

Effective Focus Group Research - Part II

In the last issue of *Marketing Treasures*, focus groups were introduced as effective research tools for libraries seeking to survey opinions, reactions, and attitudes toward current or planned library services. This article concludes here with ten steps for preparing for focus group sessions.

1. Define the Research Project. The first step is to define why you are conducting the research and what information you expect to gain from it. One or two pages should be adequate. It should provide key details including: background, objective, how the information will be utilized, key characteristics of the group participants, and budget. Use this briefing document to ensure that all the people involved with the project agree with its initial design.

2. The Focus Group Process. After all the details of the focus groups have been established, develop a flow chart showing specific timing for each stage of the research process. It should identify all steps and people responsible for conducting the project, thus outlining the process in an organized, systematic manner.

3. Select the Moderator. Moderators are responsible for conducting the sessions. To be effective, the moderator should understand the dynamics of human and group behavior, as well as be impartial participants. Selecting a moderator to lead the group session is an extremely important step, but where do you start? Many personnel departments have professionals who have been trained in group interview techniques. Local colleges may refer you to students and professors as moderators, or you may turn to professional marketing researchers who specialize in moderating groups. Librarians should not conduct focus groups on their own services and products. Even with proper training, a librarian will not get honest responses to questions on their own current service quality.

After an initial briefing of moderator candidates, have each one submit a written proposal on what s/he will do, the costs, and the format of their final report.

4. Brief the Moderator. Once selected, the moderator must be thoroughly briefed about the project. The purpose of this briefing is to get the moderator sufficiently familiar with the materials so that s/he can lead an effective group discussion.

5. Group Profile. With the assistance of the moderator, outline specifics of the research program. Here are some points to consider: Don't attempt to conduct more than three sessions in one day. Between seven to ten people per session is the norm. A comfortable, relaxing environment is best. Identify participant characteristics. Also, define the criteria for the composition of each group.

6. Moderator's Guide. As an outline of the materials to be covered in the group sessions, the guide has a significant role in focus group research. Guides usually are developed by the moderator, with initial drafts reviewed by the library client. The guide covers every aspect of the session — from beginning to end — and includes the questions to be asked and information to be obtained from the sessions. To summarize, the guide provides direction for the moderator during the session.

7. Observers. Many times, librarians and others want to observe the sessions in person. "Who will be invited, if anyone, to observe the sessions?" is a question that should be answered with the assistance of the moderator. Unless they can observe through a remote means, observers often have a detrimental effect on the outcome of the group by intimidating participants. This is particularly true if the sessions are meant to uncover opinions of current library services. Observers usually can be comfortably accommodated in sessions designed to solicit comments on proposed new services or product ideas.

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Pearls of Wisdom

The *Marketing Treasures'* Sample Notebook is ready to go! Filled with more than 75 samples of annual reports, newsletters, brochures, bookmarks, and folders from all types of libraries, this notebook can be borrowed for three weeks by *Marketing Treasures'* subscribers. Send a letter requesting the notebook, along with a phone number where we can reach you, and we'll ship the notebook out via UPS. Since shipping costs vary according to mail zone, borrowers can reimburse us for shipping when they return the notebook. We will use first class mail to ensure Canadian addresses prompt delivery.

You can borrow the winning notebook entries for the 1988 John Cotton Dana Public Relations Award. Call the ALA Headquarters Library at 800/ 545-2433 ext. 338, or write to ALA at 50 East Huron Street, Chicago, IL 60611.

Paper companies have begun flooding the market with special paper for laser printers. The Hammermill Company has issued a very informative folder on laser printing and its mechanics. Included in the folder are samples of their laser paper to try in your printer. To obtain a folder and its samples, write to Hammermill, 6400 Poplar Ave., Memphis, TN 38197-7000 Attn: Judith Black. Ask for "Introducing Hammermill Laser Print."

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Sometimes finding and buying laser printer paper, or any paper, in small quantities is difficult. To solve that problem you can rely on PaperDirect, a company that specializes in supplying small quantities of paper. They carry select papers from Hammermill, Strathmore, James River, and Crane. Call your local printer for a price quote on a ream (500 sheets) of paper and then check PaperDirect's price. I think you'll see a savings. For a catalog call 800/426-8765 or write PaperDirect, 57 Romanelli Avenue, South Hackensack, NJ 07606.

