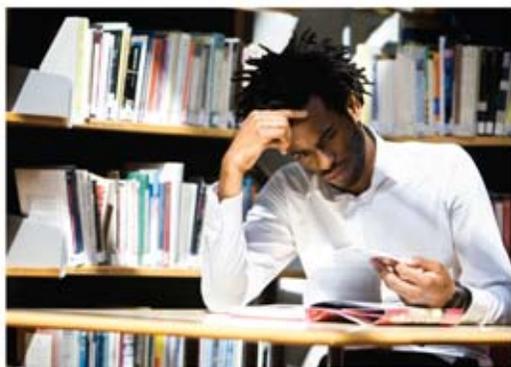




SMALL BUSINESS AND THE PUBLIC LIBRARY

Strategies for a Successful Partnership



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Partnership

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PREFACE

An ALA news release of October 29, 2008, entitled “ALA Seeks \$100 Million in Stimulus Funding as U.S. Libraries Face Critical Cutbacks, Closures” cited the need for libraries to “expand critical employment activities and services such as resume development, job bank web searches, and career planning workshops.” On December 12, a segment of the *NBC Nightly News* with Brian Williams stressed the benefits that libraries offer in these challenging economic times.

In addition, much of the current library literature cites the need for libraries to remain relevant and to adapt to changing times. When this book was started—a few years ago—the economy appeared to be flourishing. Today—as we begin the twenty-first century’s second decade—we are facing a historic economic crisis. Reports about increasing job losses and massive unemployment are daily news. One way libraries can stay relevant in these conditions is by addressing the needs of job seekers, working families, new immigrants, college applicants, and the small business community. In the past few months, the Miller Business Resource Center (MBRC) has seen an increasing number of patrons requesting assistance with resume preparation. Many are experiencing unemployment for the first time in their adult lives. Others are reentering the workforce to supplement the family income. Prospective college students are dealing with financial aid problems as their parents’ college funds have evaporated. Businesses are facing hard times and are seeking new marketing and networking solutions.

A number of public libraries have incorporated small business services within their libraries. Over the years, the Middle Country Public Library (MCPL) in Centereach, New York, and the Miller Business Resource Center within it have established a series of local and regional partnerships, networking alliances, collections, services, and personnel to assist patrons with many business and employment issues. Some of the programs offered have been in place for years. Others have evolved recently in cooperation with local and regional partnerships. What we find is successful, we try to duplicate and improve. A sampling of programs includes:

SAT and PSAT preparation classes. The cost of many SAT and PSAT preparation classes can be prohibitive for families trying to save for college tuition. For over twenty-five years, the MCPL has offered two workshops; a PSAT preparation workshop in the fall and an SAT workshop in the winter. These consist of five 2½-hour sessions, and the cost is fifteen dollars for the PSAT or SAT preparation guide. Sixty students can take each course. The teachers are hired by the library, and the funds come from the programming budget.

Career counseling, resume and interview preparation. Career counselors are available three nights per week, two weekdays, and Saturdays to help district residents with job resumes, interview preparation, interest inventories, and college guidance. The counselors, all of whom have advanced degrees, are hired on a part-time basis. Counseling sessions are on a one-to-one basis and take approximately forty-five minutes.

Job fairs. The Miller Center hosts two job fairs each year in conjunction with the Suffolk County Department of Labor; each fair attracts 30 employers and over 300 job seekers. These events are sponsored and funded by the Department of Labor and give local area residents a chance to come to their home library and investigate possible job opportunities.

ESOL and citizenship classes. The Miller Center offers a number of programs to help new immigrants to enhance their workforce preparation skills. ESOL classes are offered to help non-English speakers learn listening, speaking, reading, and writing

English skills. Citizenship classes help to explain the various naturalization processes and to prepare for the U.S. citizenship test. Often, the professional licenses of new residents are not valid in the United States and recertification is required. Citizenship classes and career counseling classes assist people in negotiating this recertification process. An additional program, Conversation Groups, facilitates networking among people new to the United States.

