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Building Trustee Support for Digital Resources

Rod Gauvin
ALA, altaff@ala.org

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Cover Page Footnote

Rod Gauvin is senior vice president of K-12, News, Microfilm and Genealogy Publishing, and Global Content Alliances for Ann Arbor, Michigan-based ProQuest. He is also president of ALTAF, the Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations, a division of the American Library Association.



We Love LIBRARIES!

Building trustee support for digital resources

by Rod Gauvin

Why do libraries struggle with funding and patron support when we are living through an information explosion in the sheer quantity of data that is delivered and new information products launched? It is clear that the range of services offered has expanded dramatically in most libraries. But the shift in the purchase of library services from fixed media to digital resources has not been followed by an adequate level of patron appreciation and understanding for those digital resources and services — the type of support needed for millage approval and fundraising. What can we do, individually and collectively, to address this issue?

Most trustees and friends groups are conversant with new technology. These folks represent many potential spokespersons, or citizen journalists capable of capturing new technology success stories that an organization such as the Association of Library Trustees, Advocates, Friends and Foundations (ALTAFF) can highlight and deliver through its various communication channels.

Storytelling is a powerful technique for reaching hearts and minds. Here is a checklist that I might suggest (challenge is too strong a word) trustees, friends and library administrators consider when framing the value of digital resources to build community usage and support.

Setting the stage ...

- Is there a coordinated campaign that seeks to document the use of electronic resources in the library and the value patrons generate from these resources?
- Does the library staff systematically capture success stories of patron problems that are solved through the use of electronic resources and digital alternatives?
- Is there a method in place to create a patron story when there is a positive interaction, such as when a genealogy question gets answered or the right resource for a medical

challenge or health issue is identified?

- Are potential spokespersons fully conversant on such current industry studies as the 2010 update to the OCLC “Perception of Library Information and Resources” study or the “Public Library Funding and Technology Access Study” compiled by ALA and the Center for Information Innovation at the University of Maryland? How about the reports available on the research site on ALA Connect?

Reaching out ...

- Is there a designated staff person at the library who communicates with local media? Are the library director and the board of trustees working together to connect, at the senior level, with local media and community leaders?
- Do members of library staff and the friends, trustees and foundation members serve on other nonprofit (and networking-rich) boards such as the United Way, the Chamber of Commerce, county government or school boards?
- Are the success stories and special events reported to ALTAFF, the Public Library Association or other ALA divisions for them to leverage and share in campaigns?
- Are we soliciting help from the vendor community in such a way that the key information providers are also promulgating these success stories and looking to raise the visibility of the digital library of the future?

ALTAFF has a key role to play in assisting trustee groups with framing the issue for building support for digital access to information products. Your ideas, thoughts and suggestions are most welcome. ►►

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