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Networking Resources for Outreach Librarians

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PURPOSE

Welcome to the club! You have “outreach” in your job title (or somewhere buried in your list of responsibilities). The good news is that you have the most interesting and fun job in library-land. The not-so-good news? There’s probably no other librarian with your exact same job profile and currently no association just for outreach librarians. So where do you go for inspiration and support? Where can you find partners for cross-institutional collaborations? How can you continue to develop as a library outreach professional? See the ingredient list for sources and advice to kick-start your library outreach professional network.

TARGET AUDIENCE

Outreach librarians

INGREDIENTS

This is a very flexible recipe! As you explore and identify which ingredients below work best for your networking needs, keep in mind that this is not an exhaustive list and what works for one person may be very different for another.

Conferences

- Association of College & Research Libraries (ACRL) Conference

- American Library Association (ALA) Annual
- Annual Conference on the First-Year Experience
- Designing for Digital
- Internet Librarian
- Library Assessment Conference
- Library Marketing & Communications Conference
- Marketing Libraries Think Tank
- Public Library Association (PLA) Conference

Listservs

- Academic PR
- ACRL Library Marketing & Outreach
- PR Talk

Professional Organizations (North American)

- ACRL Library Marketing & Outreach Interest Group
- ACRL/University Libraries Section Academic Outreach Committee
- ALA LLAMA (Library Leadership & Management Association) Marketing & Communications Community of Practice
- ALA Programming Librarian Interest Group (PLIG)

Social Media Groups

- Library Marketing & Outreach (LMAO) – Facebook
- Libraries & Social Media – Facebook
- Marketing Public Libraries Think Tank – LinkedIn
- Programming Librarian Interest Group – Facebook
- Conference or virtual conference hashtags – Twitter

INSTRUCTIONS

1. Establish goals for professional development. Do you want to
 - a. expand your network of librarians with similar roles?
 - b. gain knowledge outside the library profession?
 - c. find a regular source for outreach ideas?
 - d. meet people regionally who are doing outreach?
 - e. set the stage for finding your next job?
2. Consider your budget. Many of the resources above are free while others require travel and registration. Consider your goals to find the right match. If you’re still exploring, make a plan so that you can spread your costs over several years.

SECTION I. GETTING STARTED WITH OUTREACH

Planning

Hazlitt and Metzger

3. Get out of the library! Conferences are great opportunities to meet face-to-face with people who have inspired you online. Can't make it to the conference in person? Follow the official Twitter hashtag for the conference and engage virtually. To make conferences work for you as an outreach librarian, you need to
 - a. spend time with the schedule in advance to find programs related to outreach;
 - b. look for roundtable and discussion opportunities that are more intimate and interactive; and
 - c. seek meet-ups and informal gatherings outside of the convention center.
4. Volunteer. Find ways to get involved in committee work related to library outreach or communications at the national, state, or city level. Relationships and networks built on shared volunteer experiences can yield satisfying and lasting results.
5. Ask and share. It's important to not just lurk on listservs and social networking sites. Others are more likely to respond to a question or favor you ask if you have been actively sharing. What can others in your shoes learn from your experience? Mutual learning is an incredible benefit of expanding one's professional network.
6. Stay in touch. Continued communications with people you meet on the road and online is an important component of keeping your network alive.

CAUTIONS/ADVICE

Avoid limiting your network to librarians at institutions just like yours. You may be surprised by what you can learn from colleagues at different types of libraries.

Go beyond the library world to seek networks outside of the profession. Are you a liaison with a particular academic department? Find out where scholars in that discipline gather and converse and see if you can join them. There are also some relevant professional networks outside of the library profession. For example, if you're responsible for communications, check out the American Marketing Association and Public Relations Society of America.

Don't be afraid to move on. If a particular group doesn't work for you or your goals have changed, try something else! See Vongalis-Macrow (2012) (<https://hbr.org/2012/06/assess-the-value-of-your-network>) for wonderful advice assessing the value of one's networks.

REFLECTION

The authors met while co-chairing the PR Xchange Awards in 2013. In-Between frequent in-person, phone, and online communications about the awards, we discussed our jobs. Even though we are at different kinds of academic institutions, our job profiles were similar. We were both responsible for outreach and communications, both led campus one-book programs, both managed other people, and both reported directly to the head of the library.

After our committee work ended, we scheduled monthly phone calls to continue to bounce challenges and ideas off each other. Since then, we've advised one another on topics ranging from the design of exhibition space to student advisory groups to project management tools to working with development departments. We've recommended conferences, publishing opportunities, and new contacts. This article is our attempt to pay forward the wonderful fortune we have found in each other's professional company.

REFERENCES

Vongalis-Macrow, A. (June 29, 2012). Assess the value of your networks. *Harvard Business Review*. Retrieved from <https://hbr.org/2012/06/assess-the-value-of-your-network>