Library Business Connection. For over eight years, Library Business Connection meetings have served as a networking forum for the local business community. Speakers on a variety of business topics from e-commerce to time management have imparted business wisdom and know-how. Membership continues to grow because local networking provides marketing leads and business support. In this unpredictable economic climate, these free and informative networking meetings at the library may be the best business value in town.

In writing *Small Business and the Public Library*, we have tried to highlight various series of steps and action plans in creating a business resource center within a public library. The chapters in this book will detail ideas on collection development, programming, marketing techniques, and coalition and partnership building that can be adopted and adapted to grow a small business and finance collection into a vital regional business resource that is part of a public library.

From the sidewalk lemonade stand to the giant corporation, every business wants to find more customers. *Who are they? How do I identify them? How do I reach them?* The job seeker also has questions. *Where can I find a job? What skills will I need?* Increasingly, public libraries have gained access to current demographic and marketing data that are of real value to the business and job-hunting community. How do we create public awareness of these resources and services? In *Small Business and the Public Library: Strategies for a Successful Partnership*, we seek to identify the key elements of a public library's business and career services and suggest ways of marketing them to the business community through innovative programming, active networking, and mutually beneficial partnerships.

Chapter 1 explores how a robust library business service brings benefits to both the business community and the library, and discusses both the role of technology in facilitating the service and the vital importance of outreach in achieving a working relationship between the library and local businesses. Chapter 2 identifies those resources, both print and electronic, that have proved the most valuable in answering business and career questions. Chapter 3 discusses the unique issues involved in creating programs for a business audience. Chapter 4 stresses the importance of marketing to a successful library business service. Networking and its critical role in establishing business connections is the subject of chapter 5. Chapter 6 studies how partnerships can contribute to innovative marketing and programming, and chapter 7 investigates ways of acquiring funding.

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Writing this book has allowed us to reflect not only on our careers as business librarians but also on the role that business librarians have played in the public library. When we entered the field of library and information science, we never imagined that this would be the path that we would follow and how fortunate we were to become involved with the development of the Miller Business Resource Center. We would like to thank the following people without whom this book could not have been written: Sandra Feinberg, director of the Middle Country Public Library, an innovative and progressive leader who has challenged us to attain our goals and who gave us the freedom to explore new ideas and programs; Barbara Jordan, assistant director for community relations at the Middle Country Public Library (now retired), for her tireless efforts, grant writing, and for embracing the concept of the Miller Business Resource Center; the Middle Country Library Foundation, for fostering the growth of the Miller Business Resource Center; the Miller Business Resource Center team for their professionalism, devotion, and enthusiasm; the MCPL Community Relations Department for their constant support and assistance with all of our programs and events; John D. Miller for his continuous support and for recognizing the need to develop a regional business center on Long Island; and all of our community partners for their trust and for sharing a common passion.

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Business Services and the Mission of the Library

Times Are Tough, Libraries Are Thriving” announced a *New York Times* headline of March 15, 2009. Today, as we mark the beginning of the twenty-first century’s second decade, we are facing a historic economic crisis. Massive job losses and stubbornly high unemployment are daily news. Meanwhile, much of the current library literature cites the need for libraries to remain viable and adapt to changing times. How can we do this? Is it possible? One way libraries are staying relevant is by addressing the needs of job seekers, working families, new immigrants, college applicants, and the small business community. It is, after all, the small business sector of the U.S. economy that has generated 60–80 percent of new jobs annually over the last decade, and small businesses employ 50 percent of the private sector workforce.

As businesses face hard times and loss of revenue, they constantly seek new avenues to increase their sales, marketing efforts, and networking opportunities. The time is right for the public library to recognize that the business community should be an integral part of the library’s marketing focus. Advances in technology have made it possible for public libraries to assist businesses in ways never before possible. Business databases accessible to libraries allow entrepreneurs to

- pinpoint existing customers
- target new customers
- identify and evaluate competition
- locate industry benchmarks and forecasts
- examine retail sales and consumer expenditure data for any U.S. zip code

evaluate the local, regional, and national business climate
study market trends through marketing research reports

The following example demonstrates how libraries often have access to data that today's search engines cannot find and how more and more business information is becoming available all the time. One aspect remains constant, however—the need for a trained librarian who knows who produces the information and where to find it.

