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Librarians and the information superhighway : a multimedia presentation

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LIBRARIANS AND THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY:
A MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATION

A Thesis

Presented to

The Faculty of the School of Library and Information Science

San Jose State University

In Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Master of Library Science

by

Chris Marie Mayer

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ABSTRACT

LIBRARIANS AND THE INFORMATION SUPERHIGHWAY: A MULTIMEDIA PRESENTATION

By Chris Marie Mayer

This thesis was created using multimedia technology. It presents the subject of librarians and the information superhighway to a general audience in a short public relations video. Special focus is given to the professional ethics of librarianship based in part on the 1990 proposed draft of professional ethics by the American Society for Information Science. Points covered include: intellectual freedom, equal access, privacy, confidentiality, proprietary rights, and censorship, as well as a general explanation of the information superhighway.

The content of the video was determined by the outcome of a Delphi study, where eight professional librarians and two library science graduate students responded to the question "What ought the public know about librarians within the context of the information superhighway?"

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Introduction

The image of librarians is acknowledged to be an important factor in the market position of the library. More than ever, information providers vie for the attention of potential users and struggle to secure funding to maintain and develop services. A historical survey of library literature reveals an ongoing need to improve the public's perception of librarians. Strategic plans for reform call for the proactive approach of self-promotion with a focus on the substantive role that professional librarians play in a changing society. Consequently, the video, "Librarians and the Information Superhighway" was produced to enhance the public image of librarians by explaining the potentially significant role of librarians in connection with the information superhighway.

The content of the video was determined by the outcome of a Delphi study, where ten active members in the library field gave their opinions on what they thought the public ought to know about librarians within the context of the information superhighway. Popular opinions were used to develop a short linear multimedia presentation, that is, a non-interactive computer based presentation which incorporated sound, images, animation and text. Finally, the multimedia computer file was transferred to video tape to allow for easier distribution.

The final video does not necessarily represent the individual opinions of those who participated in the study, nor does it officially represent the views of the library profession as a whole.

Literature Review

The Image of Librarians

As early as 1876 library literature has identified public image as a concern for librarians (Green, 1993, p. 84). More recently, surveys conducted by the American Library Association reveal image to be one of the top five concerns of the library profession (Wallace, 1989, p. 22). The negative stereotype of the old fashioned, homely librarian has been acknowledged widely through the library profession in peer discussions, casual interviews and general observation, methods that have not usually incorporated random sampling and have not lead to measurable data. The journal, *American Libraries*, for example, has monitored the image of librarians in popular culture since 1985 in the column "Image". Information in this column originates from letters and examples of librarians portrayed in the media. The majority of the images reported are consistent with negative stereotypes (Land, 1988, p. 15).

In 1990 the Special Libraries Association published the Inter-Association Task Force on Image Report. Two methods, a survey and a questionnaire, were employed to collect measurable data on the image of librarians and information specialists. The results of the survey were found to be statistically valid, but due to the factor of self-selection, the questionnaire could not be validated statistically.

The survey was prepared to determine what the perceived image of the librarian/information professional is and what the term librarian means to certain segments of society. The survey was distributed by mail to 8000 individuals in six particular segments of society.

The six sample groups were: 1) community leaders and local elected officials; 2) corporate executives; 3) government officials and state and provincial legislators; 4) academia; 5) entertainment media writers, directors, and producers; and 6) media news and information writers and editors. The data collected from these segments were: 1) formation of their opinions of librarians; 2) experiences with librarians; 3) perception of the job of librarians and information professionals; 4) personal characteristics attributed to librarians; and 5) the demographics of the respondents.

The study yielded an 18% valid return rate. Ninety-one percent of the respondents to the survey came from three population segments: (1) corporate executives; (2) media news and information writers and editors; and (3) government officials and state and provincial legislators.

Respondents' attitudes on the whole were positive, finding librarians dedicated, reliable, responsive, and responsible. The ability to communicate was valued as the most important attribute of the librarian. On the negative side, less than one-quarter of the respondents thought librarians were assertive or imaginative, and most assumed that the salary level was quite low.

Empirical studies have also monitored the librarians' image in literature such as those conducted by Nation (1954), Speiden (1961), and Pankin (1978). These studies, however specialized, do reveal some positive evolution of the image of the librarian in literature, yet in general stereotypes still prevail.

Consequences of a Negative Image

Kaycee Hale (1990), SLA Task Force Chair, remarks that according to business experts, economic level, education level, trustworthiness, social position, economic heritage, level of sophistication, success, and moral character are all initially measured by image. Negative stereotyping is also seen to have an adverse effect in drawing new people into the profession (Merrill, 1984, p. 17), as well as being responsible for the downgrade of federal librarians in civil service (Land, 1988). Government funding for libraries may also be in jeopardy as a result of image. According to public relations expert Howard Rubenstein, libraries are on the political "sacrificial block" due in part to their benign image (*Unabashed Librarian*, 1992, p. 11).

