)
University of Nevada, Las Vegas

Abstract

Marketing library resources remains an important issue despite library reductions in staff and collections budgets. In order to maintain or expand marketing programs, libraries could do well tapping into the expertise available through the vendors supplying resources to libraries. A case study of a library marketing program called, "Vendor of the Month," at the University of Nevada, Las Vegas explains the collaboration between the library and its vendors to increase awareness and use of selected electronic resources.

Introduction

With the proliferation of online research databases offered by academic libraries, the need to educate, increase awareness and usage of the resources has become critical in order to justify the cost of the products. Decreased usage and a 90 per cent allocation of the University of Nevada, Las Vegas (UNLV) Libraries' collection budget on electronic resources required an exploration into new methods to promote the databases to the UNLV community. During a time of budget and staff cuts, funding marketing efforts become increasingly difficult. Nevertheless, the UNLV Libraries Collection Management Department endeavored to create strategies to promote the collections. The UNLV Libraries needed an approach that would bring the content to end users and encourage them to explore and learn about the resources in a manner that would meet their needs. This case study will describe the collaborative partnership that the UNLV Libraries embarked upon with larger publishers or vendors of electronic resources represented in its holdings in order to develop creative awareness and access opportunities for its campus. This was also a small test case to determine how libraries with limited resources could create and utilize the expertise that already exists among vendors. Although the study may not have been as successful as its authors had hoped, it has served as valuable insight into the need for allocating resources to

develop a consistent and multi-pronged approach to marketing electronic resources.

With a large majority of the UNLV Libraries collections budget given to electronic resources, there was a need to use a variety of promotional techniques to keep usage at consistently high levels. There needed to be a means to help patrons become aware of resources that are available for their research and curricular needs. During the UNLV Libraries strategic planning process from 2009 to 2011, the patron's ability to discover information resources needed for research assignments was a special focus. One goal of the plan that emerged related to resource discoverability, specifically stated as, "Goal 2: Expand user awareness of library resources, services and staff expertise through promotion and technology."

During the final planning stages, Library Administration decided that Goal 2 should be addressed by the Collection Management Department. Collection Management was asked to create a promotional campaign to promote library resources to faculty and students (graduate and undergraduate) on the UNLV campus. This case study outlines the planning and implementation of a promotional campaign at UNLV Libraries for selected electronic resources and highlights collaborative efforts between UNLV Libraries and various library vendors.

Literature Review

A review of the literature shows a variety of articles that discusses marketing library services, including electronic resources, chat reference, roles for librarians, electronic reserves, and so forth. The literature, however, shows electronic resources as having a major focus in marketing campaigns. An article by Brannon details the steps for an education and promotional campaign of electronic resources for the Denton Public Library. This public library was spending a good portion of funds on electronic resources but usage of those resources was declining. The first part of the promotional campaign involved educating staff on the electronic resources to help them become more comfortable using the resources when interacting with patrons. Next, the library secured a small grant to implement a promotional campaign that included giveaways (pens, pencils, and magnets), advertising (newspaper, automated telephone service, and website) and printed materials. The campaign also included increased training sessions for patrons.

An article by Leong details a marketing campaign targeting electronic resources to distance learning students[2] in which a variety of approaches for marketing includes direct emails, working with faculty, website design, and marketing resources at the point of need when interacting with students. Woods' article discusses a marketing project at Brock University.[3] The project involved finding out more information about the users via surveys, promotion of electronic resources and evaluation of electronic resources. The promotion of electronic resources included instruction sessions and advertising on the library's website and via email. An article by Buczynski discusses the technique of "viral" or "word-of-mouth" marketing of electronic resources.[4] This article provides an account of setting up the process of viral marketing, establishing goals, identifying target markets and the importance of PURLs. Millet and Chamberlain provide details of Trinity University Library partnering with peer tutors to help marketing electronic resources.[5] Thompson and Schott highlight marketing efforts to community college patrons in New Jersey.[6] This article provides two case studies where efforts to promote

electronic resources include using database pathfinders, revamping library Web sites, altering instruction sessions and faculty workshops. Articles by Williams,[7] Ellis,[8] and Wisniewski and Fichter[9] offer various tips and ideas for marketing electronic resources. Another useful article by Dillon provides an interesting analysis of marketing electronic resources in conjunction with the library as a whole.[10] Dillon provides a great overview of issues associated with electronic resources and marketing and looks at libraries role in the current information environment.

