



A NEWSLETTER FOR LIBRARY TRUSTEES

WITHIN THE PIONEER LIBRARY SYSTEM

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Branding:

The Library's Secret Weapon in the Information War

by Kimberly A. Iraci

On October 10, 2007, Todd Butler, Executive Director of the Ad Council of Rochester was the featured speaker at the Pioneer Library System Annual Dinner. Todd's presentation focused on **Branding: The Library's Secret Weapon in the Information War** and he shared marketing successes, interpretations gleaned from our system-wide survey, and touch points that libraries need to consider as we move forward in a competitive world for consumer attention and in meeting consumer needs. The following is an overview of his presentation and the future of the OWWL Brand.

Why Should Libraries Care about Branding?

There's a lot of competition in today's world especially in the fields of information. Patrons can easily search the web, visit a local retail chain, order materials online, or even purchase books at their local supermarket to meet their informational and recreational needs. We are competing on a daily basis with organizations within our communities, not only for site visits, but also for support. This competition requires that the brand promise we offer has to be reflected in everything we do—from customer interactions at the circulation desk, to the cleanliness of our building, to the neatness of our entrance ways.

By concentrating on each touch point that the customer interacts with within our organization we help meet our brand promise. This builds loyalty and credibility not only with those using our services, but also enables us to attract the best employees as well.

Surveying PLS Users

In order to benchmark how PLS users perceived the OWWL brand, a system-wide survey was conducted in June, resulting in 680 responses. Nearly 72% of respondents were library users not affiliated with the library via a Friends group, as a staff member or as a Trustee. Although 83% would recommend their library to a friend, 79% agreed or strongly agreed that they look to the internet first when they need information.

Respondents noted that the most valuable benefits they received from their local library were in order: books, free loans of materials, information, DVDs, recreation, children's programs, and friendly staff.

New services they would like to see offered at their library are: downloadable books, audio books, and DVDs; being able to pay fines and make donations via a credit card from the web and at the library; and to receive more library information via email. The survey indicated that in general the community views their local library to be in the business of information, education and customer/community service.

The survey responses were reviewed by a panel of member libraries along with Ad Council representatives and an executive from Auragen Communications to develop the OWWL brand.

Feature Topic: Branding

What is Branding?

A brand starts with a great product and becomes a series of promises that we make to our patrons. It's more than just a recognizable logo, it is the sum of all of our PR efforts: our name, advertising, customer service, history, website, employees, and environment. A brand is the sum of the good, the bad and the ugly within our organization. It is our best customer interaction and our worst, our best employee and our worst hire, every finely worded article in our newsletter to every word overhead in the local coffee shop.

Brand is an essence (the heart and soul of the organization), a promise (a unique benefit that you offer your patron), and a personality (how customers feel when they interact with your organization).

A group of Pioneer member libraries met with Ad Council representatives for a day long workshop to develop the essence, promise and personality of the OWWL brand.

The following was achieved as the message that our internal actions would convey to OWWL users of our libraries, website, and services:

OWWL's Brand Essence: A welcoming, convenient and quality connection

OWWL's Brand Personality: Easy, Smart, Reliable, Customer Centered, Inclusive, Dynamic and Enterprising

OWWL's Brand Promise: Only OWWL engages, entertains, and connects lifelong learners of all ages with free access to resources—to discover quality information in professionally developed collections, to experience dynamic programs, and to explore progressive technology—in 42 community libraries.

Where do we go from here?

