Designing and Promoting Web Sites
Christine A. Olson M.L.S., M.A.S.
Chris Olson & Associates

March 16, 2000
Computers In Libraries Conference
Washington, DC

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Presentation by Christine A. Olson
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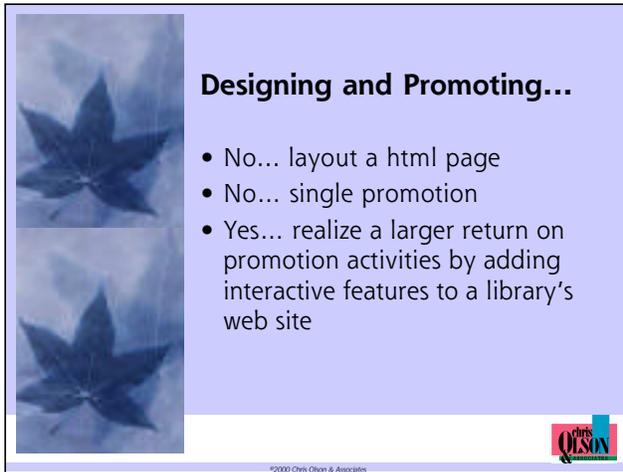
Designing and Promoting...

- No... layout a html page
- No... single promotion
- Yes... realize a larger return on promotion activities by adding interactive features to a library's web site

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Six months ago when I signed up to make this presentation, I was thinking of creating a talk which would be "filled with ideas for designing and promoting library web sites to build business, draw new visitors, and foster communities." to quote the program description for this talk.

About 6 weeks ago, when I sat down to draft my outline, I created a healthy list of ideas-- all dedicated to the idea of building a loyal customer base in the form of a virtual community. But while I was researching virtual communities, I had a revelation. **Building a virtual community isn't just an objective, it was also part of the marketing plan! It's a marketing tool !**

So, today my talk is not limited to design and promotion ideas... it's not about laying out or producing an html pages, creating graphics or a "how-to" promotion technique.

Instead, I want to approach the topic from a **different perspective**. Rather than having the community be the end result-- the product of our design and promotion activities, **I propose a different scenario. A bigger picture which incorporates virtual community features into library marketing plans and promotion activities**.

Enabling greater returns from our investment in marketing activities.

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Marketing...the Basics

- marketing research
- targeted messages and products
- promotion mix management
- advertising campaigns
- brand management

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The marketing heritage that we bring to web site promotion is fairly comprehensive.

First of all, let's review **heritage** and what most of us are doing today in our **marketing endeavors when it comes to marketing library web sites.**

What we find is that we've **taken traditional marketing activities and applied them to web site promotion**. Nothing out of the ordinary. Most businesses on the net have done the very same thing-- **transferred what works for "brick and mortar" places to the electronic "virtual" world**.

For many libraries that means--

Marketing research-- survey research- planned and impromptu, e-email, e-forms, continuous feedback, specific quests.

Targeted messages and products-- market segmenationa- reaching people in need of information or interested in product. (also automated mailing list management tools make it easier for people to sign up for specific products/services/announcements (Listbot.com)

Promotion mix-- as librarians gained experience they blended promotion activities into mixes to extend their efforts and achieve higher visibility of promotions. (posters, flyers, emails, ad banners, e-cards)

Advertising campaigns-- got the attention of the audience with visual themes and messages which were coordinated and targeted.

Brand management-- Libraries adopted logos and slogans to reflect the missions and visions they established for services.

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Marketing…Popular Mix

- e-mail announcements
- post card and flyer mailings
- visibility/brand building
- packaging/adding tangibility
- open houses and events
- contests and games
- coffee cup and pen promotions

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As I have said before, most **marketing plans implement popular, tried and true promotion activities**. Here's a small sampling.

e-mail announcements-- fast, easy, inexpensive, targeted.

post card and flyer mailings- never underestimate the value of paper when it comes to promoting virtual products and service. It's "in your face", not passive.

