

## MARKETING THE MEDIA CENTER: LET ME COUNT THE WAYS!

by *Janella Knieren,*  
*Sugar Grove Elementary*

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hen I think of marketing my school library/media center, a multitude of examples runs through my mind. These range from the mainstream (chairs the professional development grant committee and heading up the school improvement plan) to the, well, not so mainstream (dressing as Viola Swamp—black lips and all— for Book Character Day!)

Marketing a library/media center and its programs is more than just good public relations - it's our survival. With pending rumors of cutbacks for educational programs, we have to demonstrate our worth and importance every single day to our patrons and school administrators. Eliminating media specialists and diverting our funds elsewhere must be the furthest thing from their collective mind!

Our school library/media centers have to be a welcoming place for all students, staff members, and people from the surrounding community. Besides presenting a visually inviting atmosphere (colorful bulletin boards, posters, banners, students' work and other visual displays), we as media specialists have to collaborate with teachers and administrators to make ourselves visible and convince them that they cannot function without us.

### **Here are just a few of the many ways to accomplish this:**

- Send newsletters to students and parents informing them of media center activities, upcoming events, methods to promote reading, etc.
- Write articles for your school newspaper about media related events.
- Send news releases about student projects to your local newspaper for their school section (Media Fair participants and placings, Science Fair winners, Book Clubs, etc.).
- Invite guest readers during National Book Week or National Library Week (School Board members, superintendent, principal, janitors, cooks, local business people) and have them stress the importance of reading in their line of work.
- Hold contests, especially during Book Week or Library Week (Design posters, design bookmarks, write Public Service Announcements, have "Guess How Many" contests, Name the Puppet contest, etc.).
- Hold Book Fairs annually or semi-annually and promote them in your community with an after-school event for families.
- Invite local authors to speak to students and staff about the importance of reading and what it takes to become an author.
- Set up a Media Center web page that's connected to your school page. Post pictures of various media center activities, offer links for student research, do a virtual tour of your media center or the school.
- Make a poster of each teacher holding his or her favorite childhood book.
- Get pictures of your teachers as children and have them write about a childhood story they still remember. Display for everyone to enjoy.
- Keep teachers informed through a monthly newsletter about new resources (videos, books, computer software, professional materials, reference hints, hints for laminating, for internet searching, etc.).
- Host a computer lab evening and invite parents to come and preview new software programs their children will be using or programs they are currently using.
- Share stories with classes and then do book extensions or activities to go with them. Think about writing extensions in the computer lab to reinforce the theme.
- Offer to display student projects in the media center.
- Coordinate a "Stop and Read" program weekly. Draw names of students and give a book as a prize.

- Interlibrary loan when your media center doesn't own books, videos, or professional materials needed for a classroom project.
  - Conduct in-services for the staff (new computer software programs, e-mail, word processing, database or spreadsheet tips, or new equipment).
  - Invite professionals to present in-services for your staff (Cable in the Classroom, Grolier Multimedia encyclopedia, university professors, other media specialists that have already mastered a program your teachers would like to learn, etc.)
  - Volunteer to sit on any committees that deal with the curriculum so that you know which materials to purchase to supplement your classroom texts.
  - Take digital pictures of school activities and display them in the hallways and then publish them in your school yearbook.
  - Capture video clips during Grandparents' Day.
  - Coordinate a "Name That Book" contest. A phrase from the selected book is read during morning announcements and each classroom guesses the title. Keep track of the times each room wins and reward them at the end of the school year.
  - Alternate your lunch times so you can eat with different grade levels of teachers. This is a great time for impromptu collaboration.
  - Use an LCD projector to show students web sites, computer programs, great reference links, local and distant museums and attractions, etc.
  - Find out what field trips the grade levels are planning and locate the web site so the students can familiarize themselves with the destination before the trip.
  - Purchase high interest, current, appealing, and useful books and materials for the media center.
  - Ask for teacher suggestions when ordering materials, especially if you have a new textbook series. There will be lists of books and materials to accompany the textbook.
  - Constantly update your professional collection to keep teachers informed of new methods and best practices.
  - Display author pictures along with books autographed by those authors.
  - If you have local or state reading contests and have access to next year's titles, send a list of them to students before school gets out for the summer.
- The kids can get a head start by reading them over the summer.
- Host staff development sessions to offer teachers suggestions on how to integrate media center materials into the curriculum and meet the standards.
  - Inform teachers of contests in which they might involve their students (poetry contests, local or national writing competition, etc.).
  - Sponsor students or groups of students in creating projects for Media Fair or Science Fair.
  - Read professional journals and share information with teachers.
  - Become a member in all professional organizations that pertain to your profession and be an active member.
  - Write grants for new programs, materials, clubs or activities.
  - Organize your media center for maximum benefit and usage.
  - Stress free flow and flexible access to your media center.
  - Suggest and coordinate projects for different grade levels of students so that the older ones can tutor younger ones (Reading Buddies, Techie Friends for computers, etc.).
  - Develop and maintain positive and friendly relationships with all staff members.
  - Coordinate school-wide thematic/holiday units (Cinco de Mayo, Chinese New Year, Oktoberfest).
  - Display the poster torn from an old issue of *Teacher Librarian* that states, "What a school thinks about its library is a measure of what it thinks about education." Make sure it's in a prominent position and can be seen by anyone walking through your media center.
  - Finally, BE FLEXIBLE!! Smile when you feel like screaming, be understanding when you don't understand, and greet each patron with a smile as if they are the first one you've seen all day. Be willing to try new ideas, accept suggestions from colleagues, and take the time to enjoy everything!
- Every media specialist has his or her priorities and could not possibly make use of all these activities every year. But, if we make ourselves an integral part of our school, then we should never fear the administrators when they are looking for programs to diminish or cut

completely. We will have proven to them that the media center is truly the heart of the school and the school would die - or at least have a heart attack - without us there to keep the blood pumping.

*For further information, contact Janella Knieren at [jkk@vigoschools.org](mailto:jkk@vigoschools.org).*