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**Marketing a City Library in the
Face of Negative Attitudes**

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Marketing a City Library in the Face of Negative Attitudes

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Abstract

Marketing research was employed to understand the shortcomings of an underutilized city library. It was then used to build an integrated marketing campaign for a ballot initiative to build a new city library to unite public and private actors. Secondary literature and focus group research with residents of diverse urban neighborhoods were analyzed to shed light on the experience of library space by city residents. Results showed that residents were concerned by the limited hours for special programming, unsavory characters surrounding the existing library, and an outdated public building. Further complicating the issue was a perception the library had become outdated by new information technology. These concerns were incorporated into a multi-media campaign to promote a ballot initiative to fund a new, state-of-the-art urban library. The campaign work included education, communication and publicity – power point presentations to community groups, print flyers and other educational materials to promote the benefits of a new library, distributed through door-to-door communication, and local media. This research-driven campaign is a case study to showcase how integrated marketing communications can be used to address public concerns and misunderstandings to the benefit of the community. In Fall 2011, the city mill levy passed, despite a national political climate of anti-taxation efforts. Construction of the new library is underway.

Keywords:

Corresponding Author:

Introduction

The community effort described here was spearheaded in a city with a history of conservative voting patterns opposing funding for public services, and amidst a cultural bias perceiving the existing public library to be an unsafe, dirty, and obsolete place. A prior mill levy to fund a new library had failed in 2002 due to perceived fire safety violations, limited public advertising to promote the initiative, and a general lack of perceived benefits among voters. In 2010-2011, the city's library board launched a professional marketing and fundraising campaign (initiated by a \$2 million private donation) with the hopes of success. The new library would incorporate new technology in innovative ways to assist child learning, job skills development, virtual lending and e-reading, and much more. Plans for new cultural programming and a reconstruction of the immediate vicinity were intended to both reduce crime and dispel perceptions of the area as unclean and unsafe. In order to fund this project, however, city voters would have to pass a ballot initiative to support it. Hence, the library board recruited university researchers and public policy advocates to develop a multi-media campaign to galvanize public support.

Background

Successful Library Campaigns

There have been many successful library campaigns. Princeton Public Library, New Jersey (Burger and Garrison, 2006) was constructed in April, 2004. The campaign offered the community a vision of what a city library for Princeton should represent and asked for their input, rather than propose a rigid design. The designers developed an easy-to-understand master plan, including preliminary drawings of the building and the surrounding site. The team's flexibility allowed it to incorporate changes throughout the development. The campaign worked closely with community, including those opposed to the project and / or different elements of it, always aiming to build consensus rather than to push the plans through.

The Flint Public Library, Michigan (Hendrix, 2000) was running out of money and their millage proposal passed 79 percent to 21 percent. Primary and secondary research methods were used to develop campaign strategies. Over 128 Michigan Libraries had asked property owners for support and 98 had received it. Most efforts included direct contact with targeted voters. There were continued writing letter after letter to the local newspaper editor in support to the library. A simple key message ('Don't Close the Book on the Flint Public Library') and reinforced it in every written and broadcast communication.

Maryland's Public Library, (Baykan, 2006) have been successful in getting major funding legislation through the Maryland General Assembly from 2004 to 2006. Their polling campaign cost \$57,500, but generated \$35 million in new state funding. The results showed the library already had positive images

and ranked at the top of local public services including police and public safety, social service, parks, and local government efficiency.

Their goal was to impress upon the state delegates and senators how much their constituents used and valued their public libraries. While the library directors were busy taking care of the home front, members of the legislative panel made strategic appointments with the governor's chief of staff and with the leadership in both the House and Senate.

Dempsy (2009) pointed out that referendums under \$10 million have an 85% success rate. This was as of 2007 but a different predicted economy will make it harder. Because, voters are more and more unaware of activities that libraries contribute, and there is a higher number of substitutes. You have to build a case that syncs with voters desires.

Justification of study and implementation

The new library endeavor also suffered a stigma associated with the failure of the previous bond initiative, an ongoing economic hardship and fear of additional taxes among strong opponents within the community.

Shortcomings of the old library were plentiful. Technology within the library was outdated and had limited availability. Even though a citizen opinion survey (Gazette Opinion, 2011) revealed strong support (80%) for keeping the library near its present location in downtown Billings, the old library building was not up to code and was not ADA compliant. The old facility was difficult to maintain and had inadequate meeting spaces. It did not stand out as a transformative part of our infrastructure or add to our community vitality.

In order to promote the ballot initiative to raise the funds for a new building, the new library effort set several objectives for their campaign.

