



### INTRODUCTION

In 1977, Robert Vrecenak conducted a study of 424 library public relations programs, 16 of which were in academic libraries. He reported that few academic librarians seemed aware of the potential advantages of public relations.<sup>1</sup> In a 1979 study, Alice Norton found only three college libraries with full-time librarians working in public relations.<sup>2</sup> In 1983, Frank Wylie conducted a national survey of library public relations programs and found that public libraries were three times more likely to have public relations programs than academic libraries.<sup>3</sup>

In 1985, Vikki Ford, a public relations firm executive, surveyed 48 state university libraries to determine the extent of academic library public relations.<sup>4</sup> She discovered three important trends. First, 40 academic libraries conducted some form of publicity, but less than half reported programs planned by one person. Second, the majority of the libraries saw their programs as only moderately effective. And third, interest in public relations programs among academic librarians was high. Ford wrote, "Faced with financial woes, librarians have joined representatives from other types of institutions across the nation in telling their stories through public relations as a means for increasing public awareness of and support for their services."<sup>5</sup> She suggested that with more and stronger, well-organized public relations programs, academic libraries could resolve some of the financial problems facing them.

Today, when libraries are expected to do even more with less, marketing and public relations play an increasingly important role in research and academic libraries' funding strategies. Via newsletters, flyers, newspaper ads, television commercials, and web pages, the library is heightening awareness of its services and the funding necessary to keep those services current and available. New titles, such as director of marketing and publishing, development officer, or public relations coordinator, reflect the more active role libraries play in fundraising.

This survey sought to delineate the growing relationship between marketing and public relations and library funding by identifying: 1) the extent to which North American research libraries have developed organized programs in the areas of marketing and public relations; 2) who holds positions in these areas; and 3) what impact do these programs have on library funding.

To bring consistency to the survey results, public relations was defined as:

[A]ny organized effort or activity created or performed primarily to enhance prestige or goodwill for an individual or an organization. Individuals involved in public relations are typically responsible or may be responsible for issues management, crisis management, promotions, image enhancement, publicity (media of all types), public awareness, fund raising, government lobbying, public awareness and education.<sup>6</sup>

Marketing was defined as:

[T]he organized process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that will (if applicable) satisfy individual and organizational objectives. Marketing collects and uses demographic, geographic, behavioral and psychological information. Marketing also fulfills the organization's mission and, like public relations, inspires public awareness and educates.<sup>7</sup>

Fifty-four out of 121 member libraries (45%) responded to the survey.

### SURVEY RESULTS

*Organized Marketing and PR Programs.* When asked, "How are marketing and public relations functions organized in your library?" more than a third of the respondents (20 or 37%) reported having one department, area, or individual responsible for combined marketing and public relations activities. Ten libraries (19%) reported having separate departments, areas, or individuals responsible for both marketing and public relations functions, while five (9%) reported having only a public relations function. No library reported having only a marketing department. For those without any kind of marketing or public relations department, area, or individual, nine (17%) reported plans to implement one in the future, while 10 (19%) indicated no plans for future implementation.

When questioned about department characteristics, however, few institutions, if any, appeared to distinguish public relations activities from marketing. For example, none of the marketing departments had the word marketing in their name, although one of the combined depart-

ments did. Only one of the public relations departments had “public relations” in its name, while two of the combined departments did. “Development” was most commonly found in the names of all three types of departments.

Likewise, there was a good deal of overlap in position titles; the word “development” commonly appeared in titles across all three types of departments.

Furthermore, no pattern of primary and secondary goals emerged that would separate marketing activities from public relations—what some libraries emphasized as a primary goal others emphasized as a secondary goal. Nonetheless, the two most frequently mentioned goals were the same for public relations, marketing, and combined departments: raise funds and educate and/or heighten awareness. Not only was this true for libraries with departments already in place, but also for those planning to establish one.

All three types of departments had the distribution of brochures and flyers high on their list of fundraising or promotion activities. The least-used method was government lobbying, perhaps indicating a trend towards seeking independent resources from a broader clientele base, rather than from government resources that have become so scarce over the past decade.

Finally, in terms of years in operation, “combined” departments range from one to 30 years, “public relations” from one to 10 years, and “marketing” from three to six years.

*Resources.* Libraries that had public relations and/or marketing departments or personnel reported that most positions are full-time. About as many nonlibrary professionals as library professionals were in these positions. Most department head positions required a bachelor’s degree, although a few required a graduate degree. Slightly less than half of the respondents (15 or 45%) felt they needed to add staff to the operation. The three most important pieces of equipment for these operations were a copy machine, a fax machine, and a computer with graphic design software and Internet access.

*Impact of Marketing and PR.* Most respondents indicated that their marketing and public relations activities are either effective or very effective. The overwhelming majority said that marketing and public relations activities have repaid the initial investment. Most indicated that since the department was established, library funds have increased—sometimes by a substantial percentage.

## CONCLUSION

Several observations can be made from the survey results. Overall, the results indicated that little clearly differentiates marketing from public relations—at least in terms of outward signs, such as department and position titles. It appears that what one library calls marketing, another calls public relations, and both call development. Nonetheless, libraries that have such activities rate them as important and effective. Moreover, all three department types serve common goals: fundraising and heightening awareness of library services.

The data gathered indicates that libraries favor the mass distribution of printed materials (brochures and flyers, for example) over other means of self-promotion and fundraising. Also, since most persons employed in marketing and public relations hold only a bachelor’s degree, it appears that libraries opt to employ public relations professionals and provide library training.

The fact that over 79% of the respondents (27 of 34) have experienced fund increases because of such activities calls for greater awareness. If libraries gain more knowledge about the successes and deficiencies of other institutions’ marketing and public relations activities, the better positioned they will be to improve their own fundraising and awareness campaigns.

*This SPEC Flyer and Kit were prepared by Evelyn Ortiz Smykla, University of Alabama, as part of the OLMS Collaborative Research/Writing Program.*

<sup>1</sup>An Evaluation of the Graphic Arts/Public Relations Program of the Capitol Region Library Council (Hartford: Connecticut State Library, 1977), ERIC #ED145827.

<sup>2</sup>“Public Relations,” *ALA Yearbook, 1978* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1978), 242-45.

<sup>3</sup>“Attitudes Toward the Media,” *Public Relations Journal* (Jan. 1975): 6-7.

<sup>4</sup>“PR: The State of Public Relations in Academic Libraries,” *College & Research Libraries* 46 (Sept. 1985): 395-401.

<sup>5</sup>*Ibid.*, 395.

<sup>6</sup>Jerry Martin Rosenberg, *Dictionary of Marketing & Advertising* (New York: J. Wiley, 1995).

<sup>7</sup>Paul Argenti, ed. dir., *The Portable MBA Desk Reference: An Essential Business Companion* (New York: J. Wiley, 1994).

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