If you're looking for something different for your next promotion piece, consider holography. It's expensive, but eye-catching! Regal Press has a brochure describing their hologram offering. Be sure to send your request on company letterhead so that you also receive free samples of their work. The Regal Press, 129 Guild St., Norwood, MA 02062.

The Michigan Library Association (MLA) is actively supporting marketing and public relations activities in their region. At this year's Fall Conference there will be a Swap 'n Shop and a conference program entitled "Public Relations Through Public Service." The MLA Executive Board recently approved a petition to form a caucus focusing on public relations activities in libraries. The Marketing and Public Caucus will have its first official meeting at the October 12-14 conference to be held in Dearborn, Michigan. For additional information, contact Ken Miller at the Detroit Public Library, or call the MLA office at 517/694-6615.

Here are some tips on using color effectively from *The Colour Handbook* by E.P. Danger, (Gower Publishing Co.). Blue works for displays because it doesn't clash with the products displayed. Orange is appealing to younger people. Don't use bright red on a brochure if you want to project an image of stability. Gray conveys a dignified image and is pleasing to the eye, but it can be a depressing color when used too much. Bright colors make a package look larger, while muted colors do the opposite. Use red, orange, or yellow to attract attention.

For a concise review of public relations and marketing activities in libraries during 1987, read the *Public Relations* essay by John Eldredge in the *ALA Yearbook of Library and Information Services '88*, pages 259 - 264.

Worth Its Weight in Gold

Your letterhead is your library's calling card. It represents your services in your absence, reflecting the value and quality of service to your customers. Specifying the paper for your library's stationery is an important decision. Working along with your logo, design, and ink colors, paper impacts the image you project.

Fine letterhead paper is composed of cotton fiber or rag, as opposed to lesser-quality paper made from wood pulp. The more cotton fiber, the more substantial the sheet of paper feels in your hands.

Fine writing papers come in three finishes — smooth, vellum, and cockle. The smooth finish is flat and compact. Vellum presents an elegant surface similar to an egg shell, while a cockle finish on paper adds crispness and feels like handmade paper.

The higher the percentage of cotton fiber in the paper (as indicated in the watermark) the finer the quality of the sheet. Cotton fiber paper is available in 25%, 50%, 75%, and 100% cotton content.

Cotton makes paper durable and long-lasting. That's one reason why all U.S. paper currency is printed on 100% cotton fiber paper.

Paper comes in different weights which are known as basis weights. The basis weight describes what a ream of 500 sheets of paper weighs in a standard size. Letterhead papers usually come in 20-24 pounds basis weight.

If you want your stationery to have a sharp, crisp snap to it — and most executives who receive letters on paper with this sound are impressed with it — and a substantial feel, then you should consider a paper with a high cotton fiber content. Cotton paper may cost a little more than wood pulp paper, but the impression it will leave with your customer will be worth its weight in gold.

Note: Cotton fiber papers are made by most paper manufacturers including Crane, Gilbert, Strathmore, and James River. Call your local paper distributor if you would like more information on paper selections.

Promotion Gems

Establishing a visual identity for your library requires consideration of a number of important elements. When strategically integrated, these elements can form your library's visual image. An important component of your library's visual image is the graphic design that represents your library — the logo.

Logos can be unique symbols — like the NBC peacock — or they can be logotypes — words written in a special typeface. If you are working on a visual image that uses typography to convey a message, you should realize that variations in type can change the meaning of a word or slogan.

Let's take the words "we mean business" — a popular slogan for business information services. Using a typeface with rounded letters will yield a friendly image. Using upper and lower case letters softens the words and makes them easier to read, but detracts from the slogan's punch.

WE MEAN BUSINESS We Mean Business

If too much of a curve is applied to the letters, they become so decorative that the entire message of the slogan is negated by its visual image.

We Mean Business

To make a powerful visual statement, strong, straight letters could be used. In lower and upper case, this typography projects a believable, persuasive message — the service is straightforward and accessible.

We Mean Business

Using the same type, but in heavy bold-faced uppercase letters, changes the message, yet again, making it visually powerful.

