

Top Ten Tips for Marketing to Teens

By Connie Urquhart

Every librarian has heard that libraries aren't good at marketing, but there has never been a better time to reverse that reputation. Free and low-cost options for most marketing tactics are readily available on the Web. By combining these resources with the talent and connections of an already established customer base, marketing library services to teens isn't as daunting as it once was. Follow these top ten tips, and have fun. (Don't forget to check out the YALS site, <http://yalsa.ala.org/yals>, for a list of resources and links that complement this article.)

1. Build Relationships

The most important part of marketing is not selling teens on a particular event or promotion. It's selling them on the *idea* of the library. Building that foundation by saying "I don't want anything from you, I'm just here" is what will make the library seem credible when it comes time to promote something tangible. This means visiting schools/classrooms, being part of community groups, representing the library in festivals and events where teens are likely to be—all without any expectation other than generating goodwill toward the library.

This also means not only being part of social media but using it in the same way people do with their friends: sharing something funny, posting photos, and commenting on other people's posts, tweets, and photos. Friend other local, teen-friendly organizations and businesses, and be part of their conversations. That organization may reach a huge segment of teens who never before considered using the library, and this is an excellent way to gain visibility with those groups.

2. Listen

A lot of time goes into building relationships, so staff should be vigilant to maintain that good reputation by listening to what is being said about the library. Teen advisory boards are great for this purpose, but one step further is for members of the advisory board to elicit feedback from their friends who *don't* use the library. Why not? What do those people think about the library?

It's unrealistic to think that all comments about the library happen within its walls or on its Web or social media pages. Google Alerts, not just with the name of the library but other important keywords such as staff names, events, and location-specific

landmarks, help staff to know what people are saying about the library. Social media is not often covered by Google Alerts, but most social media sites have a search mechanism in which the same Google Alerts keywords can be entered. Users may not know the library's Twitter handle or what hashtags to use on Instagram, but that won't stop them from talking about what books they're reading or what they are doing at the library. If there's an appropriate place for the library in that conversation and a way to show that staff is listening, take advantage of it.

Finally, staff should Google the library regularly, entering several variations of possible searches teens might use (including incorrect spelling). What would a potential patron see if he or she Googled the library? The immediate page of search results is most often the first impression. What does it say about the library?

3. Keep It Simple And Succinct (KISS 2.0)

Learn from Twitter by pretending everything has a character limit. The message staff want to convey may be longer than 140 characters, but what would it look like if that was all they had? If further text is absolutely necessary, create a link to additional information (this goes for flyers, too). Face-to-face as well, staff should remember to keep facts and details brief so the most salient elements are remembered.

There is an exception, however, which goes for everything from in-person presentations to YouTube videos to flyers. Personality goes a long way; it's OK to tell a meaningful anecdote. If it's funny, the message can be a little longer—and may even go viral.

Need to say more? Say it with a graphic (see tip #4).

4. Let Images Do The Talking

Social media analytics reveal what teachers have been telling students for years: a picture

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is worth a thousand words. Users are much more likely to engage with a post if it is visual, whether in the form of a graphic, photo, or short video (15 seconds or less).

Tech-savvy teens have no trouble making gifs, face swaps, and memes. Library staff don't need to do these (but why not?!). However, they should be comfortable using some of the myriad resources available on the Web and via apps. Photo editing tools like PicMonkey (www.picmonkey.com/) and piZap (www.pizap.com/) are free and allow users to easily create collages of photos depicting recent events, contest winners, or random teens hanging out at the library. Animoto (www.animoto.com) and Vine (<https://vine.co>) are examples of fun, easy video creation tools to employ in getting the library's message out.

Staff should ask themselves: what is the intended result of the message being delivered? Sometimes the images being disseminated will be intended to promote an upcoming program, but more often than not it's to remind teens that the library is an option. That's all it needs to be. Not all images need be original content, either. The Internet is the land of sharing, reposting, and retweeting. Take some time surfing through image-based sites like Imgur (<http://imgur.com>), Pinterest (<https://pinterest.com>), and Tumblr (<http://tumblr.com>) to find memes and funny or relevant photos that relate to teens, books, reading, or libraries. As long as the teens know that image they're enjoying (and subsequently sharing) came from the library, staff have done their job.

