

What Do They Think? Effective Focus Group Research

At one time or another, every library has a need to conduct research on its services and products. When that time arrives, most librarians elect to administer a questionnaire through the mail, collecting non-personal, anonymous responses. While there is nothing wrong with mailed questionnaires, they aren't the research technique of choice when opinions, reactions, and attitudes toward a current or planned library service are sought. This is the first of a two-part article on focus group research for libraries.

What is focus group research?

In marketing research there are two basic classifications of research: 1. *Quantitative research techniques*, which are statistically accurate and usually provide data from a relatively small group representing a large universe of people; 2. *Qualitative research techniques*, which are characterized by focusing on subjective evaluations rather than empirical measurements, and are not intended to be generalized to a large universe of people.

Focus groups are one of several qualitative research techniques used today. A focus group consists of a discussion among eight to ten people about a topic of interest. Following an outline of questions contained in a "Moderator's Guide", a trained moderator leads the discussion.

Focus groups are one of the only research techniques in which the participants are encouraged to interact with each other. Indeed, the successful generation of useful information during focus group research depends on group dynamics. Most people feel more comfortable talking when they are involved in a group discussion. The interaction among members of the group will make people more talkative, owing to the stimulation of listening to the ideas of others.

When can focus group research benefit a library?

There are many uses for focus groups. Here are a few possible library applications:

Identifications of new ideas.

The input generated by a group of people frequently will assist a library searching for a new service or product, new uses for existing products, or new packaging ideas. When you find yourself compiling a questionnaire with questions that ask people "what information service would help you?", then abandon the questionnaire in favor of focus group research. You need an interactive format in order to adequately explore potential information services or modifications to existing products. In addition, comments made during a focus group will help you identify a positioning strategy and promotion program for the service when you "roll it out" (introduce it) to your target market.

Pre-quantitative market research tool.

Librarians can use focus groups to learn the target audience's vocabulary or jargon. Librarians planning to send a questionnaire by mail can hold focus groups to become familiar with the terminology used by target audience members to explain or express library services or products. Use this terminology in the questionnaire to ensure that respondents understand the questions.

Another pre-quantitative research application is the use of focus groups to gain insight into the relative knowledge of the target audience. It might be helpful to learn how familiar the target audience is with a particular library service. This information would be instrumental in designing a mail questionnaire to obtain responses regarding the quality of your service.

Pearls of Wisdom

The results are in from our reader survey! More than 75% of you responded and shared all kinds of valuable insights. For instance, the "hottest" promotion items are brochures, orientation materials and newsletters. Other items included user interest profiles, seminars on using library services, and an annual Christmas Cookie Competition with bottles of wine as prizes. Notes Eileen Foster of Telesat Canada, "President has judged the contest and V.P.s attend. About 300 employees attend."

This and other little tidbits, combined with requests for articles on how others are marketing and promoting their libraries, has convinced us to expand *Marketing Treasures* to a six page newsletter. Starting with the September issue (Volume 2, Number 1), *Marketing Treasures* will include an insert page devoted to profiling various library marketing programs. This extra space will allow us to include additional articles like how a nursing library celebrates National Library Week and gets everyone involved, the marketing approach of an insurance company library, and the marketing plan of a large corporate library. Interviews with people like Eileen Foster will be included to get the details on their marketing "treasures." In addition, illustrations and photographs will be used to help you "see" the concepts explained.

The September issue of *Marketing Treasures* will kick-off our exciting second year. Thanks for completing the surveys and helping to identify these enhancements!

Published bimonthly by Chris Olson & Associates, 857 Twin Harbor Drive, Anneck, MD 21012, 301.847-6708. Copyright 1987 by Christie A. Olson. All rights reserved. No part of the text of this publication may be reproduced in any form, by microfilm, photocopy, or otherwise, or incorporated into any information retrieval system, without the written permission of the copyright owner. Use and reproduction of Cut & Paste Art is limited to subscribers only. Reproducing any portion of *Marketing Treasures* Cut & Paste Art for the purposes of resale in clip art services or other publications, without written permission of the publisher, is strictly prohibited.

Annual subscription price (6 issues) \$45.00 U.S. & Canada. Foreign add \$12.00. Subscriptions must be prepaid, payable to Chris Olson & Associates.

Back Issues: Issues without Cut & Paste Art are \$6.50, issues with Cut & Paste Art are \$7.50 for U.S. and Canada. Foreign orders add \$1.35.

Missing Issues: Please report the nonreceipt of an issue within 30 days of normal receiving date. Missing issues requested after this time will be supplied at the regular back-issue price.