When electronic resources and the Internet first became widely available, an exasperated MBA student approached the librarian at the reference desk of the Middle Country Public Library. He explained that he had spent nearly two fruitless hours searching the Web for a desperately needed pie chart of sneaker sales and he had found nothing. Within a few minutes, the librarian presented the relieved student with a Standard & Poor's Industry Survey entitled "Apparel and Footwear: Retailers and Brands" with the elusive pie chart (then, still in paper format) and also the URL of the website of the National Sporting Goods Association.

Today, we can offer even more. Standard & Poor's industry surveys are now online, and we also have the Sports Business Research Network database, which can give 15 years of sales data for over 20 different types of athletic footwear with consumer expenditures by brand, age group, education level of household head, gender, geographic region, household income, outlet type, and price point, as well as future trends and forecasts.

Most of the time businesses are unaware of the existence of these resources or that the public library of today might have them available. Traditionally, the local merchant does not associate the public library with business assistance. Entrepreneurs envisioning a business library usually picture one connected to a business school, a major city, or a corporate headquarters. The public library is equated with "homework help" and recreational reading. In the past three decades, however, the explosion of data being gathered and stored electronically has paved the way for access to a wealth of specialized business information. In the late 1980s, public libraries' holdings usually did not contain more than twenty business magazines and journals, in paper, with some microfilmed back issues. Today, one business periodical database alone affords full-text access to over 2,300 business magazines and journals whose contents can be e-mailed, faxed, and even remotely retrieved. Twenty

years ago, the average library had a few directories of major U.S. businesses. Currently directory databases of over 15 million U.S. businesses provide entries by company name, sales volume, staff size, zip code, and Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) and North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) code.

Businesses also need market research data to help them determine product development, future marketing strategies, and accurate pricing. In the past, market research data have often proved either elusive to obtain or too costly for the small entrepreneur. Market research generally is divided into two categories: primary and secondary research. Primary research is most often gathered through interviews, focus groups, direct mail, telemarketing, and so on and is usually collected to address a specific problem or issue. Done either in-house or by a paid market researcher, these reports often carry a price tag of thousands of dollars. Secondary research is data that is already compiled and/or published information. It often tracks trends within a market, industry, or geographic or demographic segment. It can include market research reports, company profiles, articles from trade journals, and publications from government agencies, trade organizations and associations, and commercial publishers.

Technological advances have greatly multiplied the number and quality of business data resources the average public library can now offer the business sector. Technology has also made possible the increased speed with which data can be gathered and made accessible. Large vendors to “big box” stores such as Home Depot and Wal-Mart can receive daily—sometimes even hourly—reports on how their products are selling. While that data are not usually available to the small vendor, there are many secondary data market reports that are synthesized synopses of the raw data. Access to online proprietary databases, government statistical data, industry market research, and association reports has allowed libraries to tap into previously cost-prohibitive and unavailable resources and make them available to the business community. Librarians are experts at searching for and locating information, and businesses can profit greatly from this expertise.

The competitive edge needed to achieve continuous growth in today’s knowledge-based economy requires access to timely, accurate, and relevant information and the acquisition of skills and competencies to effectively use that information. The business owner, equipped with this information, has

an edge in the challenging marketplace. Conversely, small businesspeople who lack both an awareness and access to these unique industry resources find themselves at a distinct disadvantage in the information-driven business arena.

Small Business and the Public Library seeks to discuss *library recognition of the business community as potential library users and the elimination of barriers to service*. It is, quite simply, in the library's best interest to cultivate the business community as library users. Their success is crucial to the continued economic health of the neighborhood the library serves. When the library recognizes the businessperson as library patron, the benefits can be mutual. The businessperson gains needed industry data and marketing assistance to strengthen his operation. The library gains a supportive, appreciative patron who can often be counted on to sponsor library events and help promote the library's business center. And, as we have found, in addition to contributing to community economic strength, the business community has come to recognize our library as a strong force in melding the local spheres of influence. The library can serve as neutral territory for the private, governmental, and public sectors to address common concerns.

