Programs At Libraries: A Presenter’s Perspective

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“Hi, my name is Mark and I am library addict.”

- “Hi, Mark.”
- Daytime Services Manager, Jack C. Taylor Library, Fontbonne University
- As the Daytime Services Manager I:
  - Help manage all library materials coming in and out of the library
  - Supervise our daytime student workers
  - Help the Fontbonne community use the library
- I have also worked at another academic library and a public library too
“Hi, my name is Mark and I am library addict.”

- I am big library patron
  - I have been a big library patron ever since I was a young boy
  - I work 40 hours a week at the Taylor Library
  - On most Saturdays I visit 2 public libraries and sometimes a third!
“Hi, my name is Mark and I am library addict.”

- I also present programs at libraries
- On what?
- I am an award-winning naturalist
- I give programs on the Great Horned Owls I have studied in St. Louis’ Forest Park since 2005
“Hi, my name is Mark and I am library addict.”

- I give these programs all over MO and IL to many different groups/organizations
  - Nature/conservation organizations
  - Schools: pre-K through college
  - Garden clubs
  - Civic organizations
  - Senior centers

- But libraries are my favorite place to give programs
  - My Mecca, Carnegie Hall and LC all rolled into one!
Many talks at many libraries

Show me the data!

59 talks for 21 different libraries or library systems in MO and IL

A healthy sample size
- St. Louis County Library (22 times, 8 branches)
- Scenic Regional Library (7 times, 3 branches)
- Maplewood Public Library (6 times)
- St. Louis Public Library (3 times, 2 branches)
- Kirkwood Public Library (3 times)
- Edwardsville Public Library (3 times)
- St. Charles City–County Library District (3 branches)
- O’Fallon (IL) Public Library (4 times)
- Washington Public Library (3 times)
- Morrison–Talbott Library (Waterloo, IL) (3 times)
- Festus Public Library (3 times)
- Ferguson Public Library (2 times)
- Jefferson Country Library (2 branches)
- University City Public Library
- Brentwood Public Library
- Richmond Heights Memorial Library
- Hayner Public Library (Alton, IL)
- Columbia (IL) Public Library
- Columbia (MO) Public Library
- Belleville Public Library
When I give a program I analyze and evaluate:
- My preparation and execution
- My host’s preparation and execution

Since I have presented many times at libraries I have seen commonalities and variations in:
- How libraries host, promote and run their programs
- Things libraries do well
- Areas where improvements are needed

I will conclude by discussing
- Responsibilities and principles on the part of the program presenter
- The key ingredients to a successful program
What do libraries do well?

Host a huge number and variety of programs for all of their patrons
- Lectures, classes, book clubs, story times, readings/signings, computer instruction, film screenings, game clubs, DIY events, test preparation, fitness classes, trivia nights, coloring groups, and more

Bravo and kudos!
Hand in hand with the mission of libraries
- Educate and engage
- Connect and community
What Do Libraries Do Well?

- This makes libraries, more often than not, not a hugely fertile and open-minded host to programs.

- If you present programs, libraries should be super high on your list of places to give a program.

- Library programs can be seasonal and/or relevant all year long.
What Do Libraries Do Well?

- Clear communication with presenters:
  - Libraries are great about e-mailing in a clear and informative manner with folks giving programs about many of the important details
    - Dates, times, durations
    - Honoraria, invoices, contracts
    - Title, description of the presentation

- Promotion to their core constituents
  - Newsletters, flyers, program brochures, listings in local papers
  - Registering attendees
What Do Libraries Do Well?

- Welcoming atmosphere
  - Warm welcomes
  - Helpful, courteous

- AV Equipment
  - Libraries tend to have a good range of AV equipment for programs
    - Data projectors
    - TVs
    - Sound systems and speakers

[Handwritten note: A+ excellent!]
Where Can Libraries Improve?

- AV Equipment and Assistance
  - Libraries often need a greater range of cables and cable lengths for optimum presentation quality and presenter’s comfort
  - A few examples
  - Having AV equipment is great but more library staff need to know more about how to use it
    - Do not assume that the presenter is AV fluent
    - Imagine your grandparents are the presenters
    - Training and practice
  - A few notes for new buildings/remodeling
Where Can Libraries Improve?

