Winnetka-Northfield Public Library District

Both online use and staff morale got a boost when this library focused on engaging staff.

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Introduction
The Winnetka-Northfield Public Library District encompasses two highly educated, affluent communities on the North Shore of Chicago. The community is known for its outstanding schools, including the nationally recognized New Trier High School. The library serves a population of 17,808 with median family incomes over $100,000. Our library has great customer service and excellent resources but we needed to generate greater awareness of its online resources. While 85 percent of the district has library cards, our cardholders don't use their online resources as well as they could. This project was designed to increase both staff and patron awareness of the library's online services by revamping the way our message is delivered to busy residents.

Goals
- Patrons of the Winnetka-Northfield Public Library District will value and use their library 24/7.
- Our staff will have exceptional customer service skills.
- The staff and board will deliver a clear, concise message with accuracy and confidence.

Objectives
- Increase staff knowledge and comfort level by providing training about the library’s databases, word-of-mouth marketing, and customer service techniques.
- Increase the number of unique cardholder hits to the online resources by 10 percent.
- Increase the number of consultations about various online services.

Key Audiences
- Staff
- Trustees
- Influential members of the community
- Winnetka Chamber of Commerce
- Northfield Chamber of Commerce
- Winnetka Alliance for Early Childhood
- Rotary of Winnetka-Northfield
- Parents
- Elementary and middle school children.

Message
We're Up When You Are: 24 Hours a Day.

**Strategies**

**Internal**

- Provide training for staff on word-of-mouth marketing and the importance of team involvement, also online resources, customer service and one of our newest databases, Standard and Poor's.
- Encourage staff to explore these resources individually and to familiarize themselves with one or two databases on their own.
- Hold a contest to promote staff involvement in developing and delivering our message.
- Survey staff pre- and post-training to gauge comfort level with word-of-mouth marketing and the library's databases.
- Provide "cheat sheets" with talking points to help them initiate conversations. These were designed specifically for non-reference staff members who don't deal with reference interviews or databases on a regular basis.

**External**

- Develop and distribute a handy “24 Hour” bookmark/brochure that lists our online services.
- Encourage staff to talk up and demonstrate online databases to library users at every opportunity. Give note pads to those who participate. Staff members who give away the most notepads will win prizes.
- Expand database training for public to include our newest database, Standard and Poor's. This database was added as a direct result of a conversation at the Northfield Branch during the incentive contest.
- Participate in special events, e.g., first-grade reading parties, the Chamber of Commerce Annual Sidewalk Sale. Provide goodie bags with promotional materials, including a coupon for a consultation with a librarian.

**Tools**

- A $50 gift card for the best slogan/message submitted by staff
- Note cubes with our message on them
- Laminated "cheat sheets" with talking points
- 24-Hour bookmark/brochure—Worth its weight in gold, this bookmark lists all of the library's 24-hour online resources with boxes for staff to check off suggested databases when conversing with patrons.
- Coupons for an hour of personal consultation time with a librarian

**Budget**

$2,450 was spent on staff incentives, promo items, and staff training.

**Impact**

The most successful aspect of this project was the staff involvement. Thirty-four staff members and three board members were trained during seven sessions on word-of-mouth
marketing, customer service, and online resources. Surveys showed staff’s comfort levels increased significantly over the course of the grant period. People were excited by the incentive contests and by the database training. Once they felt comfortable using the resources they were able to pass the key message on with confidence. We continue to hold refresher training sessions.

The number of hits by unique cardholders was more than double what we had projected. It increased by 23 percent between March and April after staff training took place. Database usage increased 14.6 percent from October 07-October 08.

During the incentive contest, which lasted a week, staff distributed 160 promotional note cubes to the public. Two staff members were awarded $100 gift cards from Barnes and Noble for their efforts. One distributed 56 cubes. She said she liked having a reason to initiate talking with customers. Hundreds of the 24-Hour bookmarks were given out.

The least successful aspect was the coupon promotion. Not a single coupon for a consultation was returned. We suspect this is because people did not feel a need for a coupon and would turn to us anyway.

This marketing project marked the start of revamping the way the Winnetka-Northfield Public Library District delivers the message about 24/7 services to our busy residents. By continually increasing both staff and patron awareness we want to inform people that our exceptional customer service extends into their homes via our website. And then we want them to tell their friends....

**Lessons Learned**

One challenge was to overcome staff’s assumption that good customer service is enough. It was important to stress that marketing has become an integral part of everyday business at the library. The phrase "promotes library services and materials" has been added to all staff evaluation forms.

It was surprising and rewarding to see the way people responded to being part of the team. It was a positive experience for all the staff to how their colleagues, even those who are shy, excelled at being customer service extroverts. People learned from each other. This was the perfect project to foster team building from within the ranks.

The “24-Hour” bookmark/brochure has become one of our most useful promotional pieces. It can be adapted for a variety of situations and uses by any department. It is simple and easy to replicate for any library.

—Juli Janovicz, Head of Adult Services (julij@winnetkalibrary.org)