The Special Libraries Association conference's "Marketing Swap and Shop", held in Denver last month, was an enormous success. More than 400 people "shopped" the 20 tables of library promotion samples submitted by more than 30 libraries. Attendees "swapped" promotion ideas with 10 poster session presenters. Your *Marketing Treasures* editor was there to gather all the examples. These, along with samples that many *Marketing Treasures*' readers have sent in, are being compiled into notebooks. The notebooks should be ready for loan to *Marketing Treasures*' subscribers by September. See the next issue of *Marketing Treasures* for borrowing information.

The James River Paper company currently is offering a sample package of their Curtis flannel paper line. If you want a "gray flannel suit" look for your brochure or pocket folder, flannel paper may fit the bill. Write the James River Corporation, Premium Printing Papers Group, 145 James Way, Southampton, PA 18966. Ask for their "Curtis Flannel Writing Celebrates American Enterprise" sample package.

Thinking about sending out a direct mailing or mail questionnaire and wondering if paper color and texture will increase response? The Direct Marketing Association and American Paper Institute pooled their resources and tested different types of response elements. The results are presented in the free publication "Effect of Colored and/or Textured Paper Stock on Mail Promotion" available from the American Paper Institute, Dept. MK, 260 Madison Ave., New York, NY 10016.

Several *Marketing Treasures*' readers received great press coverage in the May 4th *Washington Post* Food Section. Domino's Pizza, Adolph Coors Company, National Restaurant Association, the Food Marketing Institute, and others were noted for information services to the food industry. If you'd like to get an idea of how the local press could write-up your information services, read Carol Sugerman's article "The Biting Question: How Special Libraries Serve the Food Industry" in the Post.

Worth Its Weight in Gold

This issue of *Marketing Treasures* includes your third Cut & Paste library clip-art sheet. The sheet includes original artwork in camera-ready form. Your comments on the reader survey prompted us to change our approach to this artwork. On this clip-art sheet we have included a variety of smaller images that are suitable for your newsletters and brochures. If you would like the first two clip-art sheets from Volume 1, send \$7.50 for each sheet to *Marketing Treasures*.

Office Bound. Many of you liked the cartoon in our last clip art sheet. Here's another you can use to announce or promote any number of outreach library services you might offer.

Ticket. You can use this with or without the words. We have left room at the bottom for your library's name. If you want to be creative, think of a information-service-oriented movie title (like "Invasion of the Project Researchers") and use the tickets to announce a new project support service, or as invitations to an exhibit or demonstration. Reduce or enlarge the ticket size to accommodate your idea.

Borders and highlight squares. Many of you design your own fliers and brochures. Use this border design as an accent bar at the top or bottom of your promotion piece. Use the squares as introductions to paragraphs or as a graphic design element between paragraphs.

Information technology. This image is a nice graphic for that space in your newsletter that needs a visual boost. If you are announcing the introduction of new technology, this artwork will work well.

Telephone, clock, and computer. Use these small graphics in brochures or wherever you want to visually break long columns of text.

Books/Technical Reports. Here are some more of your most-requested graphic image.

Information You Need To Know, The Resource Authorities, Searching for Information. Here are three phrases that draw attention to your information services. The "Authorities" phrase could be treated as a serious graphic or light-heartedly, with pictures and names of your staff.

Editor's Note: *Marketing Treasures* originally came with sheets of library clip art and this column provided ideas on how to use the graphics. The clip art images from *Marketing Treasures* are now available from www.LibraryClipArt.com.

Promotion Gems

The Special Libraries Association (SLA) conference held last month in Denver offered a smörgasbord of programs devoted to marketing library services and products. For those who were unable to attend the conference or missed a program because it was standing-room-only, here are some highlights.

- "Learn how the other half lives." (Gary Lance, *San Jose Mercury News*) Get out of the office and visit with your consumers. Find out how they use information and what information they need today, tomorrow and next month.
- "Glory tales." (Beth Dominianni, Aetna Life & Casualty) Generate news items of good works and words from users. Use your company newsletter to let people know what great things your library has been doing.
- "Coffee and doughnut holes." (Kaycee Hale, The Fashion Institute of Design & Merchandising) Don't forget food and beverages when holding a public relations event.
- "Listen to the customer." (Suzanne Walters, Denver Public Library) Understand the decision-making process of the customer and develop your services accordingly. It may take longer for a service to "catch-on" than you expect.
- "Translate products and services into benefit statements." (R. Bruce Hutton, Ph.D., University of Denver) Identify why, how, and what good things your library product or service offers to consumers, and express those benefits in all communications efforts.