Measures to Reform the Image of Librarians

The American Library Association has declared 1990-2000 to be the decade of the librarian in a ten year strategic plan to reposition librarianship for the twenty-first century. ALA has proposed the following model which identifies the librarian of the twenty-first century:

- a leader in meeting society's information needs;
 - a fighter for intellectual freedom and full access to information;
 - an expert in the field of information and communication;
 - a partner in community leadership;
 - a model for other professionals in recruiting for and service to a pluralistic society; and
 - a professional empowering people to meet their information needs.
-

ALA has recommended six strategic directions for achieving these goals:

- bring the best people into the field of librarianship;
- create a work force that reflects a pluralistic society and is committed to serving it;
- better compensation for librarians;
- retention of people currently in the profession;
- educate people for library and information careers; and
- gain recognition for librarians as information professionals in a changing society.

The Special Libraries Association Task force on the Enhancement of the Library/Information Profession (1990) has targeted ten specific environments to enhance the image of librarianship, which include taking every opportunity possible to promote the profession. SLA recommends that librarians offer to produce pieces for the media that alert the community to the library and/or its parent organization.

Former ALA president, Patricia Glass Schuman, suggests that efforts should be concentrated on promoting the substantive nature of librarianship, rather than diverting energy to counteract visual stereotypes. "As librarians, we are ethically dedicated to the organization and dissemination of information--the dissemination, therefore, of knowledge and power. Our impact could be massive." Shuman concludes that "we must seize the initiative, articulate our values, and communicate our pride in who we are and what we do" (Shuman, 1990). Shuman's recommendations coincide with several recommendations made by ALA and SLA.

Benefits of a Multimedia Presentation

Experience shows that the benefits of multimedia include being systematic, ensuring that the presentation of information can not be overlooked. It is also ideal for looking in depth into difficult subjects, and affords the ability to train large groups of people quickly. Multimedia is also very appealing to the new generation of people who are growing up with computer technology (Soloway, 1991, p. 23).

Research shows that sensory connections to sight and sound contribute to rapid assimilation of information, as well as believability and retention (Davis, 1992, p. 19). Advertisers confirm that audio-visual materials are effective marketing techniques. In the library field, this can be confirmed by the increasing number of audio-visual entries in the John Cotton Dana Awards for excellence in library promotion. Hanna de Vries, secretary of the 1992 IFLA audio-visual roundtable, also identifies the merit of audio-visual materials in library promotion and alerts librarians not to underestimate the power of media (de Vries, 1992, p. 232).

The Delphi Study

A Delphi study was conducted to develop the content of the video. A diverse panel of eight librarians and two library science students voluntarily agreed to participate in the study with the understanding that data collected would be incorporated into a public relations video on librarians and the information superhighway. The Delphi methodology was selected because of its use in refining judgmental data collected from a panel of experts.

The effectiveness of this methodology "is based upon the assumption that majority opinions will have greater credibility and authority than the surmise of only the most articulate spokespersons in a group of participating respondents" (Busha, 1980, p. 176).

The panel included state, city, academic, school, museum, and private sector librarians. Two second year graduate students in library science also participated in the study. All panelists were working or studying in the San Francisco Bay area of California.

Data solicitation and collection were done by mail, with the opportunity for panelists to reply via electronic mail if they so chose. In the end all correspondence was handled by traditional mail, primarily because the survey instruments were not made available to the panel in an electronic form.

Step One

Participants were asked to address three questions in a list form. Respondents were encouraged to take a "brain storming" approach, where as many ideas as possible were freely written down. The questions were:

- 1) What do you think that the public currently knows about librarians within the context of the information superhighway?
- 2) What do you think the public ought to know about librarians within the context of the information superhighway?
- 3) What do you predict that the role of librarians will be within the context of the information superhighway?

Responses were compiled into a single summarized list of statements which generally reflected the collective input of panelists. When possible, the statements in the summary were direct excerpts from the survey.

In the case where comments were duplicated, the most encompassing statement was selected.

Step Two

Panel members were asked to evaluate each statement in regard to its appropriateness to the content of a public relations video about librarians using the following scale:

important = important to include in the video
somewhat important = somewhat important to include in the video
not important = not important to include in the video

Responses were assigned the following point value:

very important = 3 points.
 somewhat important = 1 point.
 not important = 0 points.

Cumulative points were tabulated for each statement. Statements were then ranked by point total. The maximum points possible for any one statement was twenty-four, since only eight panelists responded to this portion of the study.

# of points	-	# of statements	# of points	-	# of statements
24	-	3	11	-	3
23	-	0	10	-	2
<u>22</u>	-	<u>19</u>	9	-	8
21	-	2	8	-	4
20	-	10	7	-	4
19	-	2	6	-	2
18	-	8	5	-	1
17	-	9	4	-	0
16	-	6	3	-	1
15	-	6	2	-	1
14	-	2	1	-	0
13	-	5			
12	-	3			

Step Three

The analysis of results was presented to the panel for evaluation and refinement. The idea was proposed that the content of the video could be generally developed around the 22 statements that fell between the range of 22-24 points. Since a strong theme of the ethics of librarianship appeared in the top 22 statements, it was suggested that this theme would be predominant in the video. Panelists were asked to submit additional ideas and feedback, or to acknowledge their acceptance of the proposed content. There was a consensus among panel members that the content of the video would be developed around the top 22 statements, with a focus on the central theme of the ethics of librarianship as it relates to the information superhighway.