- Nuances of hosting
  - Libraries do not have to hold the presenter’s hand but...
    - Show the presenter the room or space
    - As much as possible, have the room or space ready to go
    - Confirm that the presenter is comfortable
    - Introduce the presenter
Promotion Outside of Core Constituents

- Program promotion is like voting in Chicago: early and often

- Use every tool in the tool box
- More program promotion = more program attendance = more library support and circulation = more funding

- Maximize your online presence and tools
  - One Facebook post and/or tweet is okay but...
  - If your presenter tweets about the program, re-tweet
  - Social media can be a tricky beast—divide and conquer
Where Can Libraries Improve?

Promotion Outside of Core Constituents

- Did the presenter provide pictures and text for promotional usage?
  - If so, use them
  - If not, ask them
- Promote with the local media
  - One of the best ways to bring awareness to your programs and drive attendance
  - Spare or no connections with local media? Build them!
Connecting programs with the library’s collection
- Libraries have materials on everything under the sun
- Chances are that a library has materials relevant to the subject of almost any program
- Set up a display of these materials
  - In the room where the program will be or elsewhere
  - Mention the materials in your introduction and concluding remarks
Responding to inquiries about hosting a program
- Most of the time libraries are great about returning e-mails or phone calls
- But more than a few have taken multiple phone/e-mail inquiries
- Sometimes even just to get a response
When proposing a program to a library
  ◦ Be clear about who you are and what the program will involve including
    • Duration
    • Style
    • Audience

  ◦ Establish and document your expertise

  ◦ Document and share your program experience and testimonials about your programs
When proposing a program to a library
  ◦ Clearly and politely delineate your needs:
    • AV equipment
    • Furniture
    • Presenter fee or honorarium
    • Be reasonable
      • Do not ask for no brown M&Ms

Flexibility = more programs
  ◦ A lower honorarium or shorter run time or other changes may be necessary
  ◦ A good program experience can bring you back
Prepare your program with care

- Who is your audience?
- Do not go over people’s heads
- Do not talk down from on high
- Do not be afraid to challenge

- Observe and learn from
  - Good programs—what to do
  - Bad programs—what not to do
Presenter’s Principles & Responsibilities

- **Practice**
  - Make sure you know your content inside and out
  - Rehearse your
    - AV usage
    - Narrative flow and delivery
    - If using slides have them saved in two different locations

- **Logistics**
  - Make sure you have directions, contact information
  - Ask for arrival time that gives you flexibility
  - Bring some AV flexibility of your own
Promotion

- Early and often
- Your own website
- Listservs
- Social media
  - Topical or geographically relevant Facebook groups, Twitter feeds are hugely important
On The Day Of:

- Look sharp
- Be on time
- Be genial, flexible but firm
- Lend a hand if needed
- Introduce yourself to the audience—ask them about themselves
- Provide introductory materials
- Be prepared for AV to NOT work
Presenter’s Principles & Responsibilities

- Connect your work with libraries!
  - Especially if, as in my case, libraries are a big part of the work on which you are presenting
Ingredients To A Successful Program

- A successful library program regardless of type, topic, audience, duration is made up of four key ingredients

- I call these ingredients the E words
Ingredients To A Successful Program

- Energetic
- Engaging
- Entertaining
- Educational
Ingredients To A Successful Program

- Energetic
  - If you the presenter are not energetic you could be handing out $100 bills and the audience will fall asleep
  - Start at a high energy level and keep it there
  - Create an energy exchange feedback loop
Ingredients To A Successful Program

- Engaging
- You must connect with the audience
- Eye contact
- Movement
- Gestures
- Voice
- Drama
Ingredients To A Successful Program

- Entertaining
- Have some fun!
- Make ‘em laugh
  - Early and often
  - Poke fun at yourself
  - Don’t be shy about getting some help
- Fun = memorable
Ingredients To A Successful Program

- Educational

- You are there to inform and educate—make sure you do

- Establish your bona fides

- Refer to sources

- Make facts clear and digestible
In Conclusion

- Libraries are a great place for programs
- Libraries do an excellent job with programs
- There are areas where improvement is needed
- Program presenters must take principles, responsibilities and ingredients to heart
- I love giving talks at libraries!
The End

- Thank you!
- Questions, comments?