But what about copyright? Memes and other viral images land in a murky area, as the very nature of such images is the intention that they be shared. However, the librarian can take a few steps to make sure the library is protected. If at all possible, credit the image creator and/or get permission for use. This is often not feasible, though, so the next step is to understand the "fair use" argument within

When to Go Old School

With instant access to customers via the Web and mobile devices, traditional marketing methods like press releases may seem outdated. However, they can serve a purpose when used appropriately. Staff should consult the library's public information officer for help in crafting a release, to make sure the library's logo and other necessary information is included, and to obtain a contact list of reporters, producers, and other key figures in media organizations. If the library has no designated media relations person, there is a wealth of press release templates online. It is beneficial for librarians to utilize a centralized contact list, sharing and updating the information regularly. Include the journalists at any local high school.

Following are three different types of formal releases staff might send to the media, and when each is most appropriate.

News Release

A news release is a message to news outlets about a change in library services, or if the library has something newsworthy to share. News releases typically have more content and provide enough information in case the media runs the story without following up with the library. Photos can be included. For example, if the library's teen advisory board holds elections for officers, issue a news release that gives the winners' names, titles, and photos. Include short bios of the winners, along with quotes from them as well as the staff advisor. A local paper could pick up on the story (especially high school newspapers), which may attract more teens to the advisory board.

Media Advisory

A heads-up that an event is happening. A media advisory doesn't have to be as extensive as a news release, but it does alert the press that there's an event coming up that they may choose to cover before the actual day. This is the choice for when librarians want to get more teens to attend. The intended outcome is that a story will run *before* the event, so staff should be aware of all press deadlines and send the media advisory several weeks before the publication deadline.

Photo Opportunity

A photo opportunity alerts the media that an event is happening. The purpose of issuing a photo opportunity is not to entice teens to attend the event; rather, this is an invitation to *the press* to attend. The goal is for photos to be posted after the event, showing other teens what they missed out on and reminding them that the library is an option. When issuing a photo opportunity, be sure to give actual, specific examples of the opportunities photographers will have.

copyright law. If the image is not used for financial gain, or if the image is transformed significantly, the library should be able to claim fair use. In her article "Social Media and Fair Use: Pinterest as a Case Study," attorney Mary Ann L. Wymore states, "Social media has become part of the fabric of our culture and is very likely here to stay. With a bit of careful thought and an ounce

of caution, there is no need to shy away from it whether you are pinning, posting, tweeting, or liking for fun or to promote your business."¹

5. Be Honest

This one is simple: truth in advertising. The library should never claim to be more

than it can actually deliver. If teens are giving staff enough respect to show up and be engaged—staff should return the favor of delivering on the promises made through marketing.

Also, staff should be realistic about how teens are using the library. Why are they there? To do homework? Maybe, but more likely they are hanging out with their friends and using the computers. Appeal to this—the real reason why they are there, not the perception of why people think teens use the library. And if homework happens at midnight in a pair of pajamas, that's OK. The library has ways to help with that, too.

6. Be Consistent

Consistency is the key to any successful marketing campaign, and this is achieved through building the library's brand. While an important element of branding, logos and slogans aren't brands—they are part of the many marketing messages that support the brand. Branding is more about perception and how teens feel about the library.

Staff should take time to consider what it is they hope teens will feel about the library and then do everything possible to become that perception. They should be consistent in fulfilling it at all times. Generic, lofty ideas are much more difficult to fulfill than specific practices. For example, consistency can be easily lost if the library's brand is "opening the doors to discovery," while something like "making teens feel welcome" is much more tangible and can be executed in every aspect of library service. Brands should be based upon feasibility, not sentiment, and—as with tip #5—should never promise what can't be delivered.

Brands are built on experiences. Most teens will never have a conscious knowledge of what their library's brand is, but successful branding means that ten different teens would describe how they feel using the library and they'd all be somewhere in the same neighborhood.

7. Crowdfsource

Utilizing loyal patrons to tell the library's story is one of the most important paths to successful teen marketing. Not every message needs to come from the library; in fact, teens are more likely to accept the word of a peer over an adult or organization. The best marketing campaigns gather a group of soldiers to spread the love and then let the magic of word-of-mouth marketing happen. If a friend is recommending a product or event, this carries more weight than if the organization itself is promoting its own services.