The literature also includes marketing articles that are not related to electronic resources, but some of the promotional activities could be relevant and incorporated into campaigns for electronic resources. An article by Poe highlights a marketing plan for a new electronic course reserve service at Jacksonville State University.[11] Lee provides an overview of some useful promotional and marketing tips and resources for librarians.[12] The article contains marketing guides, vendor resources and other useful information. An article by Houghton-Jan provides a list of twenty activities in which the library can use to market services and resources online, including Wikipedia, blogs and other social networking tools.[13] Dubicki details basic marketing techniques and concepts for libraries and librarians[14] in an article that covers a variety of topics, including the marketing plan, understanding library patrons, creating the message, promotional activities and evaluation.

What Is Marketing and Promotion?

Throughout the literature, the articles use the terms marketing, promotion and public relations. Although these terms are used interchangeably, the concepts are related, but somewhat different. In order to provide clarification, the definitions of the terms taken from the American Marketing Association are below:

> According to the American Marketing Association (AMA) "Marketing is the activity, set of institutions, and processes for creating, communicating, delivering, and exchanging offerings that have value for customers, clients, partners, and society at large."

http://www.marketingpower.com/AboutA
MA/Pages/DefinitionofMarketing.aspx

AMA's definition of promotional campaign is "the combination of various advertising, public relations, sales promotion, and personal selling activities used by the marketer over a period of time to achieve predetermined goals."
http://www.marketingpower.com/_layouts
/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=P

AMA's definition of public relations is "that form of communication management that seeks to make use of publicity and other nonpaid forms of promotion and information to influence the feelings, opinions, or beliefs about the company, its products or services, or about the value of the product or service or the activities of the organization to buyers, prospects, or other stakeholders."
http://www.marketingpower.com/_layouts
/Dictionary.aspx?dLetter=P

Promotional Campaign

In 2008, the Collections Development staff began reviewing trade literature to identify new promotional ideas that would increase usage of electronic resources. After reading the article by Hemphill and Soltau[15] about a vendor fair held by the Alvin Sherman Library at Nova Southeastern University, the authors contacted the coordinator of the fair to learn more about the logistics involved. The Collection Development staff chose to adapt the idea for the UNLV Libraries but set up as a "vendor expo." The proposal was vetted by the Dean of the UNLV Libraries and her direct reports. It was felt that taking on the expo was not feasible at the time, so the idea was tabled. Collection Management staff began to brainstorm on modifying the idea in order to find an economical way to collaborate with vendors.

After evaluating various options, it was decided that collaborating with vendors (understood as the publishing companies of electronic databases) to highlight electronic resources was the best option. UNLV Libraries decided to develop a "Vendor of the Month" program where various resources for each vendor would be publi-

cized during a specified month. Unfortunately, UNLV Libraries was in the midst of budget cuts and funding was unavailable for marketing. However, due to developing strong relationships with its vendors over the course of time, vendor representatives were still open to participating in the Vendor of the Month project. UNLV Libraries staff decided to host project events during the spring and fall semesters of 2011. Several months before each event, staff met with vendor representatives to organize and customize activities. Because this was a new venture for UNLV Libraries, staff decided that experimenting with a variety of promotional methods would be useful and then helpful in fine tuning future marketing efforts.

For the Vendor of the Month events, the UNLV Libraries used a variety of methods for promotion:

- Direct emails to UNLV students, faculty and staff promoting Vendor of the Month activities
- Scheduling one day of workshops that allowed vendors to provide training on electronic resources
- On the day of the visit, placing a table at the main entrance of the Lied Library (the main UNLV library) displaying educational and promotional materials, pens, etc.
- Working with vendor representative to sponsor "major giveaways" such as electronic readers and gift cards
- Creating a LibGuide (or subject guide – http://guides.library.unlv.edu/vendor_of _the_month) for each Vendor of the Month to highlight resources and activities
- Placing vendor logo with information on electronic resources on a rotating image on the Libraries' website
- Distributing educational and promotional material at service desks during the month
- Promoting activities on LCD screens at each branch library as well as the UNLV Student Union and Student Wellness and Recreation Center

- Posting Vendor of the Month activities on the University's web-based Calendar
- Creating posters highlighting promotional activities and place these in the UNLV Libraries (Lied and branch locations), UNLV Student Union and other campus buildings (such as departments/colleges)
- Hosting live demonstrations of the electronic resources
- Using the UNLV Libraries Smart Cart to distribute promotional materials at the most visible locations on campus
- Sending an email to subject librarians to forward to their faculty and college listservs
- Posting announcements and reminders on the UNLV Libraries social media (Facebook and Twitter)
- Utilizing the marketing and educational offerings from the publishers (posters, bookmarks, flyers and training guides)

Case Studies

The Vendor of the Month activities at UNLV Libraries resulted in some interesting and effective ways of promoting electronic materials. The UNLV Libraries would like to highlight three specific cases of collaboration with vendors.

