Marketing

Your Public Library's Online Research Resources

a how-to guide
In addition to an outstanding collection of print resources, your library offers authoritative research databases. If usage reports and staff comments indicate that these online resources are underutilized, however, what can you do? Plenty!

It’s time to introduce (or reintroduce!) your databases to your community. This guide, part of the ProQuest Public Library Marketing Toolkit (www.proquest.com/go/pltk), outlines four steps for doing so:

1. Mastering the resources
2. Creating compelling messages
3. Choosing the medium
4. Measuring results

In the toolkit, you’ll also find materials—many of which are customizable—to help you make your introductions when ready.

Because every public library is different, not everything presented in the guide and toolkit will be applicable to your specific circumstances. However, we hope that at least some of the low-cost ideas and materials will help you increase the visibility and usage of your research databases.
Step 1: Mastering the Resources

Before introducing your online research resources to your community and users, ensure that the library staff is equipped to answer questions about them. It’s important to understand the types of information needs your research databases are designed to satisfy and the types of users they are meant to help.

If training is needed, check with your database providers. Vendors often offer free training materials to both librarians and their patrons. Search the database vendor’s Web site or call your sales representative for training and support.

In Your Toolkit: Links to ProQuest training materials
Step 2: Creating Compelling Messages

When your library invested in your research databases, what group of patrons was each resource intended to help? Who else could they help? What information needs do these people typically have? Summarize this information as shown in the sample Needs/Resources Summary Chart below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Patron/Prospect Type (Audience)</th>
<th>K12 Students/Families</th>
<th>Out-of-Work Adults &amp; Entrepreneurs</th>
<th>General Population</th>
<th>Genealogists</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Patron/Prospect Needs</strong> (include as much detail as you can)</td>
<td>Age-appropriate, reliable, safe content for completing homework assignments and pursuing hobbies</td>
<td>Tips on résumé writing and interviewing, accurate company histories, etc.</td>
<td>Reliable health care resources, up-to-date travel/cultural information, personal finance information, etc.</td>
<td>Census and vital records, immigration records, military records, family histories, historical maps, etc.</td>
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</tbody>
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### Your Library’s Online Resources

<table>
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<tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ancestry® Library Edition</td>
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<td>Opportunity</td>
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<tr>
<td>CultureGrams™</td>
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<tr>
<td>eLibrary®</td>
<td>Opportunity</td>
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<td>HeritageQuest® Online</td>
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<tr>
<td>ProQuest Career and Technical Education</td>
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<td>ProQuest Health and Medical Complete™</td>
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<td>ProQuest Newsstand™</td>
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Opportunity
You’ll discover that you have many marketing opportunities—the points at which your patron’s or prospect’s information needs intersect with a specific database’s content.

Rather than trying to introduce your resources all at once, prioritize your opportunities. Start small. You’ll want to see which marketing tactics work best before you invest too many resources. As time and resources permit, you can expand your efforts and build on your successes.

Once you know where you want to focus, it’s time to think about your marketing message. The key to creating a compelling message is to put your “audience” first. This is where the Needs/Resources Summary Chart will come in handy.

Let’s pretend that you want to encourage more middle school students to use your “country reports” database. The message isn’t that the library has invested in a database for students. It’s that students can quickly find accurate, teacher-approved information online (24/7!) about the countries and peoples of the world, which will help them complete their class assignments. If you decide that this database would also be of interest to travelers, the message could be that you have a resource that provides quick, reliable snapshots (customs, languages, foods, etc.) of the countries they plan to visit. You may be focused on introducing one resource, but if different groups can use it, you’ll need to address what’s important to each group.

Looking for more messaging ideas? Read your vendor’s sales literature. While the material is probably targeted towards librarians (you are their target audience!), it likely will contain language regarding how the database meets patron needs.

What if one of your marketing goals is to attract new patrons (prospective users) as well as to increase usage of your databases? Then, you may need to develop targeted messages that talk not only about your specific research databases and the information needs they meet, but also about the services you offer and how to access them.

You may need to publicize really basic “how to” information relative to your virtual library, such as:

- Obtaining a library card
- Finding your library’s Web site
- Accessing the library’s research databases, either in the library or from home
- Using the library’s computers
- Attending computer training, if the library offers it

Focused and with messaging in hand, it’s time to make some introductions.
Step 3: Choosing the Medium

You know who you want to introduce your databases to, and you have compelling messages aimed at those patrons and prospects. Now it’s time to consider where and how to deliver those messages. Typically, the more times and ways you can place your message in front of your intended audience, the better.

**Existing Patrons**
Existing patrons are the easiest to reach. They already visit your library or Web site. Using your knowledge of their information needs and your databases, create materials for use in the library. Posters, bookmarks, fliers, and database how-to guides all are effective tools.

**In Your Toolkit:** Bookmarks and customizable posters and fliers to help you get started (http://www.proquest.com/go/pltk)

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PREPARE FOR VISITORS

Before you begin promoting your online resources, ask yourself:

- Can patrons and prospects easily find the library’s homepage?
- Can they immediately find the research databases?
- Can they effortlessly determine which database(s) will answer their questions?

If you answered “no” to any of these questions, address the issue(s) before implementing your marketing tactics. While people have become attuned to self-service, those services must be intuitive. If they aren’t, people may not try a second time. If you want patrons to turn to your library first for their information needs, make sure they can get to your resources quickly and easily.