visibility/brand building-- putting logos on everything activated the branding plan for most libraries. If the plan was thought through, then the logo was consistently applied across all products and services, paper-based or otherwise. **Accompanied by messages supporting the brand of who we are, what we do, and why we are critical.**

packaging/adding tangibility-- most library services are intangible so we added tangible characteristics such as product names (and built product brands), packaging, design elements.

open houses and events--provide opportunities to show off skills and knowledge. With a touch of **merchandising** for displaying packaged products, **sales talks**, and taking orders. face with their customers.

contests and games-- Add fun and interest to promotions. Draws attention and as a promotional device has a **long shelf-life**-- announce the coming of the contest, then announce it, announce that it's coming to a close, and then announce the winners.

coffee cup and pen promotions -- mousepads, t-shirts, hats, beachtowels…. it's a long list of items given away to folks with the intent that the logo and message the item displays will be a **constant reminder of the library's services**. Goes along with visibility.

Librarians draw on these and other activities to promote their web sites.

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Marketing…New Horizons

- Expand the planning picture
- Energize promotions
- Keep people coming back
- Realize a greater return on marketing efforts
- Add value to traditional information services and products

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Now it's time to go beyond today and even-tomorrow. **The electronic environment which is developing around us offers librarians new tools and opportunities for marketing and promoting information services.**

Let's energize the library marketing mix like the bunny… and keep it going and going.

Give people a reason for returning to your web site.. Remember information itself is not a reliable drawing card…if the library has it, they may or may not come. **Just because you promote it once or twice, will they remember? Probably not.**

It takes time and money to plan and execute marketing activities. **Why not get a greater pay-back?**

And if your web pages are dominated by lists of bibs, recent acquisitions, hot topics database links, and newsletters. **It's time to take a page out of the e-business game plan and add some interactivity to your web site.**

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Seize the Moment...
Start a Virtual Community!

- A new marketing tool
- Intra- and Internet-based
- Service environment independent

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Add a virtual community to your marketing toolbox and incorporate it into your marketing mix. Build your library business with repeat customer visits, attract new visitors, prospective customers, give them a place to exchange information, give yourself the opportunity to gain insights,

Doesn't matter if you're on a intranet or internet-- although my examples for today are based on the internet.

And it doesn't matter if you're a special library, academic, public, subscription, whatever type of library, **virtual communities offer all libraries the same opportunities to extend their marketing and promotion activities.**

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What's a Virtual Community?

- 40% of visitors to a web site want to connect with other visitors
- Provide visitors a "place" to interact

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40% of visitors to a web site want to connect with other visitors (According to a study by **Jupiter Communications**)

Provide visitors a "place" to interact-- **people want to interact with librarians and other visitors. A community setting offers them the "virtual place-- the address" to do that.**

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What comprises a virtual community? Here are some **typical components**.

Message boards -- visitors can share and retrieve information with everyone who visits the community site.

Chat rooms- Allow groups of people with similar interests the ability to communicate in real-time.

File sharing - Exchange/Post files - graphics, text, for people to download and peruse at their leisure.

Discussion groups -- Enable virtual discussions via email within special interest groups.

Instant messaging - real-time-one-to-one and one-to-group communications.

Member directories - Provide a simple and safe way for community members to find others based on their personal profiles they create and their interests.

A community is a step up from the listservs-- it offers more that just email exchanges-- it's more robust. And you can do more with it -- and "in" it.

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Marketing Appeal

- Common interest
- Keeps people coming back
- Mailing list potential
- Get feedback
- Solicit ideas

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"Oh, great," you say. "As if I don't have enough to do already!"
Sure, it's gonna take time, but look at what you get in return. **The marketing appeal of the community.**

common interest-- a virtual community brings together people with common interests. If you have your marketing glasses on, it's easy to see how a group of people with a common interest can make a **great audience for targeted messages and product offerings**.

keep visitors and customers coming back-- if the community is well-built and encourages frequent visits, then the library has the opportunity to present itself, it's products and services, and it's expert people to community visitors. **It's repeat exposure to the library** logo, slogan, and messages, **helping to build the library's brand image**.

mailing list potential-- hosting a community gives you the ability to communicate directly with the community members through email messages and community postings.