EBSCOHost

During the month of April 2011, EBSCOHost was the Vendor of the Month. In the planning stages, two unique ideas for marketing electronic resources were selected. Several years ago, UNLV Libraries purchased a hot dog cart, later renamed the "Smart Cart" as a mobile method to increase visibility around campus for promoting UNLV Libraries services and resources. The Smart Cart has insulated storage. After initial discussions, it was decided that in addition to the typical methods for promotion mentioned previously, EBSCOHost would donate a sum of money and the UNLV Libraries would purchase drinks and ice cream to distribute via the cart. At previously determined peak-times, UNLV Libraries employees (staff and students) positioned themselves in high traffic locations and distributed beverages, ice cream, and promotional items (pens, bookmarks, etc.) on behalf of

EBSCOHost and in order to advertise the workshops. Additionally, the decision was made to create unique training sessions by targeting specific disciplines. Workshops included: health sciences & psychology, interdisciplinary research (two sessions), education, and business and hospitality.

Elsevier

Elsevier was the Vendor of the Month for October 2011. The representative created a new strategy to engage users regarding specific databases. Elsevier created a guided "quiz" with simple research questions that the library hosted on its website using SurveyMonkey to expedite grading. Only UNLV students were eligible to enter the contest, and by answering all of the questions correctly, each participant would be entered into a drawing to win the new Simple Touch Reader Nook from Barnes & Noble. At the end of the month, over 160 students participated in the online quiz, with the majority of the respondents being undergraduate students.

Wharton Research Data Service (WRDS)

In November 2011, the Libraries' experimented with the use of Internet-based tutorials and webinars for the Wharton Research Data Service. This specialized database contains customizable financial datasets. Given the short amount of time before the end of the semester, the UNLV Libraries decided to promote online tutorials and webinars through available online promotional tools, these being the UNLV Libraries' website, University news blogs and the RAVE distribution system for UNLV students (undergraduate and graduate). The RAVE system allows staff to send targeted messages to specific student populations. At this time, there are no data focusing on how many users viewed the promoted tutorials and webinars, but there was a slight increase in the number of requests for access accounts.

Assessment

In order to assess the Vendor of the Month program, the UNLV Libraries attempted to use two methods. The first mode of assessment analyzed

Table 1. Vendor of the Month Attendees

Vendor	Vendor of the Month Workshop Registrations	Faculty/Staff	Graduate Students	Undergraduate Students
EBSCO	68	20	36	12
Elsevier	39	18	10	11
ProQuest	59	20	27	12
Thomson	38	23	12	3

the patron category of persons participation in the training workshops (faculty, students, staff, etc.). By gaining knowledge of patron type and attendance numbers at the workshops, the UNLV Libraries could use the information to target specific populations for future events. The information is also useful in identifying faculty to target when creating collaborative promotions for specific resources in the future. Please note that many of the participants registered for multiple sessions, but they were only counted once.

In addition, the Collection Management staff plans to look at use statistics for the vendor's electronic resources to see if there was an increase in usage compared with the previous year's numbers for a one, three, and six-month period following the Vendor of the Month activities. Please note that usage statistics are collected on a quarterly basis, and usage statistics for the 2013 Vendor of the Month campaigns are not yet available. When examining the usage for the databases compared to the year before, two of the four vendors experienced increased usage of their databases on the month of the Vendor of the Month promotion. When looking at usage statistics three months after the Vendor of the Month activities, two of the four vendors experienced higher usage than the previous year. In the analysis of usage statistics six-months after the program, two of the four vendors had higher usage than the previous year. For two vendors, the amount of usage across all of their databases was less than the previous year. The above analysis shows that although in the short-term, usage statistics for half of the vendors did increase, the Vendor of the Month activities did not produce sustained momentum in usage.

