



The electronic newsletter
with marketing ideas for
information professionals.

compliments of...
Chris Olson & Associates

A Note From Chris

This month we lead off with pragmatic advice for conducting focus groups. Based on personal experience, these [10 tips](#) are sure to help your own research activities run smoothly.

The Singapore National Library Board has been working more than 9 years on reinventing itself and implementing a marketing strategy. The results are in and the Board has become the de-facto [market leader of reading services in Singapore](#). This is an outstanding marketing initiative that warrants attention.

So what are your options when you want to host an open house and you're a solo librarian? Read the approaches taken by innovative librarians in [Promotion Gems](#).

Last month's marketing SOS asked about introducing library services to teachers. Thanks to everyone who took the time to send along their insights and pointers, all of which are presented in [Help This Marketeer](#).

Look for our next issue October 19th when our lead article examines marketing strategy examples which surround us every day.

Happy reading!

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads 'Chris Olson'.

Chris Olson
Publisher

10 Pointers For Better Focus Groups

Among the options for conducting qualitative research is a group interview technique called focus groups. A focus group is normally comprised of 6-8 individuals representing the target audience, sitting in a quiet room discussing a product or service lead by a moderator. The room typically has a one way mirror behind which members of the marketing team can observe the discussion first hand without influencing the conversation. If a room with a two-way mirror isn't available, then a regular room is used and the focus group session is tape recorded.

Focus groups are an attractive research technique when insights, suggestions and reactions are desired from customers or non customers, and when conducting individual interviews is not an option. We've used focus groups on a wide range of marketing issues including new product ideas, service performance, brand taglines, advertising campaigns, web site usability, value perceptions, and brand recognition. Here are 10 lessons we've learned over time.

1.) Don't conduct the group sessions yourself. Ask someone else to lead the sessions as a moderator, otherwise people in the session will be reluctant to speak openly. If you are unable to

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hire a focus group consultant, ask a colleague from outside your organization to be the moderator. Consider swapping focus group sessions -- you lead their sessions, and they moderate your sessions. However, if you use a colleague, don't introduce them as a "librarian." The mere mention of your professional background can cause some people to withhold honest comments about library services. Even having someone inside your own organization can influence whether people in the session will speak openly.

2.) Reward people for participating. Professionally conducted sessions usually pay people to participate in focus group sessions. It's always good to reward people for their time with cash or a small gift. At the very least, provide refreshments. Maybe bagels and fruit for morning sessions and ice cream and popcorn for afternoon sessions. Be careful about timing the food with the actual session. We once held breakfast focus groups and as soon as everyone finished eating, they left for their next meetings before we got a chance to hold the discussions.

3.) Choose a room with comfortable chairs. The last thing you want is for people to be uncomfortable. If the sessions are being held in a conference room or around a large table, make sure it doesn't isolate people at the table ends. Likewise, make sure the room is large enough to accommodate the number of people in the session and it's well ventilated.

4.) Set ground rules for the focus group session. In order for the sessions to yield honest and useful results, the moderator and the participants must respect everyone's comments and ideas. We normally review and post a set of ground rules at the beginning of each session so everyone feels they can contribute openly. Reviewing the ground rules can actually be converted into an ice breaker for the group, an especially important consideration if the participants don't know each other.

5.) Leave the cell phones and PDAs at the door. We hate to state the obvious, but make sure everyone is free of their technology tethers.

6.) Set objectives for the sessions. It's important to identify what you expect to come out of the focus groups otherwise the session can become a unwieldy discussion. What do you want to learn? The answer to this question will guide what questions are asked during the session. The moderator will lead the focus group session and discussion using a Moderators Guide. The Guide should layout the entire session like a movie script -- from the opening introductions to the closing wrap-up. A well developed Guide helps to prevent surprises during the session and ensures that discussions stay focused.

7.) Don't underestimate the resources it takes for arranging logistics and preparations. It takes considerable time to put together focus group sessions. The logistics for identifying participants, inviting them, scheduling them into different session times, arranging for rewards, working with the moderator, identifying the questions, and reserving the room are just some of the activities associated with running focus group sessions.

8.) Write debriefing notes after each session. An audio tape won't be able to capture the body language, facial expressions, or group interaction during the session. These are important to consider when interpreting the results of the focus groups. We recommend conducting a debriefing after each session. Ask the moderator to write notes about the group dynamics and individual reactions witnessed during the session. If you observed the session, you should write up your own

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notes for later reference. Trust me. After 3 focus groups you won't remember who said what or how.