get feedback -- think about the perspective you can gain just by monitoring the community discussion boards. **Find out what's on the minds of your customers. (market research)**

solicit ideas-- Got an idea. You don't have to develop the idea in a vacuum. **Float the idea on a community discussion board, develop a prototype and solicit feedback and input**. Integrate the community into your library product development activities

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Communities to Visit

- www.nike.com (Lance Armstrong)
- www.craigslist.org
  (SF Bay community)
- www.golfonline.com
  (Golf magazine)
- www.pets.com (pet supplies)

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As I said before, **take a page out of e-business.**

If you're like me, you probably don't visit chat rooms, or frequent many or any lists. After sitting in front of a computer all day, spending my leisure time staring at a computer screen is not my idea of a good time. If I want to chat with someone, I use the telephone.

But, if I want to find out what others thought of a new golf course, or how they liked a new cat product, **I will visit a community to read other people's comments.**

Describe these sites.

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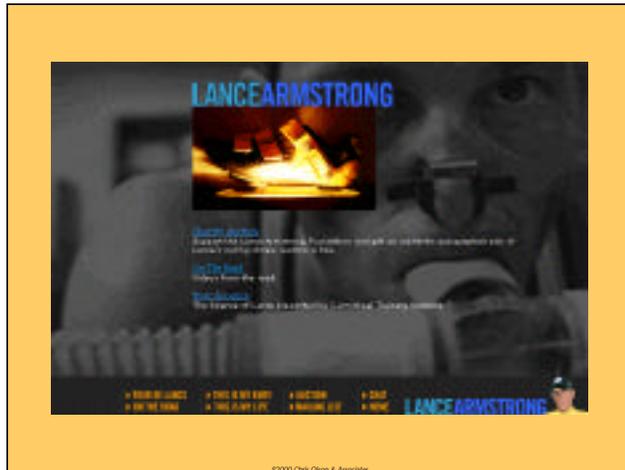
Very interactive, up to date, informative. Almost like "a day in the life of…"… which may be an interesting idea for a library to do sometime.

Notice how they weave the community into the overall site design.

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This site has everything...

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Active Community

- www.pets.com

message boards for all types of pets

cats
dogs
birds
fish
ferrets
small pets
horses
reptiles

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Even your pet has a community.

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"Stickiness" is Win-Win

- Foster a two-way dialog between library and customers
- Customers get ability to find and forge relationships with other who share interests
- Enable people to create their own content and share information

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For a library community, here are some points to consider:

A good, productive virtual community is designed to be **sticky. It encourages active user participation** -- good for both the community members and the library
.

Enables the library to **communicate with it's customers** in a virtual setting.

Library **customers get the opportunity to identify other people with similar interests** and forge virtual relationships with those people.

Gives people the opportunity to create their own content-- **to share their own experiences, observations, knowledge, and insights which can add value to the original piece of information.**

Snowball effect. The more people participate the stickier the community site will get, and the more visibility and marketing benefits the library will realize.

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Start small...

- Learn likes and dislikes
  Discussion groups
  Message boards
  Interest groups
- Reach current/prospective customers
  Mailing lists
  Message boards

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If starting a virtual community sounds rather overwhelming, then think about starting on the small scale. You **don't have to do everything at once.** And it doesn't have to be perfect.

Consider starting with these features-- go to slide.

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If you've never joined a community or want to explore options, here are some resources.

Let me point out that you **don't have to subscribe to a service**. If you have a Java programmer or know how to activate Java applets you can implement some features of a virtual community step-by-step. It's not a big secret. However, if you're looking for a turnkey solution, here are some resources to investigate.

PeopleLink : provides community services on a contract basis.

Talk City : another resource which builds communities on contract

Virtual Communities Conference: May 8-9, 2000 San Francisco. Creating, building, growing, and managing virtual communities.

Vicinities.com: Provides resources to build a virtual community.