Lessons Learned

The Vendor of the Month campaign was held throughout the spring and fall semesters of 2011. Typically, the spring semester is less busy for the UNLV libraries staff responsible for planning the events since the greatest influx of new campus members occurs in the fall. Given the small pool of staff members working on the campaign, we scaled back the event activities to one day only. This reduced the amount of conflict with other library activities and campus events. Volunteers were solicited for the first Vendor of the Month day but it proved to be easier to work with a smaller group staff within the Collection Management Department and with student employee ambassadors, and scale back the programming for the day. The workshops and the table presentations were spread throughout the day in order to capture audiences that were on campus in the morning and late afternoon. Late evening workshops were considered but not held due to staff and vendor representative schedules. Attendance to sessions held after 3:00 p.m. seemed to drop off while late morning, early afternoon sessions were more heavily-attended (see table in assessment section).

Graduate students and faculty were the largest population of attendees at the workshops. This proved to be a great method of encouraging them to promote the resources in the courses that they taught. Attendees generally stayed after a session to ask more in-depth questions, especially concerning those resources with more tools built into the interface.

"Tabling" (that is, hosting a table with giveaways and demonstrations) was another method used to educate and engage our community.

Table 2: 1-Month Database Usage after Workshops in 2011

Vendor	Current	Previous Year	Percent Increase
EBSCO	248639	183361	36%
Elsevier	20643	21393	-4%
ProQuest	9551	19706	-52%
Thomson	4208	4097	3%

Table 3: 3-Month Database Usage after Workshops in 2011

Vendor	Current	Previous Year	Percent Increase
EBSCO	486960	373476	30%
Elsevier	51725	53303	-3%
ProQuest	30606	89045	-66%
Thomson	12095	11322	7%

Table 4: 6-Month Database Usage after Workshops in 2011

Vendor	Current	Previous Year	Percent Increase
EBSCO	863292	852920	12%
Elsevier	99724	102063	-2%
ProQuest	48070	112567	-57%
Thomson	22535	21719	4%

Initially, the table was placed at the entrance of Lied Library and staffed by a combination of staff and student workers. This method appeared to be slightly more intimidating to users, as some avoided it and did not interact with library staff. It was also helpful, but not always successful, to train staff on effective techniques to engage users at a table. Anecdotally, tabling seemed to be more effective with the undergraduate students because they could engage in a different way. There were opportunities to collect help guides, sign-up for drawings and select other types of promotional items such as pens, highlighters, etc. Some promotional items were placed at the Research and Information desk (reference desk) as well so that users could learn more about the resource and ask questions of librarians. These items did not go as quickly as the items on the table partially due to the limited visibility of the desk versus the table at the entrance of the library. It was also due to users not wanting to ask staff about the resource because they were seeking a different type of assistance. Training encouragement for librarians is also needed for them to promote better the re-

sources on the scheduled Vendor of the Month day.

Staff support became an interesting phenomenon for the Vendor of the Month events. A few library staff were regular attendees at the training sessions and expressed their gratitude for the new tips or information they acquired to help students and faculty. Other staff did not believe in heavily promoting resources because they felt that it led to further confusion amoung library patrons about the types of databases offered. Leadership support could also help to encourage library faculty to more enthusiastically support the marketing efforts on the event days.

Promotional items varied with each vendor that visited campus. Some items were distributed in the workshops for attendees due to the limited quantity, some were used as drawing prizes, and others were placed at the table at the entrance of the library and at the Research and Information desk. We encouraged vendors to send items (specifically pens, highlighters, or

bookmarks) before their visit to generate buzz about the upcoming training sessions. Certain types of promotional items were more popular with end users, although all items on the tables were usually claimed by the end of the day. Demographic data were not collected about the gender or classification of the person who claimed a promotional item.

Overall, developing a manageable plan for the Libraries' staff by at least the semester before each Vendor of the Month event was the most effective. Ideally, contact with the vendors should be made a year in advance in order to fit the activities into their travel plans. Asking for promotional items before a major conference can also be problematic.

Future

In the summer of 2012, the University of Nevada Libraries underwent a major reorganization that involved the merger of the Collection Management Department with the Logistics and Resources Distribution Services (technical services). This move aligned its function with the acquisitions and cataloging departments. Staff changes occurred as well, thereby placing the Vendor of the Month campaign on hold. Even though these changes happened, the goal of promoting electronic resources remains an important goal and an ongoing challenge. This challenge can be addressed through interdepartmental collaboration, staff training, and the development of marketing messages.