9.) Groups should be homogeneous. It can be tempting to put individuals with mixed characteristics together into groups -- to save money, to save time, to get a variety of responses. However the dynamics of a group can be seriously inhibited if participants don't feel comfortable with other group members. Simple segmentation considerations such as job responsibility, age, experience, interests, sex, income levels, library usage patterns are all characteristics which can be used to develop profiles of who should be invited and included in focus group sessions. It's easier to interpret session responses when each group represents a specific profile. One word of advice. If you are targeting upper management and c-level management in your organization or community, don't plan on focus groups. Instead, speak with these people in personal interviews arranged at their convenience in their offices.

10.) Arrive early and check the room with the moderator. Don't wait until the last minute to get to the room. Assume that if anything can go wrong, it will and be prepared to take corrective actions before participants arrive. Count the chairs, make sure the refreshments are correct, that the tape recorder is working, and other items are ready. Don't forget the phone numbers of contacts, especially if the room is in an unfamiliar building. Here's a true story. We had a focus group session scheduled in a large corporate office. Fifteen minutes after the session was supposed to begin no participants had arrived. We discovered that in the time it took us to walk from the front entrance to the session room located in a remote section of the building, the entire workforce had been sent home due to a water main break. We learned this from the construction crew since there wasn't anyone else around!

Keep these 10 pointers in mind the next time you organize a series of focus group interviews. For additional information about planning and conducting focus groups, you're invited to review the following:

[Designing and Conducting Focus Group Interviews http://digbig.com/4erjb](http://digbig.com/4erjb) (PDF file)

[Focus Group Interviewing](http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/focus.html). (Tips from Richard Krueger, a respected name in the areas of research and evaluation) <http://www.tc.umn.edu/~rkrueger/focus.html>

Treasure Tips

What Is A Marketing Mix?

Frequently known as the "5 Ps", a marketing mix is a blend of activities focusing on 5 components of a marketing strategy: Product, Pricing, Placement, Promotion, and Public Relations. For years the mix was defined as "4 Ps", with public relations and promotion combined together. But the realization that both activities have their own objectives and tools has caused the marketing mix to be expanded to 5 P's, allowing public relations and promotion to be managed as unique mix components. Of the 5 components, Placement and Pricing are probably the most challenging for librarians. Placement refers to distribution channels -- locations or outlets where the product or service may be obtained. The Internet has changed the landscape of the Placement component. Many librarians interpret "Price" in terms of cost and money, and overlook other Price attributes they can manage. Both Placement and Price are topics for another time.

The marketing mix is dedicated to fostering the exchange process which is the heart of marketing -- people give something of value to receive something they want or need. A marketing mix strategy combines the components to foster exchanges with members of the target market. In other words, each marketing mix component is managed so that it works in tandem with other components, and together the components result in someone purchasing or using the item or service being offered. A marketing mix demands a strategic approach which is dynamic and able to accommodate shifts in competition, target markets, supply and demand, and marketplace innovation.

Promotion Gems

Open Houses For Solo Librarians

Open houses are popular promotion events for librarians to spotlight their library's resources. But how do you hold an open house if you staff a library by yourself, wondered solo librarian Rita Haydar, Manager of the Medical Library at St. Mary Medical Center in Langhorne, PA. Her question

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Haydal, manager of the Medical Library at St. Mary Medical Center in Langhorne, PA. Her question on a library listserv generated the following advice and insights from colleagues in similar situations. We think these comments can help anyone planning an open house.

"... **Can you recruit hospital volunteers [to help]?** They could help serve cookies or answer the phone (if you don't already have a voicemail on your phone) or hand out brochures while you talk to other people. Is hiring a temp for a week an option? These persons could at least be an extra pair of helping hands. Perhaps even the person you report to in the hospital would be willing to come be a "body"- eg. our affiliated hospital reports to Nursing Education (whatever it's called now) and the librarian has trained a few of the nurses on providing basic library support, esp. if she's otherwise occupied."

"... **Perhaps you could put a few local hospital librarian colleagues "on call"** in case you have any rush reference questions or other requests they might be able to help with while you're "on duty" with the open house. You could reciprocate later."

"... **If your hospital has volunteers see if you can get them to help with the specific events,** especially the open house. If there are other local librarians who might be willing to help, or if there is a library school close recruit student help. Do as many things in advance as you can. Keep a to-do list so you can make sure no important detail falls in the cracks."

