

the IALS librarians taught me about the many value-added services law libraries can develop and provide to their users, as well as to the wider legal research community. This is one of the most important lessons I will take with me as the field of law librarianship keeps redefining itself to meet changing user needs.

Teaching and mentoring

Another role that IALS serves is teaching and mentoring, a pursuit traditional in libraries. In addition to hosting visiting law librarians and providing numerous professional training programs, IALS hires several trainees each year to rotate through all the departments in the library and learn the ropes of law librarianship before entering library school. Indeed, because of this unique programme, many of the UK's foremost law librarians were trained by IALS. The law librarian's role as teacher and mentor is one that I heard much about during my studies

and I truly felt that dedication to teaching from everyone at IALS. Of course, it is IALS commitment to teaching future law librarians that enabled me to join their ranks for three weeks. Not only did I have a wonderful time, I learned more than any classroom-based programme can ever teach.

Thank you IALS

My experience at IALS truly helped solidify the knowledge I had gathered throughout my year of study. Librarians face the same issues – collections, space, serving the user, and remaining valuable to our users – wherever we are. It was so rewarding to share these values across the Atlantic and to meet so many remarkable law librarians in such a unique setting. And thanks to them, I feel I have taken a very valuable step on my new journey from novice to professional law librarian.

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Marketing Your Skills – Winning that Promotion

Abstract: This practical checklist by Nicola Franklin, Head of Recruitment at Sue Hill Recruitment, gives useful tips on how to market your skills in preparation for internal promotion or a new job.

Keywords: marketing; legal information managers; law librarians

Introduction

It is a skill not often associated with librarians, but one which is cropping up in knowledge and information management competency frameworks or bodies of knowledge with increasing regularity – marketing. These are usually referring to marketing of a library or information service but the skill, once acquired, can be equally well applied to our own careers. Marketing is so much more than “just advertising” or that dreaded junk mail that pours through



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our letterboxes. Marketing is about understanding needs, wants and desires. It is about matching an offering to those needs and it is about understanding what people value. Applying those principles to our own customers, to ourselves as products and to our own markets can help us all to get noticed and then to develop an existing role or win promotion to a new one.

Expanding your role

If you are finding that your current role is starting to seem repetitive or lacking

challenge, yet there is no obvious promotion route available, then seeking expansion of your current post is a natural move. For this it is important to put your head above the parapet and get noticed, but equally important that this is done in a positive light.

There is clearly something wrong in this picture (Figure.1)! One fantastic way to be noticed is to spend a moment away from your normal tasks and look around your department. Look out for processes or procedures which, like the one illustrated, are not working very well. Instead of tut-tutting to yourself, or worse moaning to colleagues and risking a negative reputation, put your thinking cap on and come up with a solution or work-around to the problem. An example at my work was emails flying about with bulky documents attached to them. This not only clogged up the Outlook Exchange server, but also led to a multitude of versions and confusion.

Go and see your manager and describe the situation, plus the solution you have come up with. This may or may not be accepted and it might generate discussion of other ways around the issue. What counts is that you will be remembered as the positive and pro-active person who wanted to improve things for everyone. In our case at work someone suggested sending a hyperlink to where a document was saved on the shared drive in emails, a solution which has worked brilliantly.

Another good idea is to keep your eyes open for any projects or other changes that may be proposed for your department. Change of any kind is unsettling, but it offers great opportunities to push the boundaries of your role. Volunteering to help with the project implementation, supporting colleagues who might be finding change stressful, and generally being a positive and cheering influence in the department will all help show you in a positive light.

Marketing yourself internally

When you are preparing yourself for promotion, both by acquiring the skills you will need in a new position and by building your reputation internally, there are several points to keep in mind:

- Who is your audience?
- What is your product?
- What is your message?
- How will you communicate this?

Audience

Even if you bury yourself in your job and never spare a thought for how you are perceived by others in your organisation, people will form an opinion. If you are hoping for promotion, it is important that you do your best to make sure that this opinion is a good one. Your audience is anyone who could have an impact on your internal job prospects. Does feedback from users affect your appraisal? Does your line manager have a voice, either putting you forward for promotion in the first place, or as part of the promotion panel or board? How about your manager's manager, or the managers of other departments?

Following marketing parlance, these different audiences are market segments. They will have different objectives, different agendas or needs, and will therefore value different things. Networking internally and getting to know what these goals, needs and values are is time well spent, again using marketing speak, this is your market research.

