

Marketing NSW public libraries

Marketing is now a central part of how every public library does business. Recognising this emerging role the two public library associations in NSW, PLC (Public Libraries NSW – Country) and PLM (Public Libraries NSW – Metropolitan), established a joint Marketing Working Group back in 1998. The State Library of NSW has been particularly supportive of the group since its inception.

Membership is open to all public libraries in NSW. It is an inclusive group and welcomes participation of all public libraries in NSW.

The group aims are to:

- Improve the profile of public library services;
- Provide an opportunity for information exchange;
- Monitor developments in the field of marketing and promotion;
- Undertake projects of relevance to public library marketing and promotion;
- Facilitate or organise continuing education activities relevant to the marketing and promotion;
- Work with other relevant groups on issues appropriate to the marketing and promotion of library services.

Meetings have proved to be particularly fertile ground for the sharing of ideas.

The group's major activities have included an annual Seminar held at the State Library of NSW, the annual Marketing Awards for Public Libraries (MAPLs), and coordination of the @ your library[®] program across NSW.

The Marketing Group, thanks to a successful grant application, was one of the first to experience the expertise offered by retailing expert John Stanley. The project was run across six libraries in NSW and the benefits were unquestionably positive. As part of this project, an all-day marketing seminar was conducted by John Stanley and made open to all NSW public libraries. A publication on the outcomes at the six libraries was produced and distributed to all NSW public libraries.

An important part of the continuing education process for public librarians in NSW has been the annual Marketing Seminar organised by the group. These seminars, which started in 1999, have gone from strength to strength and included themes as diverse as:

- Publications
- Customer service
- Men and public libraries
- Branding libraries
- Seniors
- Relationship marketing

Central to the success of the seminars has been a small, hard-working seminar planning team supported by the Marketing Working Group and the invaluable assistance provided by Victoria Anderson, Public Libraries Consultant at the State Library of NSW.

Those of us who have been part of the team have learned a lot about running seminars in the last few years – the importance of picking the right theme, getting hold of knowledgeable and interesting speakers, and making sure attendees leave feeling they've been exposed to ideas they can take back and implement in their own workplaces. The small details also matter, and they've been well honed over time.

A catchy title is always a good way to attract people. These have ranged from *The Best Pubs in Town* (about publications rather than Hotels), *Are You Being Served? Blokes at Your Library*, *Sensational Seniors*, and *It's all Relative*.

Our budget has always been small and after running the tank dry of people available to speak at no charge, we introduced a small charge of \$55.00 which included lunch as well as morning and afternoon tea. This had no real impact on registrations and enabled us to invite a number of speakers who would not previously have been attainable. The State Library of NSW subsidised costs for a number of years.

Over the years we've tried to provide a wide range of speakers both from within our own profession and relevant experts from business, state and local government, government departments, academia, non-government organisations, and the arts. Our speakers have included authors (Peter Fitzsimons), a social worker, a psychologist, an architect, a graphic designer, a demographer, retail experts, and, of course, public librarians. We were also fortunate that many excellent and successful speakers very generously gave their time free of charge or at a significantly reduced rate.

The seminars themselves have varied in format. Some years we've increased the participation level by including a workshop. On other occasions we were able to include the findings of studies undertaken through the year. Another popular feature of the seminars has been the inclusion of a panel discussion. This has been an opportunity for libraries to showcase their achievements and has always provided plenty of practical ideas.

Feedback for the seminars has always been helpful in refining our processes for the following year. It was really gratifying to hear that a number of libraries submitted Library Grant Development applications on the basis of what they had learned at a seminar.

Involvement with the group has been a rewarding and satisfying experience, both personally and professionally.

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