Overview:
In 2016, the Whatcom County Library System (WCLS) hired Red Rokk, a Bellingham-based marketing agency, to craft and execute a marketing campaign that would increase library circulation, cardholders, and public awareness of the library’s services.

After executing a nine-month digital marketing campaign, WCLS saw an unprecedented increase in circulation and engagement; they more than doubled their annual goals for total circulation and cardholders, increased digital circulation by 86.5%, broke the record for most new card sign-ups ever in one month by 26%, and increased social media followers by as much as 160%.

The campaign also won the prestigious John Cotton Dana award, along with two PR XChange awards. The following case study shows how they did it.
The campaign also highlighted the library’s key benefits, including convenience, ease-of-use, money-saving perks, and modern resources. The graphics evoked a sense of positive energy, and gave the library a friendly and modern look. The campaign also took a new messaging approach, with short, consumer-centric copy that focused on what patrons get, versus what the library gives. The messaging and graphics worked together to communicate that the library is friendly, modern, and offers clear benefits to the community.

Research:
WCLS serves about 120,000 citizens throughout Whatcom County, WA. Of the 120,000 people, less than half had library cards. Likewise, according to a public awareness survey, there was a high interest in WCLS’s new digital services, such as eBooks, eAudiobooks, music streaming, and digital magazines, but low awareness and usage of these services. With this information in hand, Red Rokk got started by establishing measurable goals and a specific target audience:

GOALS: Increase library cardholders by 2% and boost circulation by 2%, with a strong focus on digital circulation.

TARGET AUDIENCE: To narrow down the target audience, Red Rokk executed a public awareness survey to gauge WCLS interest, awareness, and loyalty. From this survey, they found that while millennials had low engagement rates, they had a high interest in library services. With this in mind, they established local millennials as the target audience, since they had the greatest room for growth and a high likelihood to become library ambassadors.

Creative Implementation:
To hit their goals, Red Rokk crafted the “My Modern Library” campaign, an innovative, friendly, and predominantly-digital campaign that gave the library a fresh and modern identity; the campaign also highlighted the library’s key benefits, including convenience, ease-of-use, money-saving perks, and modern resources.

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The campaign engaged hundreds of community leaders and elected officials—including the Whatcom County Executive, who played the "Star-Spangled Banner" on his trumpet, while balancing the County budget on his head. Other patrons danced, cooked, meditated, and did Tai Chi, rode horses, lip-synched, and trumpeted others. People, including local businesses and friends, tagged others to do the same.

"Sign up for a library card" was trackable, was appropriate for all ages, had a clear call to action (i.e., sign up for library cards. The campaign was easy to do (almost everyone has at least one book laying around the house), was a viral video challenge that encouraged local community members to sign-up for library cards.

To cap off the campaign, Red Rokk wanted to create a completely unique promotion to encourage card sign-ups during National Library Card Sign-Up Month. Their solution was the #BookBrainChallenge—a viral video challenge that encouraged local community members to sign up for library cards. The promotion asked patrons to film themselves doing something fun with a book on their head, post it to social media, tag three friends to do the same, and then ask them to do the same.

The campaign was not only an incredible success from an engagement standpoint, it also hit the greatest room for growth and a high likelihood to become library ambassadors. The following case study shows how they did it.

OVERVIEW:

To hit their goals, Red Rokk crafted the "My Modern Library" campaign, an innovative, friendly, and digital marketing agency, to craft and execute a marketing campaign that would increase library usage: digital circulation increased 86.5%, eBook circulation increased 33%, music streaming increased 380%, digital magazine usage increased 50%, and Mango Language usage increased 127%.

After actively promoting WCLS’s digital services for nine months, they saw an unprecedented increase in library usage: digital circulation increased 86.5%, eBook circulation increased 33%, music streaming increased 380%, digital magazine usage increased 50%, and Mango Language usage increased 127%.

WCLS and Red Rokk also kicked-off an email on boarding campaign aimed at engaging new cardholders. The automated campaign included 11 emails—each of which educated new patrons on a different library service. The emails received excellent engagement, with an average open rate of 31.4% and average click-through rate of 3.4%

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In the end, WCLS more than doubled their cardholder and circulation goals—they increased cardholders by 2% and boost circulation by 2%, with a strong focus on digital service promotion.

Digital Service Promotion:

Throughout the campaign, Red Rokk featured one digital service a month through a cross-channel strategy that included email marketing, social media, blogging, PR, website optimization, and Facebook ads.

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By the end of the campaign, WCLS’s Facebook page had also grown 81%, Instagram was up 160%, and Twitter increased 55%.

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BookBrain Challenge:
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The campaign engaged hundreds of people, including local business leaders and elected officials—including the Whatcom County Executive, who played the “Star-Spangled Banner” on his trumpet, while balancing the County budget on his head. Other patrons did Tai Chi, rode horses, lip synched, danced, cooked, meditated, and more—there was an incredible amount of creativity and library pride! You can view some of the videos on the WCLS website (www.wcls.org/bookbrainchallenge-videos/) or their YouTube channel (@WCLSLibraries).

The campaign was not only an incredible success from an engagement stand point, it also hit their card sign-up goal! In fact, the #BookBrainChallenge broke the record for most card sign-ups ever in one month by 26%. Likewise, toward the end of the campaign, Facebook reported more than 86,000 people were searching for #BookBrainChallenge.

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Results:

☑ Increased electronic circulation by 86.5% compared to the previous year
☑ Increased total circulation by 4.3%—more than twice their annual goal
☑ Increased active cardholders by 4.6%—more than twice their annual goal
☑ Broke the record for most new card sign-ups in one month ever (broke the record by 26%)
☑ Increased the patrons most likely to recommend the library (i.e. patrons who ranked as a 7 on the Net Promoter Scale) by 20%
☑ Increased OverDrive circulation (i.e. eBooks/eAudiobooks) by 33% and OverDrive accounts by 25%
☑ Increased Freegal circulation (i.e. music streaming/downloads) by 380% and Freegal accounts by 69.5%
☑ Increased Zinio circulation (i.e. digital magazine checkouts) by 50% and Zinio accounts by 58%
☑ Increased Mango language logins anywhere from 80% compared to the previous year, all the way up to 447%, during the month we focused our marketing efforts on Mango Languages
☑ Increased Facebook likes by 82%, Twitter followers by 56%, and Instagram followers by 160%