Potential e-book news hooks for use with local media

In the constantly shifting landscape of digital content, there are many opportunities to reach out to media to communicate library engagement with e-books and 21st century services, including the barriers and opportunities we face in best meeting community needs.

There is a lot of possible ground to cover. Research from the Pew Internet Project in June 2012, for instance, tells us that a majority of library card users (and nearly two-thirds of the general public) are unaware that libraries offer e-books to their patrons. Many people also expressed interest in checking out e-reading devices and receiving instruction in how to use these devices and download library-brokered content. As more informational, education and recreational resources move online and new devices and applications are introduced, the role of librarian as expert navigator and guide becomes more important in helping ensure no one is left behind in the digital age.

Listed below are just a few “hooks” you might use with local media to tell your digital content story. Let us know if you have success with one of these – or came up with your own that you’d like to share – by emailing dcwg-input@ala.org. For more tips on working with news media, check out the Communications Handbook for Libraries. For more ideas tied to using data from the Pew Internet Project, go to the Additional Data Resources section of the toolkit.

Awareness

- Make sure your local media knows when you begin to offer or expand your offerings of e-books. Encourage community members to get their library card and use it online – as well as in person – to download e-books and other digital content. In this case, your headline might read: “XYZ library launches new e-book service.” Place e-books in a larger context for 21st century library services, as appropriate:
  - Today’s public libraries are thriving technology hubs that millions rely on as their first or only choice for Internet access and digital content.
  - Libraries are vital links in the chain to connect people with the information access and critical resources they need to support employment, e-government, education and lifelong learning.
  - Libraries are more than repositories – we are community centers, maker spaces and even publishers. We are digitizing our own content, as well as supporting self-expression through such spaces as Sacramento Public Library’s Community Writing and Publishing Center.

- Share information about public interest in and use for your digital content offerings. Provide an update after six months, a year or other benchmark when you’ve seen increased use. How about sending a news release when you hit your 1,000th (or 10,000th) circulation? What are your patrons telling you about the service?
• Announce classes or instruction available to patrons to learn how to download e-books and use new e-reader devices. This “hook” can work particularly well in December and January as many people may buy or receive new e-readers over the holiday season.

• Produce a weekly (monthly or quarterly) “most circulated” list of e-books available at the library. Or, another approach might be to highlight titles that are readily available (no wait list) or haven’t circulated as often but are former bestsellers, were critically praised and/or might be of interest to a niche audience. This kind of approach would aid discovery of books and authors, while also boosting circulation of a wider range of offerings. Make sure this list also is prominently available to web visitors.

E-book restrictions and challenges
• Conduct a current price comparison looking at the top-selling consumer e-books: what is available to consumers at what price compared with what is available to libraries at what price? Douglas County Libraries was among the first libraries to conduct this analysis, which you can find at the Evoke website: http://evoke.cvlsites.org/. Be aware, though, that any non-disclosure contracts you may have signed with vendors may limit what you may publicly share. If this is the case at your library, you may choose to reference Douglas County Libraries’ model (see the press release template in this toolkit) and discuss the deterioration of purchasing power in the digital age.

New opportunities
• Highlight libraries’ roles in supporting a healthy ecosystem of reading and writing. Did your library participate in National Novel Writing Month (NaNoWriMo) or do you offer classes on writing? Does your library support self-published authors and/or small or independent presses? This is a growing trend among libraries, and might be a great story for your community.

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