The 22 statements were:

1. Today's public library has the potential to be an exciting and dynamic information center.
2. Librarians are in an ideal position to provide access to electronic information.
3. The skills, commitment to intellectual freedom, and the community orientation of librarians are crucial to avoiding a society segmented into information have and information have-not.
4. There are alternative ways of getting onto the information superhighway.
5. There are economic opportunities which stem from being knowledgeable of the information superhighway.
6. The public ought to know that there is a universe of information available on the information superhighway at little or no cost.
7. As a result of new technology, information is being organized and made available directly and indirectly to the public through computer networks.

8. Librarians can assist and encourage clients to use the information superhighway to find:
 - information on an infinite number of fields;
 - people who have similar interests;
 - new interests;
 - what is going on in the community, the state, the nation, the world.
9. There are significant opportunities to increase support for libraries and librarians by demonstrating leadership in access to information, to knowledge and to the joys of reading and learning.
10. Librarians are key actors in public access to information and knowledge, and will be more important in the future.
11. Public libraries and probably other types of libraries will be critical for community based access.
12. The information superhighway is an important information tool for librarians.
13. Librarians are capable of being leaders in the electronic environment; the intermediary linking individuals to electronic services.
14. Librarians will be advocate/trainer in facilitating the personal use of the information superhighway--even if not in the library.
15. Librarians will provide equal access and training to those who do not have the necessary hardware in their homes, and to those who are not proficient in its use.
16. Librarians will provide the same role as librarians currently do, which is to insure that censorship or denial of information to any one category of individual does not take place in a public forum.
17. Librarians strive to make information available to individuals who need it.
18. Librarians strive both to ensure accuracy and not to infringe upon privacy or confidentiality in providing information about individuals.
19. Librarians protect each information user's and provider's right to privacy and confidentiality.
20. Librarians respect an information provider's proprietary rights.
21. Librarians resist efforts to censor publications.
22. Librarians play active roles in educating society to understand and appreciate the importance of information promoting equal opportunity for access to information.

Production of the Multimedia Presentation

A general storyboard and script were developed around the consensus statements. Tests, incorporating music, graphics, and moving images using the multimedia authoring program Macromedia Director version 3.1 were made, and it was determined that Director would be a suitable software program through which to execute the project. The storyboard was presented to the panel and met with their approval.

Production occurred over a span of three months. Steps were taken to ensure that permission to use audio and visual resources was secured. In general, because of the length of time required to secure copyright clearance to incorporate preexisting A/V resources, original art work and music were created specifically for the production. Production costs were minimal due to the ability to use production facilities and services available through the Alquist Center for Innovative Learning at San Jose State University.

The final project was an eleven megabyte uncompressed computer file. The file was later transferred to video tape. It was determined that video tape would be a more practical format to show the work, since playing multimedia files on a computer requires specific system configurations; requirements that significantly limited distribution possibilities.

Unexpected obstacles surfaced when the computer file was transferred to video tape. Significant resolution was lost in the conversion. Some "clipping" of graphic elements occurred around the borders. Bright colors and details did not translate well over to video tape. Major adjustments were necessary to bring the digital version into an acceptable form for conversion.

These problems were the result of inexperience and likely would not have been experienced by a multimedia professional. In hindsight, the graphics should have been designed on the computer, specifically for video output, since it was assumed that the target audience would not necessarily have direct access to computer technology. Designing for video output on the computer could have been achieved by regularly toggling between the high resolution RGB computer monitor and the lower resolution NTSC television monitor during the production process. In this way the video output would have been more predictable.

Conclusions

Multimedia productions offer a promising way of presenting a contemporary portrayal of librarians. Members within the library profession with access to multimedia computer technology and the creative drive would be well advised to begin to explore the possibilities of producing their own projects. Professional organizations might also think of embarking on collaborative productions which communicate a common message. A benefit of multimedia technology is that one basic product can be modified very easily to include more site specific information. For example, a project such as this one could be modified to illustrate local Internet resources and personalized illustrations of library ethics. Despite the commitment of time required for production, the cost of producing in-house public relation devices can be relatively low if one has free access to multimedia equipment.

Training in instructional technology and multimedia production is highly recommended. It can eliminate common mistakes, save time, and lead to a more professional looking product.

In conclusion, librarians going through the process of producing a multimedia project will have the added benefit of handling information in a variety of formats, as well as having the opportunity to experience first-hand the process of searching for non-print resources. With practice, librarians may also learn how to use multimedia technology skillfully in order to communicate effectively a message which leads to a greater understanding of our profession.

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