- Increase awareness of purpose and plan for new library.
- Increase perceived benefits of a great city library.
- Increase positive associations with new library-create personal ownership.
- Reduce perceived roadblocks to funding the new library.
- Shift probable supporters to sure supporters.

Political Efficacy and Messages

It is very difficult to get an entire community to support a ballot initiative. Dyck & Lascher, (2009) argued there is little reason to expect a positive relationship between ballot initiative usage and efficacy...messages are more likely to have efficacy among particular subsets of the general population, such as more informed voters. And yet, the more ballot initiatives are used in communities, the more informed voters have become. Smith and Tolbert (2004) said, 'We find strong evidence that citizens living in states with frequent use of direct democracy are more likely to claim that government is responsive to their needs, controlling for other factors.'

The American National Election Study (ANES) has asked questions since 1988, using 1992 ANES data, Bowler and Donovan (2002) shows that direct

democracy is related to internal efficacy, or the belief that you are informed and can make good decisions. External efficacy is a person's view of the responsiveness of government. Converse, (1972) was the first to suggest the difference between internal and external efficacy. The first is the individual's self-perception that they are capable and competent enough to participate. The second is if they believe that political institutions will or will not respond. For the Billings Library research, the goal was to increase internal efficacy for participation and external for confidence that it will be handled correctly.

Gerber & Phillips (2003) said that voters feel about issues based on group cues and public good. Self-interest is different than group interest. Support of interest groups to issues has a positive relationship to overall support. The Foundation in Billings felt it was important to get the support of teachers, students, and overall library supporters.

Bourhce (2010) said women's engagement and knowledge increases with descriptive representation. There is self- identity and group identity. The self identifies their most important identity such as, 'Am I a woman or am I black?' Or they identify themselves within groups such as environmentalists, or evangelists. Party attachments are high when both identities are high. More than 48% of evangelicals identify with Republicans. People with a higher education are less likely to attach to a party and will vote on issues. Women, minorities and evangelicals are less likely to think like this. And evangelicals and Republicans are less likely than higher educated in how they cognitively engage. But these groups are overall very politically engaged. Older more educated are also more politically engaged. If they have high external efficacy they are less likely to engage as they have faith in the government to handle everything. Yeich & Levine(1997) said that external efficacy is a component of critical awareness. You need both for mobilization. Collective political efficacy is important to the construct of overall efficacy.

According to Docherty & Ranan (2001), neighborhoods with high levels of social capital are usually higher educated, and often more politically active. Participation in governance is influenced by how well political institutions are organized and responsive. Poorer areas have a strong sense of family and belonging but less trust for the institutions to respond. This group can be reached if you emphasize achieving improvements in education and long term benefits of engagement. Social capital is a sense of belonging to your neighborhood and it is higher if you really like your environment, and arises from social networks and interaction, and is represented by a sense of trust.

And when it comes to the development of message to reach those connected to the issue, Murphy (2006) says that construction of a negative message is easier than a positive message. Negative arguments personalize the costs while Positive arguments are more complex as they emphasize the benefits to a larger community. **Yes** words are only, million and less. **No** words are over, every, and millions. Support initiatives use longer words, are more difficult to read and are written for a higher education. This group responds to Our, We, and Public.

Secondary Research Understanding the Market

For the 2011 Yellowstone County election, the county elections office expected between 25,000-28,000 voters meaning that a victory of 51% of votes would be 12,500—14,000 votes. A quantitative nation-wide survey (De Rosa et al, 2003) was used to determine behavior-oriented segments with identifiable demographics and voting habits. The market analysis revealed the following voter segments:

- *Likely Voters* are between the ages of 36-65 with children under 18.
- *Probable Supporters* are 32.3% of the market and can be divided into *Just for Fun, Kid Driven, Library Office, Greater Good, and Look to Librarians*
- The *Super Supporters* are 7% of the total.
- The rest are either *Barriers or Non Voters*.

