

Breaking the Mold and Building Awareness

Goals

The public library is still sometimes associated with dusty books and a brick building. Tuscarawas County, Ohio, is no exception, said Tuscarawas County Public Library Director Michelle McMorrow Ramsell; it is an ongoing battle. She decided to implement Geek the Library because of its potential to bring the library alive and personalize it, and shake things up a bit...in a good way. Heading into the end of her local campaign, Ramsell is optimistic.

“We wanted people to connect with the library and what it means to them and how we are there to help them. And that’s just the essence of the whole campaign... It’s dynamic. It draws attention, and gets people looking and talking.”

With a small budget and still recovering from staff layoffs due to decreased library funding in Ohio, Ramsell and her team knew the campaign would be a challenge—but they also saw the possibilities with integrating the theme into what they already do, and enhancing and improving community awareness efforts.

Geek the Library provided an opportunity to promote a cohesive message throughout all five locations, while encouraging more dialogue and engagement.

Ramsell and her team created a detailed plan that included allocating money to items that could be

AT A GLANCE

- Service area: Serves Tuscarawas County with one main library, four branches and a bookmobile
- Service area population: Approximately 92,500, with the system’s service district population comprising approximately 55,000
- Staff: 13 full-time, 41 part-time

reused and used for multiple purposes (e.g., large banners for each location), and taking inventory of what resources were already at their disposal. For example, current partnerships with the media were utilized to focus on Geek the Library, and larger promotional events (such as summer reading promotions and local parades) integrated the theme. Ramsell also ramped up her most

important weapon, what she calls her first advocates: the Friends of the Library board, the board of trustees and—most importantly—staff.

“It was really important to us with this campaign to make sure that the staff was aware of what was happening and embracing it.”



Campaign

Ramsell’s organized approach has helped the campaign run smoothly, but she insists that allowing the marketing plan to evolve and staff to be creative is key. “It’s really important to be flexible. If the campaign does what I believe it

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Geek the Library Case Study: Tuscarawas County Public Library

Continued

was intended to do, it's going to build its own momentum within your organization and within your community. Your plan shouldn't be something that will hold back that momentum. It should be something that will embrace that momentum and allow it to be even greater than you planned."

Ramsell and her team kicked off their campaign during National Library Week 2011. Historically, this is considered a fun week for staff to engage with the community, and the media had already carved out space for library coverage. A perfect fit, noted Ramsell.

"It seemed like a natural time to launch and a time where we would get the most bang for our buck. People would be looking at us anyway, and we could get the message out there loud and clear."

To pump up staff and to ensure the media took notice, Ramsell organized a staff meeting. Everyone was asked to wear a black t-shirt, and received a personalized button and a book relating to what they geek. Photos were taken outside of the main library, and one of the images was included in the launch press release. Ramsell's tactic worked, and the information and photo were published numerous times in the local press.

Outcome

Although the campaign is moving toward its end, it is in no way winding down. Ramsell and her team are working to include more community

leaders, local business owners and media professionals, pushing forth a stronger support message and actively engaging the public. They are also finding solutions to help time-strapped branch managers in localizing the campaign with community posters.

Is the campaign a success so far? Yes! "I think we've gained awareness about why the library is important to individuals, and that it is important to everybody. I think that this will eventually translate into support for funding," said Ramsell. "This campaign is one where you are going to reap the benefits long after it is finished."

Impact of the campaign will continue to grow, but at this point, noted Ramsell, it is difficult to fully assess. What she can clearly see is that the

community has heard about Geek the Library and has made a connection. She was recently invited to speak at a local organization that supports administrative professionals with a proposed theme of 'I geek admins.' "That is proof that the campaign has really gotten out there!"

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The local campaign is currently set to run through summer 2012. However, the enthusiastic library staff might push for an extension. "To tell the truth," said Ramsell. "I have concerns that staff will have trouble giving the campaign up!"

For more information about Geek the Library, visit

| geekthelibrary.org