"... **The library had just moved,** and I wanted to market the new location and the services as well. I knew I couldn't please everyone, so I came up with the idea of giving away a PDA (I bought it, but you may be able to get something from your vendors). I made up a flyer with a few library questions and a place to fill in their name, dept., etc., sent it out via email and also posted and sent to all managers. They were told they needed to get it to the library before the open house. I think I gave them almost two weeks. At least they got to the library, and if it was really impossible to get to the library, I let them mail it to me. It worked out well, and I had a tremendous response."

"...**We held [our open house] each day for a few hours** (if I recall from 10-3). We set up demonstrations of our online card catalog, online journals, databases on the computers and when someone came in, we gave them "the tour". We also did daily drawings for door prizes (gift cards from Barnes and Noble type stuff) and limited the drawings to employees and physicians. We used it to announce our new online catalog. I made Rolodex cards with the Library name and phone number (of which we still have oodles) and passed those out."

"... **I had guessing games with small prizes** (how many interlibrary loans a year, number of nursing titles, jelly beans in a jar, etc.) and raffles for prizes. I put up informational posters with lists of several hundred reference questions I'd been asked in the last year, the names of other organizations with whom we loaned or borrowed items, early photos of the library and staff, life in 1926 (the year the library was founded) etc."

"... **I set the hours up from 2-4 p.m. which overlapped 2 shifts.** The refreshments were a big hit, especially as traditionally the kitchen prepares cookies and fruit punch and I asked for cider and fresh apples (Macintosh and Granny Smith). I got bushels of apples and gallons of cider; there was enough left over to feed an army so I split the remains and sent half to nursing service and half to the nursing home staff for the night shifts. They were very grateful not to be forgotten once again."

"... **I had everybody show up from housekeeping staff to the CEO** and about 1/4 the medical staff, pretty good considering it was during their office hours. Docs got personal invitations in their mail a few days beforehand, flyers went out to departments, posters went up by the cafeteria, outside the library door, and the switchboard announced it every half hour during the actual open house. If I remember correctly we got about 125-130 people and gave away 20 items. The in-house newsletter had pictures and an article. (P.S. We had no rush requests at all, and maybe just a couple of phone calls.)"

"... **I received some excellent hints on open houses from "The Visible Librarian:** Asserting Your Value With Marketing and Advocacy" by Judith Siess " <http://digbig.com/4erck>

Pearls of Wisdom

This month we have two excellent marketing resources for you to tap as you begin drafting plans for 2006.

Washington State Library Marketing Plans

Suzanne Walters alerted us to the status of the Washington State Library state-wide marketing initiative. The plans for the entire endeavor, plus marketing activities and promotion items being used in the initiative, are available on their web site. Regardless of the type or size library you are in, we think you will find inspiration for your own initiatives. Don't overlook the Marketing Toolkit!

<http://www.secstate.wa.gov/library/libraries/projects/marketing/>

Singapore National Library Board Winning Marketing Strategy

This paper outlines the results of a full fledged marketing plan which developed and executed a comprehensive marketing strategy for the National Library Board. This paper is not only an excellent read, but it also illustrates how marketing is a 360 degree management strategy. As we know, marketing is more than promotion and the people who worked on the Singapore National Library Board marketing plans set a fine example of how to do it right. In the paper you will find out "... how the National Library Board had successfully gained market share by redefining its market space and remaking the image of libraries and librarians. Libraries were repositioned to gain mindshare and timeshare among Singaporeans, competing against the cinema, TV, video games and other leisure activities, becoming the Third Place after home and work for many." In our opinion, this is a must read! Gaining Mindshare and Timeshare: Marketing Public Libraries by Dr. N. Varaprasad, Johnson Paul, Lena Kua, In the Proceedings of the SERVIC Research Conference, Singapore (2005). <http://digbig.com/4ercj> (PDF file)

Send The Right Message

Whether you are preparing to speak to a member of the media or to make a presentation to a group of potential library users, "how" and "what" you say will determine the ultimate effectiveness of your communications. During presentations and interviews you are the spokesperson for the library, and what you say impacts the perceptions of your audience. With so much at stake, having an easy-to-scan book of communications tools and reminders at your side can bolster your confidence and keep you pointed in the right direction. "Winning Media Interviews" by Stephen Mongelluzzo fits the bill. Don't be fooled by the title. There's more between the pages than just giving interviews. Message worksheets, evaluation forms, and checklists offer help for all types of communications events. Experienced spokespeople will appreciate the reminders. Novices will welcome the book's insights and advice. Whether you need to speak over the radio or over the company intranet, the tips and pointers in this book are sure to calm the butterflies in your stomach. Winning Media Interviews: Sure-Fire Tactics to Get Your Messages Out (2005)