Probable supporters were expected to see the library as an important asset to the community and are willing to increase taxes to fund it. They would appreciate the library's contribution to the greater good. They would recognize that the research and information provided by the library is superior to the information available on the web and that not everything is currently available on the Internet. They believe that the library plays an important role in children's education and feel the library is an important asset to the community

- Of these supporters, the *Just for Fun* segment come from low-income households and are less well-educated, single, blue-collar workers, and non-white ethnicities. They use the library more than any other segment (36 visits a year). For them, the public library ranks in third place (49%) after fire and police department. They are the heaviest users but the least likely of the *Probable Supporters* to vote to fund the library.
- The *Kid Driven* segment is most likely to have at least one child in the household visit the library more than average with 19 visits reported annually. They see the library as a valuable resource for children of all ages and the role of the librarian. 48% claims that they would definitely vote 'yes' in a library referendum, ballot initiative or bond measure.
- The *Library as Office* segment considers the library an extension of the workplace. They are more likely to be business owners and they take advantage of the library's technology and other resources to conduct work. Half would definitely vote positively for a library referendum and they visit on average 18 times annually.
- The *Look to Librarians* have a deep appreciation of the value of the librarian in providing services and research expertise. They see the library as a place where they can better themselves

intellectually and feel like they belong and visit the library almost twice as much as the average for all voting respondents. They are the only segment to rank libraries first in comparison to other public services

- *Greater Good Segment* uses the library infrequently with only 4.5 visits a year, its members believe that the library plays an important role in serving the needs of the community and can be a great source of pride. They are involved in their communities, participate in local organizations and charities and follow the news about local events & politics. They are the least opposed to tax increases of any Probable Supporters segment and 50% of voters would definitely vote yes in a library referendum.

The *Super Supporters* segment sees the library as a place where they can better themselves and become the people they always wanted to be. They hold the librarian in high regard and recognize the value that librarians bring to the research process. They have a slightly greater than average for all voting respondents as they use the library to feed their voracious reading habits and to recommend children. They are the most informed segment about local civic matters are influential and well-known in the community. Supporters recognize the library's contribution to a successful community. They believe the library transforms lives, including their own.

Qualitative analysis from the same study show that Probable Supporters and Super Supporters felt that support for libraries can be improved by increasing the public's attention to four essential community benefits that the public library uniquely delivers; 1) Equal access 2) Shared community values 3) A scared place 4) Community Stature. The findings of the focus groups strongly suggest that any marketing and advocacy program aimed at increasing library funding till need to frame library funding in both value and economic(i.e., tax) terms.

In summary, library funding behavior is driven by attitudes and beliefs, not by demographics. The more that can be learned about library perceptions, the better the chances of constructing a successful library support campaign to improve library funding. A library support campaign targeted at voters in the top two segmentation tiers has a much higher likelihood of success in increasing the percentage of yes votes than a campaign that attempts to reach the broader population. The degree to which the public library was perceived as transformational is significantly higher among the most committed funding supporters. Belief that the library is a self-actualization tool is directly related to level of funding support, leveraging the perception of the library as a transformational force for both individuals and the community is a powerful motivator. And, library support is also only marginally related to visitation.

As a result of this analysis, the strategy became to make sure the super supporters voted, to target swing voters to vote yes, and to not communicate at all with the barriers. As non-voters were often identified with library supporter demographics in the *Fun Category*, the strategy would also reach out to them.

These targets were also geographically located in certain residential ward indicating that a grass roots or door hanger/direct mail effort was essential. Also, the message for swing voters to become likely voters would be most effective as a result of increased education regarding: Building does not meet codes -- 91% strongly agreed, Not ADA compliant --94% strongly agreed, Current cost of maintenance vs. cost of new building ---82% strongly agreed, and Community vitality – 58% strongly agreed.

The message for likely voters would be most effective if it focused on: Moving brand identity from informational qualities to transformational qualities, Part of the Future, A Necessity, and Equality and Democracy

Methods

Procedure

Formative focus groups were used by marketing students at Montana State University Billings to draft creative message concepts and strategies.. While developing the creative messages, volunteers were recruited to participate in pre-test focus group discussions. The recruitment was attempted within the range of target audiences between 30 and 65 years from east, west, and south areas in Billings, based on the information of swing voters for the library campaign from Management Information Systems at MSUB.

Billings' voters declined to pass a levy for a new downtown library building in 2002. Despite their successful PR campaign focusing on informing necessity of a new library by showing numerous fire safety violations through a video and inspection tours, voters rejected a mill levy that would have funded replacement of the library. *American Libraries Magazine* published in March 2003 indicated that the campaign failed to get voter's approval because the city council placed the library mill levy on the ballot too late, when the library promoters no longer had enough time for fundraising and campaigning. Also, the economic situation and other local issues obstructed the project. A teachers strike authorized shortly before the election created concerns about other needs for tax dollars. In addition, low voter turnout was one of likely impediments of failure of the library project. In January, before starting work with the focus group discussions, the moderators hesitated to get into an old building because of homeless people loitering about an entrance. Inside, more homeless people were sleeping or talking to each other every nook and corner. Such a visit encouraged the moderators to more thoroughly and completely conduct research, including focus group discussions because of a sense of urgency that a new library should be certainty.