**In Your Toolkit:** Sample database descriptions for use on your Web site to make it easy for patrons to understand which database(s) will help them most.
Don’t forget that your Web site also provides great real estate for promoting your valuable digital resources. Post a commercial or testimonials to call attention to your databases.

You also can add search widgets to your site. These are portable search boxes that help you increase exposure to your databases (see www.proquest.com/go/widgets to download a ProQuest search widget).

Does your library publish a newsletter or e-newsletter? If so, this is another great opportunity to promote existing and new online research resources to patrons. Remember to use targeted, benefit-driven language that will arouse the target user’s interest—and always explain how to access your site and programs or how to obtain more information. Need content? Partners like ProQuest publish a number of e-newsletters (www.proquestk12.com/news) that contain ready-made information, activities, etc. that you can cut and paste into your newsletter.

Does your library Tweet? Do you have a Facebook page where patrons can become your fans? Leverage all social media forums your library has incorporated into its marketing program. Be where your patrons are. For ideas about how to use social media to promote your library’s resources, check out Conversing with Your Community: Social Media Strategies, at www.proquest.com/go/smn.

In Your Toolkit: Digital commercial (www.proquest.com/go/pltk) for use on your library’s Web site.
Prospects
It’s relatively easy to capture the eyes of existing patrons, but what about reaching prospects, those people who could benefit from using your resources and services but who aren’t currently visiting your library or Web site?

Traditional media provides an opportunity to cast a wide marketing net. A well-written press release may get picked up by local and regional newspapers. Your public radio station also may agree to run a brief, on-air commercial for you, if you provide a script. You likely have many resources in the library which outline the fundamentals of creating press releases and scripts, so we won’t cover that here.

But, what if you want to target your audience further? Consider where your prospects congregate, either in the physical world or online.

If your target group is children, you could start by informing their teachers about your online homework help resources. Kids also congregate on the Web. Can you encourage them to tell their friends how they love the library? Can you ask your existing young patrons to “like” the library and recommend online homework resources via their Facebook or MySpace pages? How about holding a video competition (with prizes) among your young patrons, with their parents’ permission, and posting the videos on YouTube where their friends can see them? Or, consider gaming events and programs. Word of mouth is really important with this group of prospects.

To reach adults, consider taking a page from small businesses: partner up! Could you, for example, offer the use of the library’s free meeting space to clubs and groups and ask for a spot on their agenda? If so, use that time to demonstrate an online resource that would be of particular value to the group (e.g., an online historical map database for a group of genealogists). Ask the local coffee shop and other places that offer free WiFi access to place your fliers in their shops.

Who else in the community can help you get the word out? Will churches put your flier on their bulletin board to tell parents about your kid-safe research databases and family-friendly online environment? Does your city send out communications to taxpayers in which you could include a message for free? Will the employment agency hand out fliers for you that promote usage of your online job search resources? Will the senior center post a flier on their bulletin board that informs readers about the computer classes you offer? Look for win/win opportunities.
Step 4: Measure Results

You’ve mastered your resources; created compelling, targeted messages; and incorporated those messages into materials that you placed in the appropriate physical and virtual spaces to reach patrons and prospects. You’re all done now, right?

Not quite. How does database usage (or Web site visits, or questions about your databases, etc.) today compare with what was experienced before you began your marketing efforts? Measuring meaningful results over time is an important marketing step. It enables you to see and build on your successes and make adjustments where necessary.

Don’t worry. You don’t have to be a trained analyst to perform this step! Consider tracking the following information before and after you initiate your marketing tactics:

- Number of questions (per day/week/month/etc.) regarding how to use databases
- Number of people (per day/week/month/etc.) accessing your online resources
- Comments about your research databases (per day/week/month/etc.)
- Requests for training on how to use a research database (per day/week/month/etc.)

It’s important to measure relevant data. Notice that the above list contains only questions related to usage of your online databases. Your marketing tactics were aimed at generating more usage of your digital resources, so your measurements should capture the change in usage.

Marketing is all about testing and refining tactics. When you see that a tactic is working, build on that success. If something isn’t working or requires too many resources, modify your plan of attack to make it more successful.

AND THE SURVEY SAYS...

Not only are surveys useful to marketers for learning opinions, they also can be tools for gathering testimonials and learning new uses (new marketing messages!) for your great digital resources. Whether you create a paper-based survey that you keep near your library’s computer terminals or an online survey to capture the feedback of both library visitors and remote users, here are some questions you could ask:

- Which online research resource did you use? (You could prompt the respondent by listing your research databases, if there aren’t too many.)
- What were you hoping to find/learn using this online resource?
- Did you find/learn what you expected to?
- Was it easy to use?
- How did you know that the library had this resource?
- Will you recommend it to a friend?
- On a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 being “poor” and 5 being “excellent,” please rate this resource.
- If this resource was helpful, please tell us what you liked about it.
- May we share your opinion with others?
- Name, contact information (optional)

You also might want to explore online survey tools. Zoomerang and SurveyMonkey both offer free tools that can help you.
Summary

Your library has invested in reliable, user-friendly research databases to help the people in your community. Through your marketing efforts, you can ensure that these people know what is available to them and encourage usage of both your library and your valuable databases.

Remember that the ProQuest Public Libraries Marketing Toolkit (www.proquest.com/go/pltk) contains materials to help you get started. For additional inspiration, you also may want to watch Marketing Your Library: Heroes, Tips and Tools (www.proquest.com/go/myl).