Two products came out of the conference that may be of interest. Kathy L. Horton compiled an excellent bibliography of marketing articles and books. For a copy of her "Marketing Yourself and Your Library Services: A Bibliography," send a self-addressed, 45 cents stamped, 9"x13" envelope to: Kathy Horton, Attn: Market Research Division, Zurich-American Insurance Group, 231 N. Martingale Road, Schaumburg, IL 60196.

Many of the marketing programs were taped at the conference. For a copy of available tapes and order information contact: National Audio Video Transcripts, 250 West 49th St., Suite 401, New York, NY 10019 (Outside NY 800/237-1224. In NY 212/586-1972) Each tape costs \$12.

Sparkling Reviews

Strategic Marketing For Libraries: A Handbook. By Elizabeth J. Wood with assistance from Victoria L. Young, 1988. Greenwood Press, \$37.95 ISBN: 0-313-24405-7.

Finally, here is a book devoted to marketing libraries that goes beyond promotion and selling techniques! The authors have written a comprehensive marketing guide for librarians looking for general marketing principles applied to academic, public, and special library settings. Part I, Library Marketing, provides an overview of marketing management with a wide variety of library application examples. Part II, Library Strategic Planning, presents the integration of marketing into the overall planning process — again with plenty of examples. Each chapter concludes with a comprehensive bibliography. Two appendices present the long-range marketing plans of two public libraries.

Although numerous graphs and tables are used to present information, the overall visual presentation of the book, with its many pages of dense text, is rather overwhelming. More graphics and a larger type size would help readability immensely.

Overall, this book is a welcome addition to the growing body of literature on library marketing. It does a fine job of applying business marketing techniques to library service settings, making it an excellent book for student and practitioner alike.

Focus Groups Continued from page 1

Gathering quick impressions.

Sometimes libraries need information quickly about a specific issue. A mail questionnaire or other quantitative method, while statistically reliable, might require too much time. Conducting a few focus groups is an excellent way to gain a quick feeling for a library's target audiences' attitudes. For example, if you are faced with making a quick decision that will impact your library's services and product offering, hold a couple of quick focus group sessions to get instant feedback on different decision options.

Long-term input.

If you are looking for input or feedback on a long-term library service development project, consider composing an expert panel that you can call upon to help evaluate project progress and direction. As the name implies, expert panels are made up of individuals with training or knowledge that can contribute to service development. This small-scale research technique is just another form of focus group research, but instead of meeting only once, this group meets often and becomes an integral part of a service or product development project.

The success of any focus group depends on its participants, preparations, and environment. The second part of this article will appear in the next issue of *Marketing Treasures*. It will include 10 steps for preparing for a focus group session, including the selection of participants.

The Crystal Ball

July 28 "Marketing the Library: Blueprint for Action". Sponsored by the SLA Illinois Chapter and Mead Data Central. Contact: Carla Owens 312/346-1900.

August 1 - 5 "Budgeting for Middle Managers". Led by Alice Warner at the University of Michigan's School of Information & Library Studies in Ann Arbor. Contact: Joan Durrance 313/764-9376.

September 23 "Fees for Service: State of the Art". Presented by Alice Warner in Kalamazoo, Michigan.

Contact: James Powell, Sr.
616/385-7877.

September 27 - 29 "Design and Development of Promotional Materials". Led by Chris Olson and sponsored by the Western Canada SLA Chapter in Calgary and Winnipeg. Contact: Liz Varsek 403/269-5792.

October 7 "Design and Development of Promotional Materials". Led by Chris Olson and sponsored by the Michigan Health Sciences Library Association in Saginaw, Michigan.

Contact: Lois Huisman
616/774-7624.

November 3 - 4 (?) "Demystifying Marketing Management Strategies". Led by Chris Olson and sponsored by the South Central Library Network in Binghamton, New York. Contact: Chris Olson 301/647-6708.

January 27 - 29, 1989 "Marketing and Public Relations". Led by Chris Olson for the SLA Middle Management Institute in San Francisco. Contact: Kathy Warye 202/234-4700.

ADMIT ONE

Fast • Reliable • Convenient

WE'RE JUST THE TICKET

Editor's Note: Many of the images on this clip art sheet are now available at www.LibraryClipArt.com



18 pt. souvenir bold



INFORMATION
YOU NEED
TO KNOW.