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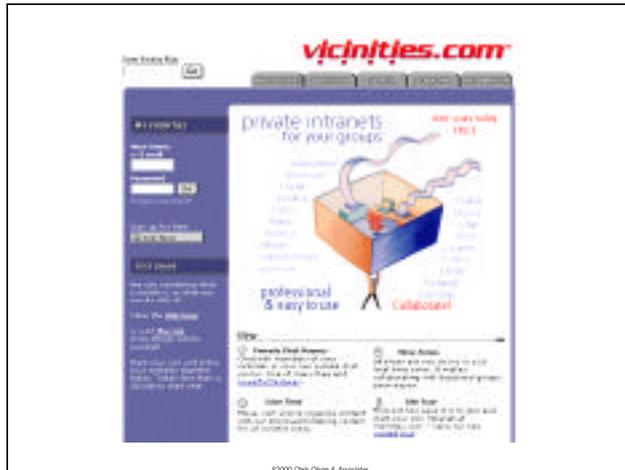
Vicinities.com is Free!

on the internet.

Here's the home page.

Recommend that you take the tour-- you don't have to join to take the tour or visit the
lab. **Take the test drive.**

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To show you how easy this is, here's a community I started and created in 2 hours.

I started by visiting the lab and taking the tour.

At first I was entering data to build a test community, but then I got serious when I saw the potential for establishing a community for librarians interested in marketing their libraries.

So within 2 hours --a village was born! It was so easy, it was amazing. **It's all menu driven.** You can **customize elements** -- menu bar, colors, what displays and what doesn't. As the founder of the community, you have administration options for mailing lists, inviting individuals, setting security.

Notice that you have the option for either **previewing the village and it's contents without actually joining it.** Or you can **join** by providing your name information, and **"entering".** As a member you'll be able to post information and engage in the interaction features of the community.

Oh, incase you're wondering, Vicinities.com promises **not to use your profile data** and the entire site is endorsed by "entrust" and "trust-e".

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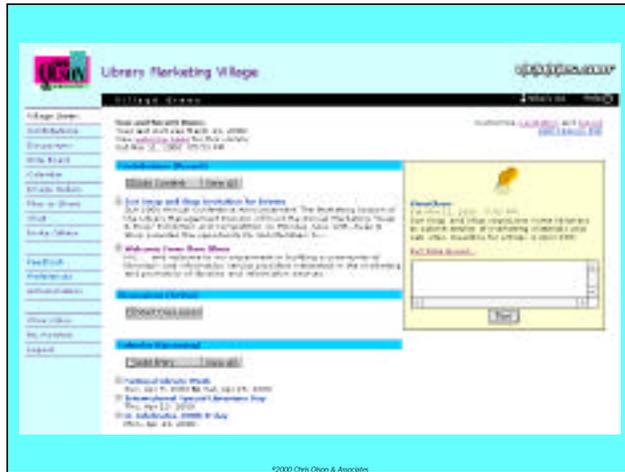
And here's the **main page of the Library Marketing Village**. It provides an overview of what is available for visitors.

Content

Discussion topics (I didn'tt have any at the time of this screen shot)

Note board

Calendar

Image gallery-- where we have some clip art for visitors

Files to share - we have the recipe for making **fortune cookies** in a PDF file.

Chat-- If anyone else is visiting the community at the time, you can chat with them "real time".

Invite others-- send an invitation to your colleagues and friends who you think would benefit from the village.

As the administrator/founder I get **weekly reports** on how many members are in the community and the option for other types of reports, including feedback from visitors. There's also a mailing list function which can be used to send out announcements to different groups of members

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Here's the web address if you would like to visit the Library Marketing Village.

Now we've seen a couple of examples from the business world, and I've shared with you my community and how I made it.

Now it's your turn...

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**National Library Week…
    and beyond**

• Who are you targeting?
• What are your plans?
• Virtual community opportunity

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Now that we've seen some examples, let's get back to your library's virtual community.

You **don't need a special occasion to launch a community** and incorporate it into your marketing plans.

But, it just so happens we do have an perfect occasion coming up.

If having a special occasion will motivate you to start a community, **let's talk about National Library Week.** It's next month and many librarians are, or soon will be planning promotion activities to celebrate and draw attention to their services and products.

But after the week is gone, then what? You just spent all that time and money into implementing some promotion activities-- here today, gone tomorrow.

