Low-Vision Services

A New Way to See

Park Ridge Public Library Marketing Campaign

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Executive Summary

The Park Ridge Public Library, in Park Ridge, Illinois, a suburb of Chicago, is a community library focused on serving the residents of its city. The library opened in 1913. In 2009, it had 217,680 books and 28,093 audiovisual materials in its collection.

The library has developed six main strategic directions as part of its strategic plan:

1. Assess and address community needs.
2. Optimize operational efficiency, flexibility, and effectiveness.
3. Promote awareness and increase use.
4. Enhance service through staff and board development.
5. Strengthen community support.

The mission of the Park Ridge Public Library is to provide the community with access to information, recreation and enlightenment by promoting materials, programs and services.

The vision of the Park Ridge Public Library is to be a community resource that dynamically provides fresh formats, materials for personal growth and stimulating programs, accomplished through a friendly and professional staff in an enhanced building with up-to-date and accessible technology.

This document focuses on a marketing campaign for the library’s services directed at people with low or no vision. Specifically, the library has a special services room that offers specialized equipment for the visually impaired. The room contains a magnifying machine and computers that have three types of software – JAWS, ZoomText, and OpenBook – that read printed and online materials aloud and magnify materials on the computer screen. The library also offers a variety of other services to those with low or no vision, such as a support group, large-print books, and audiobooks, among others.

The library has developed a marketing campaign with the goal of increasing senior citizens’ awareness and usage of the library’s low-vision services through active promotion of these services. This document will address the background research the library has done on its patrons and the community’s population. It will discuss the target group for this marketing campaign. Additionally, it will explain how the marketing campaign will be put into place and what effects it will have on the library and the community.

Theoretical Foundation

Linda Ashcroft, in her “Marketing Strategies for Visibility,” published in the Journal of Librarianship and Information Science, describes a marketing campaign for lifelong learning at Hampshire Libraries. This library “collaborated with other organizations” and
held a “Change Your Life” event. “Yet the most innovative example of marketing for this event was when the Information Specialist and Information and Advice worker ran a stall in the high street on market day to promote ‘Change Your Life’. The aim was to get out into the community and challenge members of the public who were not library users to make the most of the event and to look afresh at what the library had to offer,” states Ashcroft. This is similar to the open house for the blind and visually impaired presented in the Park Ridge Public Library’s low-vision services marketing campaign.

Donald Dyal and Kaley Daniel, in their Up, Up, and Away: A Bird’s-Eye View of Mission Marketing,” published in American Libraries, suggest that marketing campaigns must involve a plan that “employ[s] and involve[s] every communication tool available to reach our audiences.” They go on to explain the necessity of creating a “compelling message” and using “multiple venues and variations for the same message.” The Park Ridge Public Library’s low-vision services marketing campaign follows these techniques by communicating with its audience through a variety of venues, including in-person presentations, posters, radio, newspaper, and online.

In the article “Marketing Your Library…” in American Libraries, Ned Potter interviews Terry Kendrick, who “is the guru of strategic marketing in libraries.” Kendrick suggests, “If you try and look at the whole service at once, you'll probably find the set of offers you have are either not strong enough or you won't have enough resources to fully implement them. So it's best to choose one group of people you fully understand in terms of what they value, how they use your resources, what their outcomes are. Then take that segment through a whole marketing planning cycle.” This is exactly what the Park Ridge Public Library is doing in its low-vision services marketing campaign – it is looking specifically at the segment of people that consists of seniors who are blind or visually impaired.

**Market Audit & Research**

Seniors can develop low vision due to various health conditions, including age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetes, and glaucoma, according to VisionAware, a resource developed by the American Foundation for the Blind. More than 900,000 Americans older than 40 are blind and 2.4 million Americans have low vision, according to the Archives of Ophthalmology using data from the 2000 U.S. Census. The National Institutes of Health states that people 65 and older, along with African-Americans and Hispanics 45 and older, are at the highest risk for developing low vision. In Park Ridge, the median age of its residents has increased from 42 in the 2000 Census to 44.8 in the 2010 Census, according to the City of Park Ridge. It is evident that Park Ridge’s population is aging, and as it ages, the population faces a greater risk of developing low vision.
Analysis