We now have to ensure that staff, trustees and volunteers work towards bringing the above promise, essence and personality to their local library through policies, public interactions and physical layout. Todd challenged each of us to return to our library with a clipboard in hand to evaluate the following as if we were a brand new customer:

- Entrance to the grounds.** Is it free of debris, do you have flowers/landscaping, is it visually appealing?
- Parking.** Is it easy to find, adequate, close to the entrance?
- Entrance to the Building.** Is it easy to locate, free of negatively worded policies and tattered posters, is it welcoming?
- Reference Desk interactions.** Are staff easy to find/identify, is the area inviting, is there a large desk that might be a barrier, are staff too engaged in work to notice or be open to questions?
- Check-out interaction.** Is there directional signage indicating where to go in the building, are lines short, do staff smile, greet patrons, and act friendly?
- Restroom.** Is it clean, fresh, and inviting? A simple vase of flowers or a plant can add a lot.
- Book sale area.** Are there aisleways, is the area clean and clutter-free with good signage?
- Telephone interactions.** Are callers warmly greeted with a name, are they placed on hold for long periods of time, is the phone just left ringing – how many rings before someone answers?
- Independent book searchers.** Is there good signage on shelves, intuitive layout, locations prominently marked, are site maps available, more than just Dewey numbers on shelf ends (subject/visual clues i.e. travel section, cookbooks)?
- Online catalog interaction offsite and onsite.** How long is the wait time for a PC, can you easily find information in the catalog?
- Children's section experience.** Is the area clean, are there furniture and activities with kid/family appeal, low shelving, bright colors?
- Program experience.** Is it easy to register, is there a comfortable meeting space, offered at convenient times for families, seniors, adults, teens?

Feature Topic: Branding

Library Brand Equity

National findings such as those from *Perceptions of Libraries and Information Resources*, commissioned by OCLC, show that libraries have great leads in terms of brand equity compared to our competitors. Libraries have long held a position as trusted leaders in information, we also are known for being *the* place for books, and the public feels strongly that libraries play a vital role in their communities. Plus our competitors can't beat our prices.

But we also have to be aware of our challenges—the competition is out there, it's growing and it's powerful. Our equity is strongly tied to books even though we offer services such as DVDs, audio books, wifi, and computer access. In addition, many of our local libraries are sadly underfunded.

The above being said, Todd Butler pointed out that we do have a secret weapon coupled with our strong brand equity that our competitors do not have—and that is our staff. Libraries have well-trained staff members who actually enjoy finding answers to questions and leading people to information and entertainment. PLS survey

respondents acknowledged this with an overwhelming indication that their library was a customer focused organization. Skilled staff who can deliver our brand promise place us in a good position to meet our competitors' challenges.

In 2008, Pioneer Library System will deliver many of the new services requested by survey respondents: a newly redesigned website with "2.0" features, downloadable books and audio, payments by credit card, and workshops with national experts on customer service.

Trustees play an important role in helping to support staff in carrying out the integrity and promise of the OWWL brand in each PLS member library and the community it serves. For each policy, Board decision or interaction you make, please consider how your library stacks up to OWWL's Brand Essence, OWWL's Brand Personality and OWWL's Brand Promise. Trustees are an essential part of the OWWL Brand and we appreciate your dedication.

Kim Iraci is the Communications, Advocacy and Outreach Librarian with the Pioneer Library System.



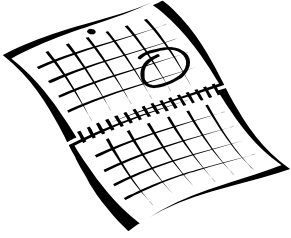
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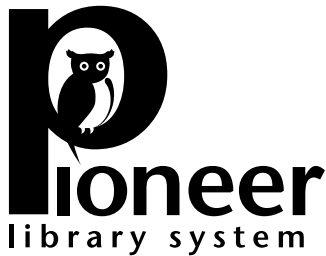


Upcoming Workshops & Events:

- Saturday, March 8, 2008
Trustee Essentials Workshop, Geneseo
- Tuesday, March 11, 2008
Library Advocacy Day, Bus Trip to Albany
- Friday, April 4, 2008
The Customer Centered Library with Karen Hyman, PLS office
- Saturday, April 5, 2008
Trustee Essentials Workshop, Wolcott

<http://www.pls-net.org>

Click on Calendar of Events for details
and to register online



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