<http://www.winningmediainterviews.com/>

National Medical Librarians Month

October is National Medical Librarians Month and the Medical Library Association has promotion resources for celebrating. <http://www.mlanet.org/resources/nml-month/2005/index.html>. You'll also find examples of promotions created by libraries, including the McGoogan Library of Medicine, (University of Nebraska Medical Center) "Passport to Information" brochure which received the 2005 Swap and Shop "Best In Show" Prize. <http://digbig.com/4ercm>

Einstein's Big Idea

Want to promote your services this fall? How about observing the centennial of Einstein's famous equation $E = mc^2$. This is an especially attractive theme for scientific and technical information services, as well as for public, school, and academic libraries. NOVA is offering a free library guide in connection with Einstein's Big Idea, a two-hour TV special about the people behind the equation. The program airs on PBS October 11th. The 32-page library guide contains a poster, display sheets, reproducible handouts, and hands-on science activities -- all designed to help people of all ages explore $E = mc^2$. <http://www.pbs.org/nova/einstein>

Help This Marketeer

Do you sell advertising space?

A public library wants to know if other libraries -- public, academic, special -- sell advertising space

in their library newsletters? If you sell advertising space, what are your ad rates and how do you determine them? Do you have a policy about the type of ads you accept and the organizations they represent?

Send your responses to MarketeerSOS@chrisolson.com. We'll compile and publish them in the October issue of Marketing Treasures.

Marketing SOS Lifesavers

Last month Pat Woodworth of the Quincy Public Library was trying to think of promotion ideas that would highlight the services they offer local teachers. Leading off those who offered Pat a lifeline is Debbie Hunt, Senior Information Specialist at the Exploratorium in San Francisco. Debbie writes:

"I work with educators both in person and online and we exhibit every year at educator related conferences where I talk to hundreds, if not thousands, of teachers. Here are the challenges they are facing: -- teaching to the test and to standards -- making do with less (less funding, less prep periods, less help) -- being inundated with too much information (as we all are) -- reaching and teaching students who are from diverse cultural backgrounds whose primary language may be other than English

Here is what they need and want: -- resources they can put right to work in the classroom that are free and easy to implement -- a way to stay current that is painless and costs little or nothing -- incentives to try new things

So, how do you promote the library to educators? (and I wouldn't limit this just to teachers -- think homeschoolers and afterschool program staff such as Boys' and Girls' Clubs)

-- Once a teacher goes home from school, it's pretty hard to get them to go somewhere else, such as the library. The bottom line is that you bring your program to them in their comfort zone. Your best bet is to contact the inservice/professional developers in your school district and ask them if you can give a workshop on your services/resources. They would most likely welcome that and the teachers are already required to attend some of these each school year.

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-- The hook? Some great freebies or door prizes. They love'em.

-- For afterschool programs and homeschoolers, you can also go to their meeting places and do a workshop there.

-- Create webliographies on your library website they can go to and get the best resources. It's important to remember that many educators are drowning, trying to find cool resources that are reliable and current. As we well know, Google is not the answer. We have an opportunity to provide links to the best stuff. (here's one to get you started that I did for a teacher workshop:

<http://www.exo.net/sccoe/index.html>)

-- Lastly, find out what they want. I play tennis with lots of teachers and am always asking them what online and print resources they now use and what would help them in their classroom because I want to be able to provide free cool resources they can easily use as part of my job at the Exploratorium."

(On October 22 Debbie will be leading a workshop "School Librarians = Information Gurus" at the Internet Library conference <http://www.infotoday.com/il2005/preconference.shtml#sunday>)

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Kris Castro from the Marshall Public Library advises:

"1. Teachers are always swamped and have very little time. Take the library to them.

2. Our webmaster is working on an online Assignment Alert where teachers can notify the Reference Dept about upcoming assignments. This way we can be ready (or tell the teacher we don't have enough info) when students arrive and can help them to be more successful. We also know what the teacher really wants.

3. Last month I attended the orientation for Principals at our local school district and gave a short presentation concerning our grant information center (Eastern Idaho Fundind Information Center) because they have just lost their grantwriter. One of the Principals had me then go to her school and give the same presentation to all of her staff. Part of our grant information is online, again saving the teachers time."

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"Invite educators to an "Education -- a Community Effort" event," suggests Cheryl Wardell from the Brealey Library at Sir Sandford Fleming College.