The population of Park Ridge is 37,480 according to the City of Park Ridge, citing the 2010 Census. The Park Ridge Public Library found that in 2009, 69 percent of Park Ridge residents had library cards. Circulation at the library increased by 30 percent from 2004 to 2009, while program attendance increased by 38 percent over the same time period. The library would like to hold more events or allow more community groups to use its space, but since the building is not very large, it is unable to provide for more groups to use its rooms than already do. It has one of the smallest buildings by square feet of those in the surrounding suburbs. The library actively offers programs for children, adults, and seniors. Children’s materials were the most circulated, at 42 percent of the total circulation, in 2009. The library anticipates the population of adults in the community over the age of 55 increasing as baby boomers age. Twenty percent of the population of Park Ridge was 65 years or older in 2009. This makes senior citizens the largest group in Park Ridge. Competitors to the library are the usual suspects: the Internet, e-books, and Amazon.com. The Park Ridge Park District might also be considered a competitor in terms of programs offered to the community. The library currently engages in a variety of marketing activities, although it only markets its low-vision services on its website and Facebook.

Environmental Scan (PEST)

Political/Legal Factors: All public libraries in Illinois have been affected by state budget cuts and significant problems with the budget year after year. The entire library system in Illinois was affected by a budget crisis in 2011, and many public libraries in the state closed as a result.

Economic Factors: The recession and continued economic problems in the U.S. have increased traffic and circulation in the library. Grants and donations have been declining in the current economy. Funding from the city has remained flat while the library’s costs have increased.

Social Factors: The demographics of library users have remained largely the same, although there is an ongoing increase in senior citizens in the city. The population in general is aging, although there are still a great number of library patrons with children. As such, the children’s department remains one of the most popular parts of the library. There are about a dozen elementary schools, two middle schools, and two high schools in the city, and they all have their own school libraries.

Technological Factors: The library recently redesigned its website to be more user-friendly and to provide more virtual services. The library works to engage its users on various social media, including Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, and Pinterest. E-books and audiovisual materials continue to increase in popularity. Internet is available on the library’s computers, but the library does not offer Wi-Fi.
**SWOT**

**Strengths:** The library has been around for a long time – it will be celebrating its 100th anniversary next year in 2013. Most everyone in the community is familiar with the library and its location as it is in the small downtown area of the city. The children’s department and children’s services are strong. It has an excellent and thorough website.

**Weaknesses:** Plans to expand the library building have fallen through, and though it has undergone some remodeling, it is still somewhat small and old-fashioned. Unique services are not always promoted and can remain hidden from the public. Young adult services are not excellent, and teenagers are relegated to a very small and inaccessible section of the library.

**Opportunities:** An expansion of the library’s adult programs, particularly classes and lectures, would be a positive step. The community in Park Ridge is aging, so services for senior citizens and the elderly could be increased or promoted more heavily. Considering that e-book usage is still growing, the e-book collection, e-readers, and dissemination methods could be explained during programs or promoted more.

**Threats:** The library’s older building makes some resources and services difficult for patrons to locate. The Internet, e-books, and Amazon.com continue to pull patrons away from the library. Its size does not always permit it to hold all of the books that patrons are looking for, although it has just become part of a new coalition of Illinois libraries, so this allows patrons to get unavailable books from other nearby libraries.

**Original Data**

The library will use focus groups of six to eight people as a primary data collection tool. The focus groups will be held at two retirement homes in Park Ridge with some of their residents and at the Park Ridge Senior Center with some of its users. A moderator will run the groups and report back to the library with the findings. The audio will also be recorded. Participants in the focus groups will be given gift certificates to local businesses and restaurants. The library will partner with these businesses to procure the gift certificates for free or a reduced fee.

The moderator of the focus groups will ask the following questions, along with any questions that arise naturally during the focus groups:

1. Have you ever used the Park Ridge Public Library?
2. How often do you use the Park Ridge Public Library?
3. Are you visually impaired or blind?
4. Are you aware that the Park Ridge Public Library offers low-vision services?
5. Have you ever used any of the library’s low-vision services?
6. Would you be interested in using the library’s low-vision services?
7. Which of the following services or resources would you be most interested in and why: large magnifying machines; computers with JAWS software that reads aloud websites, email, and documents; computers with OpenBook software that reads aloud printed materials; computers with ZoomText software that enlarges text on the screen; large-print books; audiobooks; or the low-vision support group?
8. What are the main reasons you would be interested in using the low-vision resources or services?
9. What other low-vision services would you like to see offered by the Park Ridge Public Library?