As a theoretical framework, a health educational theory, Witte (1992) Extended Parallel Process Model, was applied to identify the campaign objectives and analyze the results. Three formative focus group discussions were conducted with 'swing voters' between 24 and 57 ages in Billings in February.

Most participants had a negative perception of the existing city library, and they did not frequently use the current public library even though they lived or worked nearby. Specifically, they believed that community or residents will not suffer from absence of a new library because they do not feel inconvenient even if they do not use the current library. Also, they thought internet service and book stores can replace with the public library services and the library has essentially disadvantage of cost benefits like owning a video store, especially increasing information superhighway will provide people with functions and benefits beyond the library's services. In addition, they mentioned that the current library has many barriers to solve problem of the public library: inconvenient or uneasy access due to one-way street system and inadequate parking lots, lack of safety, and uncleanness.

Nonetheless, participants gave a positive message that they would not feel a mill levy to be an excessive burden. Such results meant that people's beliefs about the seriousness of the threat (old library) outweighed the gravity of a threat posed by a new tax. However, people's belief in the library's ability to perform recommended responses (providing needed services) was low (response efficacy). Accordingly, researchers concluded that the library campaign message had to increase perceived response efficacy high by showing accessibility, convenience, shared community values, sacred place, and community stature regarding a new library.

Results

Summary of Results of Formative Research of Swing Voters

Table 1 reveals the results of swing voters in terms of their perceived efficacy threats. Self-efficacy reveals that you think you can make a difference. Response captures the extent to which people think a solution to the problem will work. Both the perceived threat of not having a new library and a new tax were low. People believed they and the community wouldn't suffer from the absence of the library or from a new tax. However, response and self-efficacy were equally low. People did not believe they would take advantage of a new library, if it were built. Nor did they believe the solution (new library) would solve the problem (unsafe downtown, irrelevant services, etc.).

Creative Development

The marketing strategy was to create and promote a brand, not a library product brand focused on marketing library consumption. Table 2 is a model to determine the actual value to the community, or the Means End Chain Conceptual Advertising Strategy. The matrix focused on the issues raised in research as well as understanding the need for a transformational. The resulting values were used to develop Figure 1, the Perceptual Map, focusing on how to move two segments of voters who were unlikely, and why they were unlikely, to likely voters. One segment of voters believed in the transformational nature for the community but did not want to pay more taxes.

Their message would focus on economic value. The other segment did not mind raising taxes but was not sure of the need. Their message would focus on the dynamic new nature and benefits of the library. The resulting Brand Positioning Statement was:

‘Voting for the new library supports a fiscally responsible plan to fund a technically and economically advanced beautiful new facility that will bring exciting opportunities to Billings.’

Slogans to Test for communicating Brand Statement

A Bridge Beyond Books

Know to Grow

A New Chapter in Billings History

Creative Brief

The efficacy of a new library as a solution is low and the threat of a new tax for the library is low, therefore the message must include information portraying: Straight forward and factual material, Include actual costs and building rendering, The technical advancements and economic savings, The needed use for the community, Include core values and pride for the community, Include an inspirational tone, including beauty, stature, history and harmony of community events

Creative Testing

In March 24 and 30, a second round was conducted to pre-test focus group discussions with the creative messages to elicit reactions. The messages were presented through 4 newspapers, 3 TV PSA scripts, and 3 slogans. The messages were tested for audience liking, perceived benefits and barriers, and attitudinal changes with regards to support for the library mill levy. The focus group discussed the main topic and concept for every message and chose favorite and least favorite message. Table 3 reports the results leading to more specific direction of creative messages was developed. Participants wanted to read or see simple, clear, and positive message instead of wordy, vague, and negative messages. Also, their responses indicated that residents value the library as a community center, a source of community vibrancy, and a center of community life.

Media Rationale

Besides the media necessary to develop a brand identity, an effective library support campaign needs to generate conversation and mobilize library supporters to carry the message to others in the community as part of a grassroots component to the campaign. The most effective concepts connect to both the latent passion that Probable Supporters and Super Supporters have for the library, and to the economic conversation required to change voting or funding behavior. For this reason, it was important to dedicate the most dollars to hire a PR firm with experience in grass roots. For the branding effort, specific media was bought to target swing voters and likely voters with their

appropriate messages. These voters received their primary source of city information according to the following (Gazette Opinion, 2011):

- Billings Gazette 53.5%
- TV Ads 27%
- 54.5% KTVQ News
- 31.1% KULR News
- Radio 6.3%
- Swing voters watch more TV news than Likely voters.
- People who listen to radio are more likely to think new taxes are the reason not to vote for a new library.