"Invite teachers to visit the library and meet with librarians to learn more about how the library supports the education system's curriculum (i.e., resources, programs, etc.) You could even create a partnership/committee which regularly meets to view and implement new concepts.

This could be opened up to other community service organizations that also support the education system."

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And finally, Linda Elliot writes:

"I am a school LMT and I can tell you that you probably want to coordinate with the school's LMT, arrange a time at noon on the campus, and bring a dog and pony show.

-- Have refreshments--they can be just cookies and coffee or tea, it needn't be fancy. -- Have your brochures ready for the teachers, new patron applications with enough for them to hand out to classes -- If you are planning on offering to come to the school to booktalk/storytell, give a SHORT example of what this will look and feel like. They love that. -- They love freebies or door prizes!

You will have a HARD time convincing them to come to your site, so holding it at their location will make it much more successful."

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Thanks everyone for your great insights and ideas! Need some help with a promotion program? Looking for advice? Want to know what others have done? Send your marketing challenge to "Help this Marketeer" at MarketeerSOS@chrisolson.com.

Golden Opportunities

September 28. Determining & Communicating the Value of the Special Library. A workshop at The South Atlantic Regional Conference (SARC III). In Williamsburg Virginia. Conference also includes presentations on a variety of marketing and communications topics.

<http://www.sla.org/sarc3>

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September 28 -29. Promoting Library Services Using Blogs and RSS. Create a blog for your library, read RSS feeds, and use both to promote library services. Sponsored by Solinet.

<http://digbig.com/4ercn>

September 29. The Creative Librarian: Unlocking the Innovative Organization. A full day institute on creativity and innovation. In Weston, Massachusetts. Sponsored by NELINET.

<http://www.nelinet.net/edserv/institutes/clib.htm>

October 4. Marketing as if Your Library Depended on It. A workshop by Pat Wagner at the MAC/MLA Annual Meeting in Charlottesville, VA.

<http://www.cbil.vcu.edu/mac/events/2005/ce.html#marketing>

October 13. An Introduction to Survey Methodology. A 1 hour audio conference by Lisa M. Given sponsored by The Partnership. <http://digbig.com/4ercp>

October 11-12. Promoting Library Services Using Blogs and RSS. Create a blog for your

library, read RSS feeds, and use both to promote library services. Sponsored by Solinet.

<http://digbig.com/4ercn>

October 14. Branding for Success: Strategies for Information Organizations & Services. An

intensive workshop about strategic branding. In Ottawa. Presented by the University of Toronto Faculty of Information Studies, Professional Learning Centre.

<http://www.plc.fis.utoronto.ca/coursedescription.asp?courseid=192>

October 17. Sell It With Sizzle: 5 Tasty Tips for Technology Programs. A full day workshop

given by Rhonda K. Kitchens. In Orange Park, Florida. Sponsored by NEFLIN.

<http://www.neflin.org/ce/schedules/currentSchedule.pdf>

October 17 & 18. The ABCs and Ds of Marketing "E". Selling Books to Teens. These and

other presentations on marketing topics at the NELA Annual Conference. In Worcester,

Massachusetts. <http://www.nelib.org/conference/attending/program-2005.htm>

October 22. Service Strategy: How to Get the Right "Mix" of Services. Marketing Library &

Information Services: A Practical Approach. School Librarians = Information Gurus. Workshops and sessions at Internet Library 2005, Monterey, CA

<http://www.infotoday.com/il2005/preconference.shtml#sunday>

October 25. Writing for the Web. Sponsored by OCLC CAPCON Center. A half day workshop in

Washington, DC. <http://www.oclc.org/capcon/training/courses/descriptions/l170.htm>

November 4. Market Your Library: Reach Out to Faculty and Students. A workshop by Peggy

Barber and Linda Wallace. Sponsored by the Ontario College and University Library Association. In

Toronto. <http://digbig.com/4ercq>

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Heads up...

November (tbd) Branding 101.

December (tbd) Planning Library Promotion Campaigns.

Morning workshops by Chris Olson. In Washington, DC. Sponsored by OCLC CAPCON. Details forthcoming.

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Are your marketing efforts stuck on the back burner? Time to call Chris Olson!

Whether you need help on a product make-over, logo design, brainstorming sessions, promotion campaign, web site design, communications plans or branding strategies, Chris and her associates are available to lend a helping hand. Call 410-647-6708 or send a note to Chris@chrisolson.com.

All inquiries and projects are held in complete confidence.

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<http://www.chrisolson.com/marketingtreasures/mtcurrent.html>

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