Libraries must recognize that mandating a patron's actual presence in a library and restricting librarians to in-house presentations and service and even to rigid schedules create barriers to service. Business librarians must be encouraged to meet businesspeople "on their own turf" and to give presentations at Chambers of Commerce and local business groups to demonstrate available resources. Schedules need to be adjusted to facilitate professionals' attendance at "business before hours" or evening meetings, and librarians need to be prepared to present practical, concrete examples of what the business library can offer. To most people, the term *database* is intimidating and conjures up images of an endless learning curve. The librarian who demonstrates how the library's database can provide a list of every business in the community ranked by sales and number of employees will surely capture a business audience's interest. The combination of a business resource with high-priority information and the librarian's speed and skill in accessing it has offered the entrepreneur a marketing tool that could increase his bottom line. And, of equal importance, he has associated this information with a real person—a professional who has demonstrated an awareness of the needs of his business and a willingness to assist him in helping it to grow and prosper.

In succeeding chapters, we will explore ways to broaden our knowledge of business information needs and to increase the use of business resources through partnerships and networks and to expand the potential to provide a greater variety of resources through shared costs. We will explore how formal and informal networks and partnerships can further promote the library's credibility as a key regional resource for business information and a factor in economic success.

In career centers across the country, librarians are forming partnerships with business organizations, government agencies, and nonprofits to inform job seekers of their libraries' resources. Library websites are becoming clearinghouses of information as they provide links to job sites, civil service test announcements and applications, sample online career tests, career counseling, and unemployment assistance.

Moreover, responding to reference queries from multiple industry sectors rather than just a few cannot help but sharpen librarians' skills and increase their awareness of business information needs. And additional revenue received through partnerships and networks broadens the selection of resources and services a library can make available to its local business patrons.

The importance of networking can be seen in the following account of a recent reference encounter. The Small Business Development Center (SBDC), an arm of the Small Business Administration (SBA) based at the State University of New York at Stony Brook, sent Kim, a young woman starting a real estate photography business, to our business reference desk for help. Originally, Kim was only looking for a contract form she could modify for dealing with real estate agencies. She left with a few books on managing a commercial photography business and an e-mailed Excel spreadsheet of all the real estate agencies in surrounding zip codes, as well as her contract forms. Kim might never have found us without the intermediation and recommendation of the SBDC.

Small Business and the Public Library examines how public libraries are reaching out to the business community and marketing their services. We explore practical strategies and procedures that you can use to start or improve a business service within your library. It is important to realize that establishing a service to businesses takes time. For the three of us, Sophia, Elizabeth, and Luise, our principal library experience has been in the Middle

Country Public Library in Centereach, New York, where we have been involved in the twenty-year process of building the Miller Business Resource Center. What started as a small business and finance collection and a pilot career-counseling project has grown to a 5,000-square-foot resource center which includes reference and circulating business, finance, law, and career information collections, dedicated business computers, a reading area of new business best sellers and periodicals, a meeting room, and several small conference rooms and offices for the business and career information staff, as well as shared office space utilized by the local Chamber of Commerce, the Stony Brook Small Business Development Center, and others.

In 1999 the Middle Country Library Foundation and the Hauppauge Industrial Association (HIA), a 1,100-member regional industrial association, received a \$50,000 legislative grant to develop a plan for the library's Business Resource Center to provide business research services and access to specialized business databases to HIA members. Over the past twelve years, the partnership has continued to grow. In addition to providing one-on-one research, Miller Business Resource Center business librarians routinely present workshops to the HIA membership, take part in HIA committees, help develop website content, and participate in the HIA Annual Trade Show.

In May 2000, when Miller Business Resource Center librarians set up their booth at the HIA Annual Trade Show, attendees asked repeatedly, "Why would a public library display at a trade show?" As we demonstrated the database access that HIA members received through the partnership, they were surprised and intrigued. Now, when we attend the trade show each May, we are hailed on a first-name basis. We invariably leave with a new round of business research questions but also with the knowledge that we are an integral part of the HIA organization.

Providing personalized business reference and research services for approximately fifty people per day via on-site visits, phone, fax, and e-mail requests for assistance, the Miller Business Resource Center addresses the business needs of about 12,000 patrons per year. Topics include market research, industry trends, supplier and distributor information, sales and import/export particulars, demographic and statistical data, and laws and regulations. A range of special databases for the regional business community and the center's many business partners are accessible via the center's website, www.millerbusinesscenter.org.