WE MEAN BUSINESS

When working with type, be sure to explore a variety of type styles, sizes, and weights. Recognizing and understanding the impact of each of these elements on your typography design will help you achieve the visual message you seek for your logo or slogan.

Sparkling Reviews

Pricing: Concepts and Methods for Effective Marketing by Andre Gabor. Second edition. Grower Publishing, 1988. \$65.00 ISBN: 0-566-02703-8

All types of libraries are beginning to grapple with the issue of charging fees for their services and products. What a library charges is one of the most important elements of its marketing mix. This is one of the few textbooks that addresses price as a marketing tool.

The book is divided into two parts. Part I reviews existing pricing practices, while Part II shows how customer attitude and behavior can be explored and the results applied to new and established products and services. This second edition includes case studies and new material on inflation pricing.

The basic content of the book is excellent and provides the reader with a good understanding of what goes into setting prices. Unfortunately, the author approaches the topic like an academic, and it takes some effort to wade through some of the text. Since the author is British, all the pricing examples are in British pounds.

If you currently charge for your library's services or are contemplating taking the plunge, this book should prove to be a valuable introduction and reference tool. Just don't try reading it after a long day in the library!

Focus Groups Continued from page 1

8. Focus Group Report. At the conclusion of the focus group sessions, the moderator typically provides a report summarizing results of the sessions. Depending on what arrangements have been made between the

client library and moderator, the report can be an oral briefing, a summary report presenting the most important information generated from the sessions, or a detailed report — between 20-30 pages — that reviews the logistics, presents the moderators interpretations, and includes verbatim quotes from participants.

9. Costs. The cost for the moderator is usually the most expensive element of focus group research. Professional moderators usually charge between \$250 to \$1000 per focus group session. This cost typically includes preparation of the moderator guide, briefings, and conducting the actual session. Many moderators price the report as a separate cost element, based on the type of report required and on the number of sessions conducted. Other cost considerations for focus group research include participant recruitment costs, facilities, refreshments, and taping equipment.

10. Ethics. There are ethical issues between moderator and focus group participants that need to be clarified. Inform participants if the session is being taped, and how the tape will be used. Tell participants if anyone is observing and explain the observer's role. If you are conducting the groups to solicit ideas, state that the ideas raised by participants are the property of the library or sponsor. Participants should be informed that it is their responsibility to provide honest responses — what they believe, not what they think the moderator wants to hear. Participants also should be cautioned not to discuss the content of the session with others. Ensuring session confidentiality will encourage honest responses.

*Note: Some of the concepts presented in this article were derived from *The Practical Handbook and Guide to Focus Group Research* by T. Greenbaum, D.C. Heath and Company, 1988. It is the best book on the subject, and is available for loan to *Marketing Treasures*' subscribers.*

The Crystal Ball

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.

October 13 "Public Relations Through Public Service: Developing a Service-Oriented Staff". Presented by Margaret Auer at the Michigan Library Association Conference in Dearborn, Michigan. Contact: MLA 517/694-6615.

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.

February 10 "Marketing Management for the Information Professional". Led by Chris Olson and sponsored by the Florida Chapter of Special Libraries Association in Gainesville, Florida. Contact: Pam Williams 904/392-0417.

From Company Library to Corporate Information Center: The Aetna Information Service Marketing Story

by Beth Dominianni, Administrator Corporate Information Services Aetna Life & Casualty

Our story began in the early 1980s with the need to change our image. Back then the Corporate Information Center (CIC) was thought of as a nice quiet little place to come to read a newspaper or perhaps get a simple question answered.

This image did not match our vision. We wanted to be seen as a resource for the corporation that offered a valuable service. To change our image, we learned marketing skills and developed promotional pieces that encouraged Aetna employees to use our information services.

Background

Today, the Aetna CIC is a three-part system. The "main" CIC is housed in the Aetna Institute for Corporate Education. Its primary customers are employees from Aetna's personal and casualty insurance product divisions. This center also serves the corporate technology and administration areas, medical personnel, and the public affairs division.

Our second location serves the employee benefits division, and a third center provides financial information.

Getting the Marketing Program Started

In 1984 we opened our three new CIC facilities. We knew that announcing exciting opening events was a good way to reach employees and let them know about our services.