Why not **consider starting a virtual community to extend your promotion staying power**. Have a lasting effect. If nothing else, you can start by getting feedback and ideas for your next promotion, and then **expand the community 'features**" and incorporate them into your promotion mix. **Increase the site's stickiness.**

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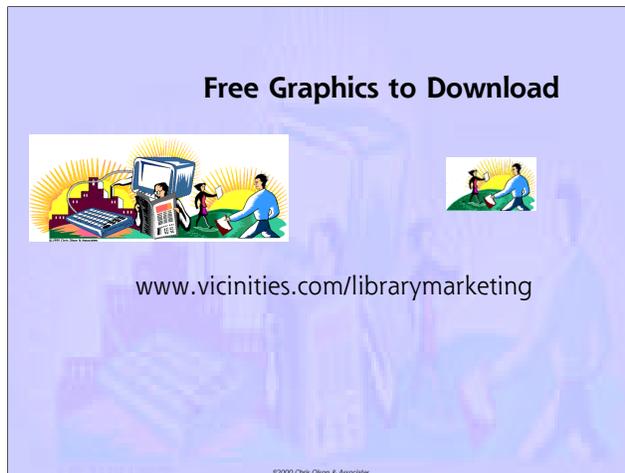
To **get you started on your own community for NLW**, and motivated to **visit the library marketing village**, I've created a set of graphics for you to use on your web sites and your own community. The Information Landscape. You can download them from the **Images Gallery**.

still image

animated image

image effects- neon

button size

web site background variations

Use the **graphics as a visual a theme for your NLW promotions**.. . If your library has a logo, display it predominately in the community and use other graphics like the Landscape Scene as ancillary graphics.

By the way, you **can also use the graphics on paper-based products**, they will print from most postscript and non-postscript color printers.

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If the information landscape graphic doesn't interest you, visit Stephanie Stokes's site and her **Library Media and PR** pages. Her focus is mostly on public libraries, but she has free library graphics which you can download in your new virtual community.

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Huh? Run that by me again…

Virtual communities
    Another marketing tool for the library -- reap a greater return on typical marketing mix activities
Library Marketing Village
National Library Week
Graphic resources
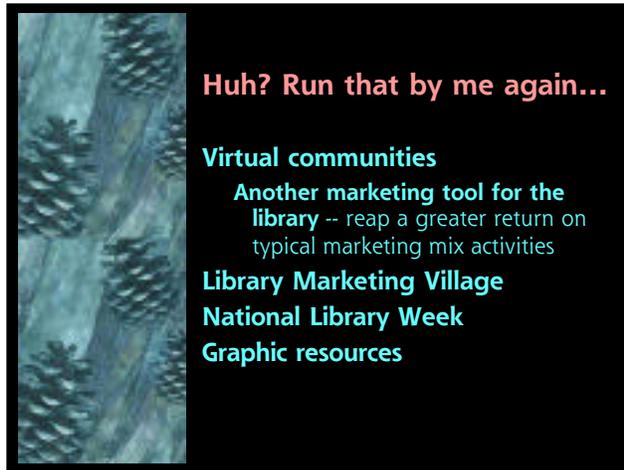
Building a virtual community isn't just an objective, make it part of your marketing plan! Integrate it's features into your marketing activities. It's a marketing tool which can help you realize a bigger return on your marketing investment.

To summarize:

--We **reviewed marketing and promotion basics--hit some highlights to illustate what promotion activities are being perused for library web sites.**

--You have a **community to visit and try out** if you need help in your NLW promotion plans.

-- you've got a **graphic resource to use in your National Library Week promotions.**

But most of all, I hope that I've **shed a new light on how your library can take advantage of the marketing opportunities afforded by building and hosting a virtual community. I hope you give it a try. When you do, make sure you share your experiences with others at the Library Marketing Village!**

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Questions...

Where to get a copy of this talk:
www.chrisolson.com/tickledpink/designpromotewebsites.pdf
www.vicinities.com/librarymarketing-- File Sharing section

URL for the Library Marketing Village:
www.vicinities.com/librarymarketing

Phone: 410/647-6708   **Email:** chris@chrisolson.com

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