

Large Library System Improves Library Awareness One Relationship at a Time

Goals

Some might wonder why the Capital Area District Library (CADL) system, headquartered in Lansing, Michigan, would move straight into implementation of a community-based campaign that's focused on spreading awareness about the value of the library and funding right after an overwhelmingly supported millage renewal. For Marketing Director Liz Breed it comes down to initiating marketing strategies that support educating people about the community's role in not only helping the library survive, but thrive. In today's volatile economic environment, notes Breed, you can't wait until you need something.

Breed was attracted to the look and feel of the campaign, but also to the three-phase structure. This strategy helps grow interest in the campaign during phases one and two, and once the community is really paying attention, a more serious message is introduced in phase three. Breed wanted something that could help create a strong foundation of awareness about the public library and CADL; something that was easy to use, flexible and customizable, and something that was impactful, but subtle. She found everything she was looking for in Geek the Library.

AT A GLANCE

- Service area: CADL serves 23 municipalities in Ingham County with 13 libraries and a bookmobile
- Service area population: 232,316 (as of the 2010 Census)
- Staff: 240 total employees

Campaign

Breed and her team started introducing staff to the program in February 2011. From the start, they engaged all of the head librarians—including making personal trips to each branch to provide guidance and go through campaign materials.

There is a lot of activity at the branch level such as displays and customized posters, and community events and activities, according to Breed, but the big messages come from the main library. They include broad public relations efforts and district-wide advertising at various points in the local campaign.



“With 13 branches, it is important that the head librarians can do as little or as much as they are comfortable with. They can control how much they participate, which puts them at ease,” she says.

“I think [Geek the Library] also taught us a little bit about how to work on maintaining this awareness, which is something that we don't always remember to do... There's a lot of focus on individual things, but that larger function of maintaining the community's awareness of the library and our place in their community is really important.”

—Liz Breed, Marketing Director

Large Library System Improves Library Awareness One Relationship at a Time *Continued*

In the spring of 2011, Breed launched with a short, but effective, burst of advertising that focused on localized billboards. Including the community as part of the campaign and as an additional vehicle for spreading awareness has been a large part of CADL's success so far. Billboards and posters have featured a long list of community members, including local media, bloggers, business owners, the mayor and even an owl from the local zoo.

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—Liz Breed, Marketing Director

Breed has also used the campaign as an opportunity to grow community partnerships, such as with the local zoo and children's science center, by finding creative ways to integrate them into billboards and posters. As a result, these organizations have supported CADL by promoting the campaign and the library in general, and by attending Geek Fest, a celebration that featured many of the local celebrities from the billboards demonstrating what they geek.

CADL unveiled a new round of local celebrity billboards and posters in the fall of 2011, and intends to wrap up its local campaign with a stronger funding message in 2012. Breed considers this the most critical part of the entire campaign. “This is when we connect the dots for people about funding,” she says. “We haven't hit them over the head with it, but it's not coming out of the blue.”

She is happy with the pace of the local campaign—it has had purposeful peaks and valleys in terms of activity, and a consistent local presence. “If you want something to stick,” notes Breed, “you have to keep putting it out there.”

Outcome

According to Breed, people in the community recognize the campaign, want to know more and make the connection to the library. She described being contacted by a community member who asked if her organization could be featured on a poster.



The organization wanted to print copies to use at a local event. “For someone who is well-known in the community to call me and ask to get their picture taken for a poster is one of the culminating events to point to how successful this has been for us. There is definitely a buzz, and people are noticing it and talking about it.”

Breed hopes that in addition to having a better understanding of the library's value to individuals and the community, people also gain vital knowledge about how CADL libraries are funded. Breed and her team are excited about how Geek the Library is encouraging community conversations and setting the stage for positive dialogue—especially about funding—in the future. “I'd like the foundation that we build to be strong enough that it's permanent... Not only has this campaign helped us to establish that foundation, I think it's also taught us a little bit about how to work on maintaining this awareness, which is something that we don't always remember to do... There's a lot of focus on individual things, but that larger function of maintaining the community's awareness of the library and our place in their community is really important.”

For more information about Geek the Library, visit

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