Conclusion

In the end, the city’s library board opted to hire a public relations firm to conduct the campaign, based on one of the research recommendations from the team described here – that a grassroots political campaign would be most effective. When presenting the second round focus group discussion to Parmly Billings Library Board members at April 19, the library hired Hilltop Public Solution for Parmly Billings Library PR campaign Hilltop Public Solution as a PR firm headquartered in Washington D.C. Unfortunately, this decision eroded the support for simultaneously producing and disseminating the mass media messages planned. Fortunately, Hilltop was very experienced with various and plentiful PR practices experiences such as grassroots campaigns, state affairs, and strategic communication. The PR company had currently achieved a successful grassroots campaign with regards to combating unfair electricity rate hikes in Missouri. With involvement from MSU Billings students who had worked on the project, the PR firm was able to achieve a victory for the library and a successful passage of the mill levy. Construction of the new library is underway.

Table 1: *Threat and Efficacy Analysis from Focus Group*

| | | |
|------------------------|--------------------------|---|
| Threat is LOW | Perceived Severity | Community wont suffer from absence of library or tax |
| | Perceived Susceptibility | Individual wont suffer from absence of library or tax |
| Efficacy is LOW | Self Efficacy | Individuals cant take advantage of the solution |
| | Response Efficacy | Individuals do not believe in the solution |

Table 2: Means End Chain Conceptual Advertising Strategy

| Attributes | Physical Consequences | Psychological Consequences | Values |
|---|--|---|--|
| Big beautiful LEED building | Hold events and adds to the city infrastructure | Part of culture, town center, focus on community | Universalism: beauty of the city, critical think of community |
| Technologically advanced, trained staff, dynamic | Accessible, equitable, responsive, enlightening | Relevant, valued, good habits established for life- long learning | Benevolence: the welfare of society and enhancement of ones friends and family |
| Safe, secure and well maintained | Safety, Trust | Warmth, partner in community, bridges the digital divide. | Security: stability of society and public funding, synergy and savings. |
| Economical plan bring new opportunities | Funding is in place, well planned | Not much money from me and growth for the future | Responsible: It is a good investment |
| Elements | Benefits | Hook | Driving Force |
| Lowers cost overall, cost to each taxpayer, technically and economically (LEED) advanced, gathering center that is safe | Beautiful new building that makes the city proud | People, Foundation, Community | Future of Billings |

Figure 1: Perceptual Map

| | |
|---|---|
| <p>Voting for the Library</p> | <p>Future Transformation Advanced Technology Adds Beauty and Sacred Stature Equality Necessary for Community Cost oriented =Need Education</p> |
| <p>Return on Investment of Infrastructure Good use of Public Funds</p> <p>No Need=Need Education</p> | <p>Not Raising Taxes</p> <p>Not Voting for the Library</p> <p>Settling for status quo Internet and Individual Clicks vs. Bricks</p> |

Table 3: Creative Concepts Results from Focus Group

| Ad Tested | Key Words | Response | Changes |
|-------------------------------|---|--|--|
| \$3 a month buys you | Either a cup of coffee or a library, taxes will not be high | It needs to be more positive, familiar, concrete, \$\$\$ is shown to be well spent and doable for most people | Recommended with high self and response efficacy. Use gallon of gas or trash for image instead of coffee cup |
| Broken down and scary looking | Maintenance costs more than a new one and it is needed | Too negative | Deleted |
| Billings needs a heart | A library is an essential part of our community | It needs to be more positive, specific, and give answers | Deleted |
| Lift off on line | Dynamic technology and connections to computers | Kids are already on line. | Deleted |
| Testimonial | It is important to the individuals in the community | It needs to be made with real people and scenes. (e.g., Swing voters are middle income, hard working, with kids) | PR Firm chose this to execute |
| History of community | How Billings has changed in the past and needs to keep going. Current library is disgraceful. | Love this. It tells me everything I need to know. Pride. Shows how bad it is and how good it can be. Reminded us that we used the library and | Recommended with high self and response efficacy. |
| Childrens Future | How should our children grow up | It mad it sounds like a childrens space, not a community space. | Deleted |
| Slogans | Know to Grow Bridge Beyond Books New Chapter | Slogan needs to motivate people to feel vibrancy and get involved with it, makes me want to know more, grow our community, grow our knowledge, grow our technological ability. | Recommended but PR firm chose New Chapter |

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