We identified "Reachable Research" as our communications theme. We chose a blue and green color scheme, selected from readily available printing ink colors. We designed a brochure, mailing envelope, and bookmark. The pieces tied together into a total marketing package and reflected our conviction that our centers were an integrated company-wide resource.

CIC
Aetna's Corporate Information Center
Information Services for Aetna Employees

REACHABLE RESEARCH

SELF-DEVELOPMENT
COMMUNICATION
MANAGEMENT
TECHNOLOGY
ACCOUNTING
ECONOMICS
PERSONNEL
EDUCATION
INSURANCE
FINANCE

Aetna Institute
FOR CORPORATE EDUCATION

Updating the Marketing Program

In 1986, we felt the need to reintroduce our services to Aetna employees. Unfortunately, our budget would not permit a new brochure and mass mailing. Instead, we decided to target our promotion message to those who were not making full use of our services.

This time our promotion tool was a poster. It was a low-cost item that could reach everyone. Aetna maintains bulletin boards throughout all buildings, so posters promised to be effective. We created a promotion theme to entice people to come see what we were all about: the new hook . . . The CIC Can!

The poster proudly proclaims that "no library can meet this business agenda." The theme reflected the image that the CIC was research-oriented and responsive to business information needs. We were no longer the quiet little library of the early 1980s.

Complementary Marketing Tools

In addition to brochures and posters, we consider

Using Aetna's in-house printer, writers, and artists kept our overall costs to about \$3,000.

We distributed our brochure through the Aetna mail system to ensure that each of the 12,000 employees received one. The response was positive — referencing the brochure as their starting point, customers called the CIC with questions about our services.

everything we produce to be a marketing tool. For example, we produce a quarterly newsletter using our Macintosh and desktop publishing software (Pagemaker). We use the newsletter to highlight databases, advertise information products, relate tales

No library could meet this business agenda:

- Database Searching
- Market Research
- Self-Paced Education
- Extensive Business Periodical Collection
- Interface with 2,000 Information Centers Country-wide
- Individualized Research



of how we helped meet business needs, reinforce our locations, and much more.

Another marketing tool has been created through presentations about CIC services and products to groups of Aetna employees. For example, 800 supervisory and managerial level employees recently attended an Aetna education fair where we had a booth for two days. We described our services, handed out prepared bibliographies, and conducted on-line demonstrations. Attendees, in their written comments, appreciated our product reviews and service descriptions.

Last year, we sent a marketing letter to carefully selected level managers. We targeted two major divisions, addressing those whose staff used our services, but could use us more. Names were obtained by talking with individuals knowledgeable about their divisional information needs and politics. Did it work? Extremely well in one division where the response, measured by inquiries, was over 60% of those we targeted!

Today's Image

I'd wager that our services are not much different than those of most of my fellow readers of *Marketing Treasures*. But the information services we provide today are fairly new to our company. Our marketing and promotion methods are part of our overall commitment to customer service.

"I used the CIC for information needed to convince a prospective client . . . and Aetna got a valuable foot in the door . . ." CIC Customer Testimonial

Since embracing a marketing mentality eight years ago, the increase in visibility and business has been significant. I believe that publicizing our services has had a major impact on

"bringing customers through the door" and on allowing customers to feel comfortable when asking for help. An increase of over 240%, measured in questions answered in the past five years, is something we feel pretty good about!

But while there is no escaping the fact that numbers are important, service is still more important. Lately, the CIC staff has been collecting "glory tales" and inviting feedback to document the impact of our service on the corporation. Our new brochure, due to appear this fall, includes this quote from a product development director. "On a recent project, the CIC was exceedingly helpful, providing more information than I thought was out there — they were right on the money!" Clearly, all our work to change our image has been worth it.

This article was excerpted from Beth's presentation for the Insurance and Employees Benefits Division session at the Special Libraries Association Conference, June 1988. Beth would be happy to talk with Marketing Treasures' readers who have questions about her marketing program. Beth can be reached at 203/727-4318.

If you have a marketing story or tip that you'd like to share with *Marketing Treasures'* readers, call me at 301/647-6708.

Chris Olson
Editor/Publisher