

What Your Library Can Help You Do

Public Relations Campaign

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Abstract

Library services are an important part of every library, including those in schools. In this “What Your Library Can Do for You” campaign, the librarian seeks to inform students about a variety of services and materials that are available to the middle school clientele.

Keywords: library, middle school, research

Introduction

It may seem as though a school library may not need advertising. After all, every student will need to utilize library services or materials at some point. Despite this fact, many school libraries are underused, simply because students do not know what services are provided or how to employ library materials independently. This public relations campaign uses the first eight weeks of the school year to educate students as to what the library offers and to inspire them to take advantage of those services and materials.

Title

“What Your Library Can Help You Do”

This is not a particularly creative or catchy title, but it is clear and to the point. This public relations campaign is all about what the library can help middle school students do – research for classes, find a good book, research careers and college, and grow into responsible citizens. Because there are four elements within the campaign, there are four separate subtitles.

- The library can help you **STUFF** in some knowledge.
- The library can help you **FLIP** open a good book.
- The library can help you **BUILD** a great future.
- The library can help you **GROW** into a responsible citizen.

Each of these titles names and explains one element of the campaign. These are further explained in the project description.

Rationale

This public relations campaign is designed to have wide appeal among the many middle school students who have diverse interests and needs. Because their voluntary use of the library varies greatly, it is important to create a public relations campaign that appeals to a variety of

individual patrons and will inform them about library services and encourage them to use the available services.

Middle school students are known for their “too cool for school” attitudes. It is a given that this attitude will spill into a “too cool” approach to the library as well – it’s not cool to read, it’s not cool to work hard in classes. In order to create appeal, the library needs to clearly demonstrate how it can serve the students and make their lives easier.

Pre-teens and teens desire independence in both their school work and their personal lives. Students want to make their own decisions. Teaching them how to utilize library services on their own will appeal to their desire for independence.

In middle school, students are beginning to learn about research. Their teachers will introduce them to finding sources and utilizing information. The library can also assist in their research. It is important for students to see the library and librarians as helpful resources that are able to fill in any gaps in their research.

Reading for pleasure is an important part of learning and becoming a better reader. Increasing student interest in the books available will increase circulation numbers. Middle school students are starting to think about their hopes and dreams for the future. Giving them opportunities to explore possibilities will appeal to this group of patrons. Bringing the previous three weeks’ themes together in the last week will reinforce the opportunities that students have through their school library and encourage them to take advantage of these services.

Time

This campaign is designed to last for the first eight weeks of school. Each of the four themes will run for two weeks. It can be condensed into less time or expanded into more time, depending on what is best for the individual library. The contests will take place during lunch

one day each. Library lessons that tie into each theme will continue for the remainder of the two weeks.

Budget

The total budget for the “What Your Library Can Do for You” campaign is \$450. The budget breakdown is as follows.

- \$25 Barnes & Noble gift cards x 8 = \$200. These will be: four for contest winners, four for random drawings of individuals who come into the library during each two-week theme.
- \$100 for miscellaneous bulletin board and poster materials: borders, backgrounds, markers, poster board, posters to print or purchase if needed.
- \$10 for two additional flip flops so that 10 students can participate in the race.
- \$100 for Double Stuff Oreos.
- \$40 for any additional expenses that may come up.
- \$0 – Lego blocks, mismatched flip flops, and plastic flowers are on hand.

Description

In order to increase interest in library services, the library will sponsor four contests, each with a different theme that relates to “What Your Library Can Help You Do.” Each contest will take place at lunch one day at the beginning of the two-week period. Students who are interested in participating in the contest will put their names into a jar; ten students will be chosen for each contest. This will introduce the theme to students and pique their interest in the library and what it has to offer. These contests will be introductions to the current theme, each of which will be a library focus for two weeks.

In addition to the introductory contests, the library will create bulletin boards and posters that relate to each theme and advertise library services and resources. There will be a drawing for a gift card during each two-week period. When students come in to use library services related to the current theme they can enter the drawing.

The library can help you STUFF in some knowledge

The first contest involves Double Stuff Oreos. The contest will be to see who can stack the most Oreos in a minute. The theme of this contest is “The library can help you STUFF in some knowledge.”

This theme is designed to help students understand how the library can assist them with class assignments and research projects. The bulletin board and posters for these two weeks will include a “hinged” head, open, with different objects being stuffed into it. Library lessons during these two weeks are over search techniques, website reliability, and citing sources.

The library can help you FLIP open a good book

“The library can help you FLIP open a good book” will be the second theme of the year. Students often choose not to read because they do not know what to read. This theme’s purpose is to help students understand that the library staff can help them find something to read that is related to their interests. The contest will be a race. Each contestant will put on two mismatched flip flops and race one lap around the cafeteria.

Bulletin board and poster decorations will be titled “What your classmates are flipping open.” These will be advertising some of the most popular books in the library, with titles and pictures. During these two weeks, library lessons will be book talks over other well-loved titles.

The library can help you BUILD a great future

Theme number three is “the library can help you BUILD a great future.” The contest is to see who can build the most realistic house out of Legos in 10 minutes. The art teacher will judge the contest.

Decorations on the bulletin board and posters will tie into the Legos and the building theme. These will have a picture of the blocks, labeled with different possibilities for future careers and colleges. The librarian will demonstrate how to find a job listing and fill out a job application, as well as different sites to search for career and college information. The guidance counselor could also be a guest speaker, sharing about future possibilities with students.

The library can help you GROW into a responsible person

Finally, the library will tie all three of the previous themes together into the final theme: “the library can help you GROW into a responsible person.” By learning to research independently, finding books to read for pleasure, and studying future possibilities, students will learn to be responsible citizens.

The contest will be to use the plastic flowers to create a bouquet in ten minutes. The principal will judge this contest. Advertisements and decorations will be flowers with words that relate to the three previous themes, such as: research, career, and college. Learning about each of these aspects of life will help students learn responsibility.

Materials

See also: Budget

- 20 packages double-stuff Oreos
- 300 Legos
- 20 mismatched flip flops
- 50 plastic flowers

- Bulletin board materials – borders, backgrounds, posters (made with Microsoft Publisher)
- Gift cards for contest prizes

Assessment

The success of the program will be measured with various qualitative and quantitative assessments. The first will be contest participation. If many students are involved and desire to participate in the contests, it is a good sign.

Other assessments will involve circulation numbers and database statistics. These can be compared to previous months and years to determine whether or not the campaign has had any impact on the library services.

Library staff can also observe patrons and their needs. A survey is also a possibility. Questions could include: What did you think of the library contests? What should the library do differently next time? How often do you visit the library? Why do you visit the library? What do you wish was different about the library? What do you like about the library? This would be a qualitative measure that gives feedback that is individual but can still be summarized in a helpful manner.

Conclusion

Every library, like the school it is in, is unique. However, every library needs to ensure that its materials and services are well-used, not simply available or gathering dust. Public relations campaigns are a wonderful way to guarantee that library patrons are aware of and understand what the library has to offer. Utilizing available items can lead to a unique and creative program. This basic public relations campaign can be adapted to meet the needs of a variety of school libraries and help each library serve its clientele.