Why would people be motivated to market the library's services? As volunteers, teen advisory board members might feel it is their job to do so. As regular visitors, teens may want to be the one credited with turning their friends on to a new place to hang out (or they don't want to be there alone). Encourage these motives.

When the well of internal fulfillment runs dry, there's always monetary or material incentive. Offer a bring-a-friend promotion. For every new friend an existing card holder signs up for a new library card, the referrer gets \$3 waived from their fines, or a coupon for free pizza, or anything that might turn regular customers into marketing soldiers.

Another way to crowdsource is by utilizing the expertise of library regulars when it comes to targeting specific groups. Have a gaming tournament coming up? Ask the group of teens always gathered around that same computer to help get the word out, and to provide ideas for other groups the library could target.

Finally, involve teens in the creation of videos, graphics, and viral marketing that deliver the library's message in a fun way. They may have ideas and expertise that staff hadn't even considered.

8. Don't Advertise

But wait, isn't that whole point of marketing: to advertise the library? In a

way, yes—but don't think of it as traditional advertising. Without even consciously evaluating a Web page, most teens can immediately zero in on what is real content and what is a paid advertisement. Guess which gets ignored? When budgets are tight, it's best to spend time and resources on more subtle forms of marketing and save any traditional ads for the biggest events only once or twice a year—and only after the library has established itself as a listening friend. Subtle, free, or low-cost "advertising" ideas include:

- Maximize the library's Wikipedia page. Whatever the library wants to highlight should be on this page. This is an opportunity to provide solid, noteworthy information in a resource teens turn to as a place of authority.
- Post events on free, online community calendars. Most local newspapers and some community organizations invite the public to share events on their online calendars. These are often picked up in Google searches and by other media outlets. Sometimes radio stations will use the information from their website's online calendar to advertise events on the air, free of charge. The more the library's events for teens are out there, the greater the chance of the information trickling down to its intended audience. Community calendar entries can be time consuming, however; for this reason it is recommended to use volunteers for this task whenever possible.
- Hold an open house and make it a point to invite teens who have never been to the library before. Enlist sponsors from restaurants, retail stores, and coffee shops in the area that teens already frequent and where a relationship has already been established, and ask them to hand out invitations to the event.
- Outreach is a great marketing tool, but when hosting a table make sure it is interactive and fun. Those who

have ever attended a career fair, conference, or festival may have noticed that 90 percent of the tables have people sitting behind them looking hopeful and bored. The crowds of teens are at the other 10 percent, where there is a basketball hoop, makeovers being done, or where participants can pick up swag. Set up a trivia contest, and have prizes on hand for the winners. Show that not only is the library fun, but that working there is fun, too.

- Keep those eyes peeled at all times. Notice what works for other organizations, then see how it is adaptable for the library.

9. Get Staff On Board

Staff will make or break an event or new service. If they don't like it or simply don't care about it, they won't spread the word. If they are invested, they are much more likely to help promote it—not only at the

library but off duty with friends and family. Before unveiling any new service for teens, hold a preview with staff. Show them all the benefits to this new service, and answer any questions they have in an open environment.

If a large-scale event or new service does require the approval and buy-in of administration, create a small-scale marketing plan. Many templates are available online and can be tailored to the scope of the project. This helps with funding and assures management that the librarian has planned for the project's success from start to finish. A great idea can flounder if no one learns about it. A marketing plan provides a road map to ensure the intended audience is engaged.

10. Back It Up With Great Customer Service

Library staff should be generous with their time and resources. Remember previous tips #5–7. All marketing should be backed up by a delivery on the promises made,

whether the promise is for a specific event or for the way teens will be treated at the library. The best way to get new patrons into the library is to have them hear the testimonials of their friends. If customers get excellent customer service and walk away happy, they may tell their friends about it. If they are treated poorly, they will *definitely* tell their friends about it.

A good rule of thumb with any project is to constantly evaluate and make adjustments along the way. The same goes for marketing to teens. Not every tactic will work, but by trying different things and paying attention to their effectiveness, library staff should be able to hone a marketing approach that is crafted especially for their community. YALS

Reference

1. Mary Ann L. Wymore. "Social Media and Fair Use: Pinterest as a Case Study," Bloomberglaw. Accessed August 11, 2013, <http://bit.ly/1aV5LU3>

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