26 pt. friz quadrata

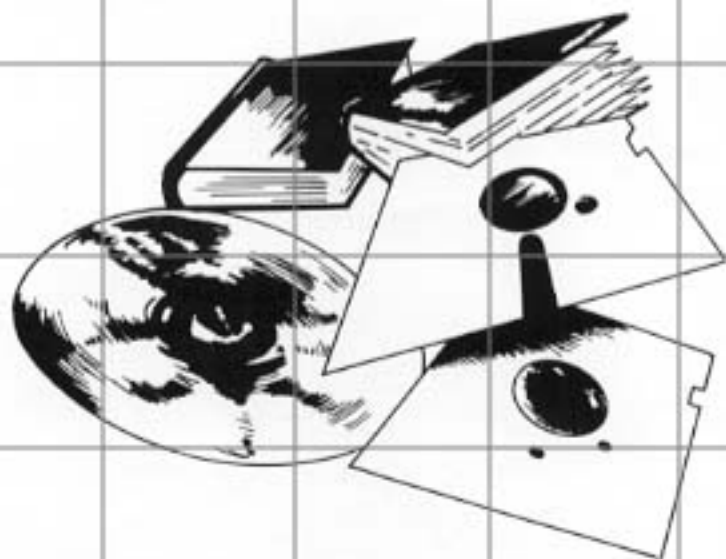


The
Resource
Authorities

30 pt. university roman

Searching for
Information?

36 pt. oracle bold



	Issue	Page		Issue	Page
Associations					
American Library Association (ALA)	1	3	Introducing	2	Art #1
.....	4	1	Invitation	2	Art #1
.....	4	2	Telephone	6	Art #3
.....	5	2	Ticket	6	Art #3
American Association of			We Deliver	2	Art #1
Law Libraries (AALL)	3	2	We Mean Business	4	Art #2
American Marketing Association	5	2	Yes, We Have It	4	Art #2
American Paper Institute	6	2	You're Invited	2	Art #1
Direct Marketing Association	6	2	You're Number 1	4	Art #2
Library Public Relations Council (LPRC)					
Special Libraries Association (SLA)	4	4	Graphic Tools and Supplies		
Authors					
Andreasen, Alan	2	3	Copyscreen	4	3
Bloom, Paul	2	1	Photocopier	4	3
Dominiani, Beth	6	3	Saga Company, source of	4	3
Entrepreneur's Information Center	4	4	Libraries		
Hale, Kaycee	4	4	Aetna Life and Casualty	6	3
.....	6	3	Arnold & Porter Law Library (D.C.)	5	2
Horton, Kathy L.	6	3	Cargill Information Center (MN)	5	3
Hutton, R. Bruce	6	3	Denver Public Library	6	3
Kotler, Philip	2	1	Evans, Sterling C., Library (TX)	2	2
.....	2	3	Fashion Institute of		
Lance, Gary	6	3	Design & Merchandising	6	3
Lambert, Shirley	5	4	Northeast Utilities (CT)	4	2
Mancarella, Michael	5	4	San Jose Mercury News	6	3
Matthews, Judy	5	4	Telesat Canada	6	2
Prentice, Ann	1	2	Texas A&M University	2	2
Schmidt, Janet	3	3	Winners of John Cotton Dana Public		
Virgo, Julie, A.C.	1	2	Relations Award of 1987	1	3
Walters, Suzanne	6	3	Marketing Management Topics		
Wood, Elizabeth J.	6	4	Audit, Marketing	2	1
Young, Victoria L.	6	4	Communication	2	1
Ziethaml, Valarie	5	2	.....	5	2
Awards					
John Cotton Dana Library Public Relations			Costs,		
Award	1	3	Cost/benefit analysis	2	3
.....	4	1	Costing information services	1	2
.....	5	3	Cost recovery	1	2
Law Library Publications Award	3	2	.....	5	3
Bibliographies					
Budgeting and accounting references	1	2	Direct and indirect	1	2
Marketing yourself			Minimizing	3	1
and your library services	6	3	Cutbacks (financial)	3	1
Clip Art Graphics					
Announcing	2	Art #1	.....	4	2
Books	4	Art #2	Databases, promotion of	5	1
.....	6	Art #3	.....	5	3
Books, source of clip art	5	4	Demographic market segmentation	1	1
Border design	2	Art #1	.....	2	1
.....	6	Art #3	.....	3	1
Cartoon (step ahead)	4	Art #2	.....	5	1
(office bound)	6	Art #3	Events, special, planning of	4	1
Clip Art & Dynamic Designs for Libraries			Fee-based information services	1	2
and Media Centers, source of clip art	5	4	.....	4	4
Clock	6	Art #3	Focus Groups	6	1
Computer	6	Art #3	Fundraising	2	2
Computer keys	4	Art #2	Macroenvironment	2	1
Coupon	2	Art #1	Mail questionnaires	4	2
Currency look-alikes	3	2	.....	6	1
Food for Thought	2	Art #1	.....	6	2
Human figures, source of clip art	5	2	Marketing information systems (MKIS)	2	1
Information technology	6	Art #3	Marketing mix	2	4
International library symbol,			Market segmentation	1	1
source of art	4	2	.....	2	1
			.....	3	1
			.....	4	4
			.....	5	1
			Naming products and services	1	2
			.....	5	1