While researching material for this publication, we reexamined the development of the Miller Business Resource Center and explored business resources in very large public libraries such as the New York Public Library's Science, Industry and Business Library and the Brooklyn Public Library, as well as smaller urban and suburban area libraries such as the Charleston County Public Library in Charleston, South Carolina, and the Burlington County Library in Burlington, New Jersey. We have spoken to jobs and careers librarians in towns and cities from Massachusetts to California. We would like to share with the library and nonprofit community the many original programs and unique collections we have seen, as well as the creative marketing ideas, resourceful fund-raising strategies, and powerful networking and partnership coalitions that have captured the interest of the business and library community.

Networking

Meeting and Greeting

Networking is one of the easiest ways to market your business services. Get out from behind the reference desk and meet the business people you can help. For many librarians, the idea of networking is intimidating. Networking often gets a bad rap. If someone approaches, immediately gives a pitch, and tries to push a product or service, he is not networking, he is selling. Networking is building and developing relationships that are mutually beneficial. The benefits of these relationships can include new customers, new jobs, and new partnerships. Too many people think that by networking they will see immediate results; but networking is about making and building connections. In order to network successfully you must be open and willing to meet new people.

Successful networking takes a lot of practice. Start by meeting or reconnecting with people. Listen to them. By listening to them you learn about what they do, what they are interested in, and what they can offer. Once you know this you may be able to make connections for them with other people you know. These connections and referrals usually don't happen right away. You may know someone for years before you have a referral for them. Even if you can't make an immediate connection, be sure to follow up after a meeting and to keep connecting with them.

So how do you start? If you are new to networking, starting a conversation can be uncomfortable. It is easier just to stick with people you know. Remember, to successfully network when attending meetings or programs with a colleague, you must separate and talk with new people. You already know each other; this is the time to make new connections. Your first approach will be the most difficult one, but as you network more and more, it will become easier—almost second nature.

- *Have an introductory line tailored for each event.* It can be something as simple as, “This is my first time here, can you tell me a little about this organization?”
- *Have an elevator speech prepared that will help you get conversations started.* An elevator speech is a short description of who you are and what you do. It is called an elevator speech because you should be able to say it in the time it takes an elevator to go from the first floor to the top floor. Your elevator speech should be under a minute long and say a lot in a few words. Use your elevator speech to grab the listener’s attention and show your enthusiasm for your work. Do not introduce yourself with name, title, and company and consider it an elevator speech. Instead, try something like, “I help businesses get free information to help grow their sales.” What business person wouldn’t be intrigued? Honing the perfect elevator speech will prove to be invaluable to you in your networking endeavors.
- *Become an effective and engaging communicator.* Start by smiling, looking the person in the eye, listening, and offering genuine conversations. Remember that nonverbal communication is a big part of how we communicate. If you approach a person with your arms crossed and look past them, they will not be receptive to connecting with you.
- *Take advantage of a captive audience.* Talk to the people in line with you at the registration table or buffet line. Always make conversation with the people sitting next to you. Start with something as simple as “Hello.”
- *Make notes on the business cards you collect.* At some events you may collect several business cards, but how can you remember who’s who when you get to the office the next day? It is helpful to make notes on the cards you collect. These notes can be related to the person’s job or can include personal information you may have gained about them. These notes will also help with your follow-up.
- *Follow up.* So you’ve attended a networking event and collected a fistful of business cards. Now what? Don’t just collect business cards to be polite. These cards are valuable components of successful networking. These cards will enable you to follow up. If you collect cards and leave them in your pocket, you are wasting a lot of networking time.

Follow-up contact can be made via e-mail, phone, or written note and should be made within 24–48 hours of meeting. The follow-up need not be elaborate. It can be as simple as an e-mail expressing pleasure in the meeting or thanking them for any helpful information. Include any information or materials you may have discussed. Providing follow-up may be enough to differentiate you from others at the event and helps build solid relationships. Be sure not to make it a sales pitch.