Market Segmentation

The main target group for this marketing campaign will be visually impaired senior citizens in the community. Many people lose their vision as they get older. They may not be aware of the types of services that can help them to access information, or they may think these services are intended only for those who are completely blind. People who are coping with new vision loss would probably be most concerned with maintaining their daily routine, such as reading emails from family, reading the daily newspaper, and so on.

The value of the library’s low-vision services to its users is that they help them to access information that they otherwise might not be able to. Without these tools, the blind or visually impaired would not be able to read books or websites. The tools in the special room that the library has put together help people with disabilities to utilize the same information that sighted people can. People with visual impairments have access to tools that they may not be able to afford in their own homes; these tools help them to read email messages from family, news on a website, or current novels and magazines.

Service Identification

The library’s services for the visually impaired would probably be considered a Dog on the BCG Matrix. They have fairly low growth and low market share. Interest in these services might be growing some, though, as baby boomers are aging and may be losing their vision. As Annette Lamb states, “In some cases, a ‘dog’ might be an essential service to a small audience.” This seems to be the case for these services for the visually impaired. Also, the Park Ridge Public Library is receiving funding from an outside group for these services. So even if the special services room is a Dog, there is no reason for the library to discontinue these services. In fact, the library should likely spend more time promoting low-vision services in order to retain its funding by keeping usage up.

This product has a low level of use currently. While magnifying machines at different levels are not that new, computer software that can read aloud well has only been around for about ten years. Therefore this product is likely moving from the introduction
to the growth stage. As more people learn about the special services room for those with low vision at the library, more people will be interested in using it. However, it is not likely to ever reach a very high level of use as there are only a certain number of people in its audience.

**Mission, Goals, Objectives, Actions, & Budget**

The mission of the Park Ridge Public Library is to provide the community with access to information, recreation, and enlightenment by promoting materials, programs, and services.

The goal of this marketing campaign is to increase senior citizens’ awareness and usage of the library’s low-vision services through active promotion of these services.

The objectives of this campaign are: 1. Attract at least 20 new users to the low-vision services room over the course of a year. 2. Present information about the library’s low-vision services to at least 100 senior citizens total at retirement homes and the senior center. 3. Increase circulation of handheld magnifiers, large magnifying machines, large-print books, and audiobooks by at least 10 percent over the course of a year.

Marketing and Public Relations Librarian Samantha Brown will take the lead on this campaign, along with Reader Services Librarian Maggie Hommel. Other staff members in the Reader Services department will assist with various phases of the campaign’s implementation.

The timeline for this marketing campaign will begin in January 2013. At that time, the library will conduct the three focus groups described above. After the focus groups have concluded, the library will assess the data and see if any changes need to be made to the prepared marketing campaign. Samantha and Maggie will have a meeting for all the library staff members to explain the marketing campaign. In March and April 2013, the marketing campaign will shift into action. Maggie will conduct presentations at the local retirement homes and the senior center. Promotional materials will be placed in the retirement homes, the senior center, and the library. Reader Services staff members who have not been trained in the various low-vision services will learn how to use them. In May and June 2013, the newspaper ad will run in the Park Ridge Herald-Advocate; the audio PSA will run on local radio stations; the press release will also go out to local media organizations; and fliers for the open house will be posted in the community and online. The open house for the blind and visually impaired will occur at the library in July 2013. Facebook and Twitter postings about the library’s low-vision services will be ongoing throughout 2013. In March 2014, Samantha and Maggie will evaluate the campaign.
Communication: The Marketing Mix

To specifically target senior citizens, the Park Ridge Public Library has created a marketing campaign that will be put into place at the senior center, local retirement homes, and the library. The Summit of Uptown, previously known as Summit Square, is a retirement community that offers both independent and assisted living, and it is only a couple blocks away from the library. The Park Ridge Senior Center attracts many senior citizens with its programs and services. As such, these are two of the ideal places to stage this marketing campaign.

Promotional materials, including posters in large print and fact sheets, will be placed in the senior center and the retirement homes expressing how people with declining vision can keep up their normal daily activities by coming to the library and using its low-vision services. The promotional materials will have large and very clear lettering so that those with vision loss will be able to read them. Librarians will also do presentations at the senior center and local retirement homes encouraging people to use the library's low-vision services. This would be likely to increase use, as new people would learn about the services for the visually impaired that the library offers through the promotions and presentations. Patrons will also get more excited about the service if they hear about it personally from a librarian.