	Issue	Page		Issue	Page
Objectives,					
how to measure achievement of	3	3	Sommer Badge Mfg. Company,		
survey research	1	1	source of	5	2
Online services, promotion of	5	1	Stikybak	4	3
.....	5	3	Swap and shop	3	2
Open houses	3	4	.....	5	3
.....	4	1	.....	6	2
Packaging	3	3	Thayer, source of	1	2
Profession image, promotion of	1	2	3M, source of	5	2
Public relations	1	3			
.....	2	2	Paper Samples		
.....	3	1	American Paper Institute, source of	6	2
.....	5	2	Curtis Flannel paper	6	2
.....	5	3	French Paper Company, source of	2	2
.....	5	3	Gilbert Paper Company, source of	4	2
Qualitative research	6	1	Intergraphix Corporation, source of	2	2
Software tools,			James River Paper Company,		
Salinon Corporation, source of	1	2	source of	6	2
Survey research	1	1	Kimberly-Clark, source of	3	2
.....	4	2	KIMDURA	3	2
.....	5	3	Letterhead, examples	4	2
.....	6	1	Mead Paper Company, source of	5	2
Target marketing	1	1	Recycled paper	2	2
.....	1	3	Special Effects	5	2
.....	3	1	Speckleton	2	2
Task environment	2	1	Strathmore Paper Company, source of	5	2
			Synthetic paper	3	2
Printing			Watermarks	2	2
Thermography, process of	3	2			
Promotion Materials			Recommended Readings		
Brochures	1	3	Clip Art & Dynamic Designs for Libraries and		
.....	2	2	Media Centers	5	4
.....	4	2	Communication & Control Processes in the		
Design, considerations	1	4	Delivery of Service Quality	5	2
.....	2	3	Costing & Pricing Information Services	1	2
.....	3	3	Designer's Guide to Print Production	5	2
.....	5	2	Drexel Library Quarterly	1	2
.....	5	3	Effect of Colored and/or Textured Paper		
.....	5	4	Stock on Mail Promotion	6	2
Christmas Cookie Competition	6	2	Effective Marketing for Service Businesses		
Direct mail	6	2	& Professional Practices	4	4
Evaluation, criteria for	3	3	Image Builders	4	4
Fliers	5	3	Journal of Marketing	5	2
Fact sheets	5	3	Marketing for Nonprofit Organizations	2	3
Folders, pocket	1	2	Marketing Professional Services	2	1
.....	4	2	Marketing the Modern		
Legibility, criteria for	2	3	Information Center	3	3
Library Public Relations Council (LPRC),			One Person Library newsletter	4	2
source for	5	2	.....	5	4
Maps	5	2	Pocket Pal	2	2
Point of Purchase display (POP)	3	4	Print Shop Graphics for Libraries, Vol. 2:		
Rolodex, mini-brochures	2	2	Perpetual Calendars	5	4
Promotional Items			SLA Denver conference tapes	6	3
Amsterdam Printing and Litho,			Step-By-Step Graphics	5	2
source of	1	2	Strategic Marketing for Nonprofit		
Badges	5	2	Organizations	2	3
Buttons	5	2	Strategic Marketing for Libraries:		
Calendars, perpetual	5	4	A Handbook	6	4
Dennison, source of	4	2			
Flags, post it	5	2	Typography		
Fortune cookies	3	2	Clip art	2	Art #1
Full-Color Graphics, Inc, source of	1	2	.....	4	Art #2
Gentle Brothers, source of	4	2	Leading	6	2
Graphics 3 Inc, source of	1	2	Point size	6	2
Holiday promotion sources	1	2	Type, effective use of	2	3
Prudent Publishing, source of	1	2	.....	5	3
Quickcolor Formats	2	2	.....	5	4
Scott, David, Industries, source of	3	2			