Business librarians should attend as many networking events and programs as they are able. These are important to your success and the success of your library. Business librarians can use networking to spread the word about the services offered through their libraries. Meeting businesspeople is a good way of hearing about their needs and concerns. This will allow you to keep your collection up-to-date and relevant to your users. Businesspeople can also become champions of your library services and connect you with new businesses or funders.

Networking with other librarians, at conferences and through professional organizations, will help gather information on new services and resources.

Networking at the Library

Libraries can add networking to almost any program. Advertise a program to begin a half-hour before the actual program start time. That time allows the program attendees to network with each other. Even something as simple as setting up tables and chairs, instead of just chairs, can help people feel more comfortable networking. Librarians in the crowd can facilitate interaction by helping attendees meet each other. This will also help them hone their own networking skills.

Libraries can start their own networking group. With the recent economic downturn, many libraries have started job clubs. These clubs are small groups of people who meet regularly to talk about job searches and careers. The goal is to support the success of all members and to network with others who may be able to help with members' job searches. Take this a step further and start an entrepreneurs' club at the library. This club would give small business owners or potential entrepreneurs a forum to facilitate meeting and the exchange of ideas and contacts.

Over ten years ago, the Miller Business Resource Center started its own networking group. The Library Business Connection (LBC) is a networking group that provides a forum for local businesses to meet, exchange information, share resources, and participate in educational presentations. The program begins at 8 a.m. with a light breakfast and networking among the attendees. After forty-five minutes or so, a speaker discusses a topic relevant to small business owners, such as customer service strategies, time management techniques, or marketing, e-commerce, and communication skills. Networking continues after a brief question-and-answer session. The LBC has been ideal for networking. We often have groups chatting well after the program has ended.

Libraries can hold their own business-to-business networking events. The Miller Business Resource Center holds two trade shows a year that encourage and promote networking. The Strictly Business Tradeshow is held in partnership with the local Chamber of Commerce and the town's coalition of chambers. It was started to allow local businesses to promote themselves and to network with other local businesses. The Women's Expo features women entrepreneurs who are just starting out. The goal of the Expo is to give these women the opportunity to network with local businesswomen and organizations, which can help them as they grow their businesses.

Libraries can host other networking groups such as the local Chamber of Commerce. Librarians can become active in other local business organizations. These organizations may want to hold a meeting at the library. This gives librarians the opportunity to present the resources they offer to a new group of businesspeople.

Online Networking

We would be remiss if we didn't mention the plethora of social networking tools available now. Some of the most popular with businesses and business people are LinkedIn, Twitter, and Facebook. Online networking tools are only as effective as your handling of them. Many users log onto a social networking site and immediately "friend" everyone they know (or think they know) and then do nothing. If you do nothing, then you are not networking.

When choosing contacts on social networking sites, consider who you have met, might meet, or want to meet at a networking event—colleagues, local businesses, government officials, and so on. When you request a connection, be sure to include a personal note stating why you think you should connect. Once the connection has been accepted, follow up with a thank-you.

On all of these social networking sites, it is important to pay attention to your connections, friends, or followers. LinkedIn allows users to get recommendations. If you have a good experience with someone, consider recommending them. Twitter users follow friends and are able to see what friends are posting. If a friend posts good news, you should send congratulations via Twitter. Be sure to use their @twitter name. Mentions can be invaluable to businesspeople. Each mention is another chance for them to connect with someone new. Facebook users can post comments and recommendations to other users' pages. As with the other networking tools, the more mentions and posts, the more chances for new connections.

Starting to network can be daunting, but steady practice will enable you to master it. Don't wait to be at a networking meeting to network. Once you hone your skills you'll find that networking can be done anywhere.

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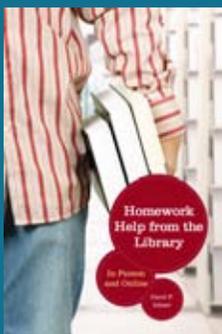
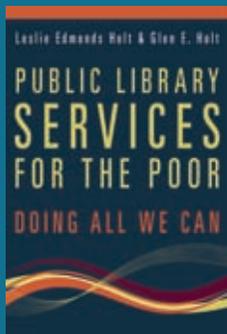
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