Additionally, the library will record an audio public service announcement (PSA) about its low-vision services that will air on local radio stations. This is a good way to reach people who have trouble seeing as they will be able to hear the message instead. The library will also put an ad about its low-vision services in the local newspaper, the Park Ridge Herald-Advocate. This ad could appeal to people who have full vision by suggesting that they tell their friends and family with low or no vision about the Park Ridge Public Library’s low-vision services. A similar message will be posted on the library’s Facebook and Twitter pages.

Promotion

The parts of the marketing campaign described above will be united through integrated marketing communication. All print materials will use the same logo, name, tagline, fonts, and colors. The audio PSA will use the same logo, name, and tagline. The promotional materials will focus on explaining how the library’s low-vision services can help visually impaired people keep up their daily routines and continue to read. They will also suggest that people with full vision recommend the services to those with low vision to help them.

As a special event, the library will hold an open house to explain its various low-vision services and how they all work. It will team up with other local organizations for blind or visually impaired people, such as the Chicago Lighthouse and the Illinois Eye Institute, so they can discuss their services as well.
Message

The main marketing message for this campaign follows the AIDA model. Awareness is developed through posters, fact sheets, and Facebook and Twitter postings. Interest and Desire are created through the audio PSA being broadcast on local radio stations and the newspaper ad being printed in the local paper. Action occurs when patrons attend one of the low-vision services presentations given by librarians or when interested community members attend the open house for the blind and visually impaired.

Branding

The name and tagline for the marketing campaign will be “Low-Vision Services: A New Way to See.”

The logo for the campaign will be:

![Low-Vision Services Logo]

A New Way to See

The campaign will use black and green for its colors and it will use the fonts Georgia and Arial.

Public Relations

This marketing campaign will use word-of-mouth marketing (WOMM), social media, and relationships with its volunteers as its public relations strategies.

The word-of-mouth marketing will start by librarians actively communicating with people who are commenting on the library’s Facebook and Twitter pages. They will try to make a connection between the comments people are making and low-vision services, if possible. The library will also start blogging about its various services and resources, especially its low-vision services. It will then track down organizations and blogs focused on blindness and visual impairment and post about its blog there. Librarians will also connect directly with staff at the retirement homes and the senior center while doing their presentations at these locations. The WOMM will continue when these staff members pass along the library’s message to residents and users who were unable to attend the presentations.
Some of the library’s use of social media as a public relations strategy is explained above, but the library will also create a Facebook event for its open house; connect with organizations for the blind and visually impaired on Facebook by liking them and communicating with them on their walls; and post messages to Facebook promoting the library’s low-vision services.

An example of a Facebook post:

Low-Vision Services

A New Way to See

Do you, your friends, or your family members have trouble seeing even with glasses? Visit the library’s low-vision services room to see text in a new light! Learn more about our low-vision services online at http://www.parkridgelibrary.org.

The library will also use relationships with its volunteers as one of its public relations strategies. Many of its volunteers are senior citizens, and when they speak to their fellow senior citizens who do not volunteer at the library, they are thought of as experts on the library and its services. By simply discussing the library’s low-vision services with its senior citizen volunteers and suggesting they recommend the services to friends and family who need them, the library can keep informed those who are already interested in helping it. It is likely that volunteers will be happy to recommend the services as they already appreciate the library and know how good it is at helping patrons.

Publicity

The publicity materials for this marketing campaign will include posters, fact sheet, PowerPoint presentation and presentation notes, a press release, a local newspaper ad, a radio PSA, open house fliers, and Facebook and Twitter postings. The posters will be hung up in the local retirement homes, the senior center, and the library itself. The fact sheet will be available at the local retirement homes, the senior center, and the library. The PowerPoint presentation and presentation notes will be used by the librarians when they are presenting at the retirement homes and the senior center. The press release will be distributed to local media to see if anyone is interested in picking up a story about the library’s low-vision services. The local newspaper ad will be placed in the Park Ridge Herald-Advocate. The radio PSA will be broadcast on local radio stations. The open house fliers will be posted around the community, online, and in the
retirement homes, senior center, and library. The Facebook and Twitter postings will be put up on the library’s pages on the two websites.

See the appendix for an example of one of the posters, the local newspaper ad, and the fact sheet.

Advertising

The marketing campaign will invest in paid advertising in the weekly local newspaper, the Park Ridge Herald-Advocate. Advertising in the local paper is not prohibitively expensive, and the paper has a large circulation in the community. Many people, from teens to the elderly, read the newspaper when it shows up at their homes every week. It will also put out a public service announcement on the radio, which is a form of unpaid advertising. Because the content is directed at those who have problems seeing, having an ad on the radio where people can hear the content instead is very important.