Ongoing training of library staff who interact with end users would ensure that consistent organizational messages about access to electronic resources are delivered. The first step would be to develop marketing messages along with toolkits containing instructional and promotional information and provide professional development of in-person and online training (webinars) for staff. Given that many vendors provide this type of content it would be relatively simple, although time consuming, to create the above-mentioned items. In the past, training about electronic resources has been optional, and continues to be so. If training were incorporated into departmental meetings, however, it could encourage colleagues that provide refer-

ence assistance to expand and diversify the resources utilized in their instructional sessions. More creative methods are needed to bring the resources to the Libraries' end users on a more consistent basis, but staffing limitations have reduced efforts in this area.

The continuation of in-person vendor events and online training for the end users (faculty, staff and students) would also be beneficial. As evidenced by the data in this article, the in-person training and online promotion does not necessarily increase usage, although, it may spike during the month of promotion. It only demonstrates the need to continue collaborations of this type and to develop creative methods to keep the campus community and library staff mindful of the resources offered. This type of marketing could potentially reduce the number of resource cancellations due to low usage and expose researchers in other disciplines to beneficial information.

Endnotes

1. Sian Brannon, "A Successful Promotional Campaign: We Can't Keep Quiet about our Electronic Resources," *The Serials Librarian* 53, no. 3 (2007): 41-55. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=31861504&site=ehost-live.

2. Julia Leong, "Marketing Electronic Resources to Distance Students: A Multipronged Approach," *The Serials Librarian* 53, no. 3 (2007): 77-93. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=31861506&site=ehost-live.

3. Shelley L. Woods, "A Three-step Approach to Marketing Electronic Resources at Brock University," The Serials Librarian 53, no. 3 (2007): 107-24. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=31861508&site=ehost-live.

4. James Buczynski, "Referral Marketing Campaigns: "slashdotting" Electronic Resources," The Serials Librarian 53, no. 3 (2007): 193-209. http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=31861513&site=ehost-live.

5. Michelle S. Millet & Clint Chamberlain, "Word-of-mouth Marketing Using Peer Tutors," The Serials Librarian 53, no. 3 (2007): 95-105.
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=31861507&site=ehost-live.

6. Mark S. Thompson and Lynn Schott, "Marketing to Community College Users," The Serials Librarian 53, no. 3 (2007): 57-76.
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=31861505&site=ehost-live.

7. Lesley Williams, "Making "E" visible," Library Journal 131, no. 11 (2006): 40-3.
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=21303262&site=ehost-live.

8. Rachel Ellis, "Marketing of Electronic Resources: Projects and Experiences," Serials 17, no. 1 (2004): 57-9.
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=12901737&site=ehost-live.

9. Jeff Wisniewski and Darlene Fichter, "Electronic Resources Won't Sell Themselves: Marketing Tips," Online 31, no. 1 (2007): 54-7
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=23655502&site=ehost-live.

10. Dennis Dillon, "The Application of Marketing Strategic Marketing of Electronic Resources," Acquisitions Librarian 14, no28 (2003): 117-134.
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=27650004&site=ehost-live.

11. Jodi Poe, "Marketing Electronic Reserves at a University Library: Start Spreading the News," Journal of Interlibrary Loan, Document Delivery & Electronic Reserves 16, no 4 (2006): 93-102.
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=23003937&site=ehost-live.

12. Deborah Lee, "Marketing Resources for the Busy Librarian," College & Undergraduate Libraries 12, no 1 (2005): 81-9.
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=20272923&site=ehost-live.

13. Sarah Houghton-Jan, "Twenty Steps to Marketing your Library Online," *Journal of Web Librarianship*1, no. 4 (2007): 81-90.
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=35284695&site=ehost-live.

14. Eleanora Dubicki, "Basic Marketing and Promotion Concepts," *The Serials Librarian 53, no 3 (2007):5-15.*
http://search.ebscohost.com/login.aspx?direct=true&db=lxh&AN=31861502&site=ehost-live.

15. Lisa Hemphill and Elena M. Soltau, "Passport to Information Day as a Promotion Tool," The Charleston Advisor 8, no. 4 (2007): 55-57.
http://www.ingentaconnect.com/content/charleston/chadv/2007/00000008/00000004/art00019.