Advocacy

This campaign will help with community building, which will help establish goodwill toward the library. A marketing campaign for the library’s low-vision services demonstrates the library’s interest in helping all the citizens in the community, even those with disabilities. By working with community organizations, the library can build relationships that continue to evolve over time and work their way into advocacy. The library’s interest in helping people who are blind or visually impaired will help it build support in the community by demonstrating its caring nature.

Internal Marketing

All staff will attend a meeting providing an overview of the types of low-vision services the library provides and the low-vision services marketing campaign. This way, no staff member will be caught off guard if a patron asks a question about the library’s services for the visually impaired. After the meeting, all staff members will be kept up to date on the progress and deployment of the marketing campaign via email. Reader services staff members who work directly with the low-vision services room will undergo training on all the software and equipment in the room if they have not already. This way they will be prepared to demonstrate how it works and what it does to patrons.

Evaluation

The marketing campaign will be evaluated in a variety of ways to ensure that the library has met its goal and objectives. The circulation statistics for large-print books, audiobooks, handheld magnifiers, and large magnifying machines will be tracked over a year’s time and compared to previous statistics. The number of attendees at the librarians’ presentations at the local retirement homes and senior center will be counted.
The number of users of the low-vision services room will be tracked over the course of a year.

Users will be asked to take a brief survey after using the low-vision services room, containing the following questions:

1. Is this your first time using the low-vision services room?
2. What service did you use in the low-vision services room?
3. On a scale of 1 to 10 (1 being the worst, 5 being average, and 10 being the best), how would you rate the low-vision services room?
4. Is there anything else you’d like us to know about your experience with the low-vision services room or anything we can do to make it better?

Reflection

This marketing plan is innovative and exciting because the librarians are actually getting out into the community to spread the message to patrons. By going to local retirement homes and the senior center to give presentations, the library demonstrates that it is interested in engaging with community members. This, in turn, shows the community that the library cares, which makes the campaign more effective. The library is also taking a fresh approach by holding an open house and partnering with local organizations for blind or visually impaired people. Forming new connections for a good cause is a great way for the library to increase the public’s interest in it and its services.

Appendix

Spans pages 13-15.
Are your glasses no longer enough to help you read?

Can you barely make out letters and numbers?

Are words a blur to you?

Do you have trouble seeing and need help reading books and the Internet?

Turn to the Park Ridge Public Library’s Low-Vision Services for help!

Low-Vision Services

A New Way to See

Stop into the library at 20 S. Prospect Ave., call librarian Maggie Hommel at 847-825-3123, or go online at http://www.parkridgelibrary.org to learn more.
at the Park Ridge Public Library

People over the age of 45 with vision problems may not just be experiencing the effects of aging. Seniors can develop low vision due to various health conditions, including age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetes, and glaucoma.

If you, a friend, or a family member needs help coping with visual impairment, turn to the Park Ridge Public Library’s Low-Vision Services for help!

The library offers:
- Librarians who are happy to help you
- A magnifying machine
- Computers with software that reads printed and online materials aloud and magnify materials on the computer screen
- A low-vision support group
- Large-print books
- Audiobooks

Stop into the library at 20 S. Prospect Ave., call librarian Maggie Hommel at 847-825-3123, or go online at http://www.parkridgelibrary.org to learn more.
Fact Sheet
Low-Vision Services
A New Way to See
at the Park Ridge Public Library

Who might be interested in using the library’s low-vision services?
Anyone who is blind or visually impaired, especially people over the age of 45 with vision problems that may not just the result of aging. Seniors who have developed low vision due to various health conditions, including age-related macular degeneration, cataracts, diabetes, and glaucoma, might also like to use these services.

What services does the library offer for people with low vision?
- Librarians who are happy to help you
- A magnifying machine
- Computers with software that reads printed and online materials aloud and magnify materials on the computer screen
- A low-vision support group
- Large-print books
- Audiobooks

Can someone teach me how to use the machines, computers, and software?
Of course! The librarians in the Reader Services department are all trained on how to use everything in the low-vision services room, and they are happy to show you how to use the services or help you with any other questions you may have.

Stop into the library at 20 S. Prospect Ave., call librarian Maggie Hommel at 847-825-3123, or go online at http://www.parkridgelibrary.org to learn more.