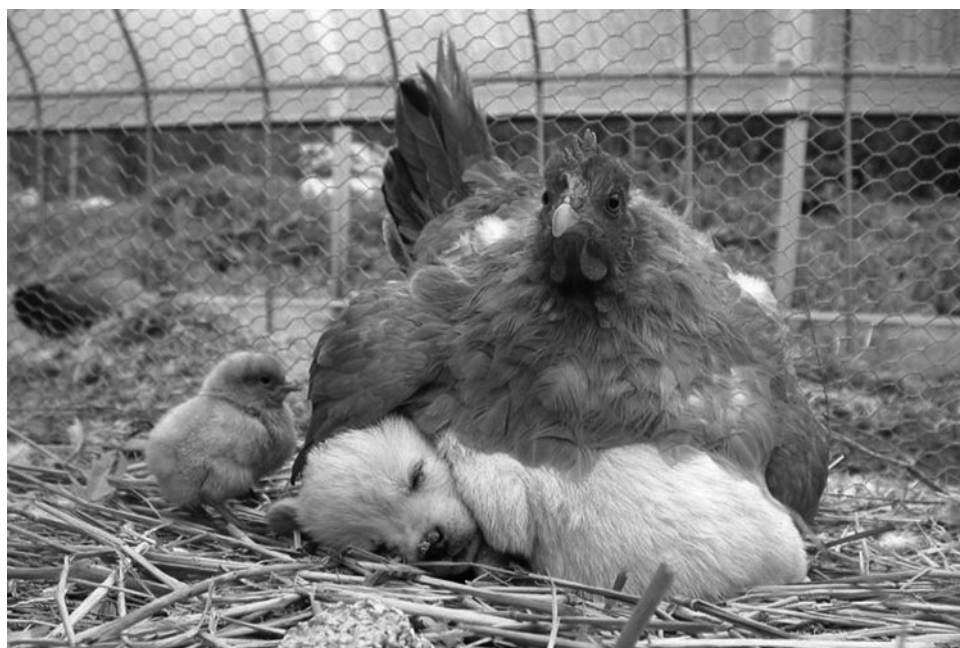


Figure 1: Spot the problem!

Product

Your product is you – your skills, your experience, your attitudes and your behaviour. This also warrants some research. One good way of conducting a skills audit is to dust off a copy of your job description and spend a few minutes updating it to reflect the actual duties you do each day, week or month. For each task consider what skill(s) you bring to bear to undertake each one. For example, if you take a turn on the enquiry desk, you might use reference interviewing skills, online database searching skills, information collation and/or abstracting skills, report writing skills etc, not to mention skills negotiating the deadline for the response.

Once you have a long-list of all the skills you use, assign each one a score based on how good you are at each, and another score reflecting how much you enjoy using each. Both aspects are important if you are to avoid pushing yourself into a role you are good at but hate doing. Add these two together to give a total score for each skill. The top ten scores reveal your key skills. These key skills are what you have to offer in a new role. Consider how they match the skills that would be needed in your ideal next step up the career ladder. Are they a close match? Where are there gaps?

Continuing professional development (CPD)

If your skills audit and gap analysis show that you are not immediately ready for the new role you have in mind, what can you do about it? There is no need to despair, there are several options open to you. Firstly, do not forget your own firm's training and development programmes. The appraisal system may already have identified training needs that you can follow up. Make sure you take advantage of internal training or external courses your firm may fund, or you can proactively approach your manager or human resources department and ask what is available.

Relying solely on your current employer for your skills development and career growth is not the only option, or even the best one, however. There are many special interest groups for the information profession and these provide an extremely valuable opportunity for skills development, particularly for management-level skills you may not have the opportunity to use at work until you are already in the role. Activities like sitting on a committee or working group, chairing meetings, managing a budget, organising events and speaking at conferences will stand you in good stead for application forms and at interviews.

Message

Once you have a clear idea of your audiences and their needs, and of yourself and your skills, you need to consider the messages you are broadcasting. Are your

actions, personal presentation, words and body language all giving the same picture?

Is your message:

- “I am a librarian”
- “I can find you a precedent”
- “I can order a journal article for you”

Or are you telling your audience:

- “I can help you reach your goals”
- “I can save you time in a busy day”
- “I can remove the stress of meeting a client unprepared”

Which would you rather be known for?

Building your reputation

Being good at your current job, whilst being necessary when you are seeking promotion, is not sufficient. Indeed, if you are *too* good at your current job, your firm may feel it is against their best interests to move you out of it...

In addition to doing a good job, it is important that people *know* that you do a good job, and that they know that you are capable of other things beyond the current scope of your role and also that you have the attitude or state of mind expected of the next role. This sounds like a tall order, but there are various things you can do to get the message across.

British people, and perhaps librarians in particular, are notoriously bad at telling people about successes. There is somehow a feeling that this is bragging and that one should not indulge. It is possible to send out the right signals without being intrusive or obnoxious. For example, users may sometimes send a message (verbally or by email) expressing thanks to you for sourcing something hard to find or getting something more quickly than expected. Several such messages forwarded to your line manager, with introductions saying “Here's some positive customer feedback for the department” will, over time, create a positive impression about your customer service skills. The ideas discussed earlier about suggesting process improvements, volunteering for projects or supporting colleagues will also create a good impression.

Web 2.0 tools are also ideal for showing your colleagues, managers and peers across the industry that you are interested, involved and have something positive to contribute. An internal wiki or intranet portal is an ideal forum for you to contribute content. A company or personal blog is a good vehicle for showcasing your research and analytical skills, as well as a well argued and evidenced opinion on current topical issues. Commenting on the blogs of other information or legal sector personalities and linking between their blogs and yours will also raise your profile. LinkedIn¹ is another useful tool for building your reputation, not just having a passive profile,

but joining groups, adding to or creating discussions and posing or answering questions.

Overall, building reputation is about being aware of yourself, where you are heading, what the requirements are of someone in that sort of position, and therefore what kind of signals you need to be giving out to demonstrate that you are ready and raring to go in a new role.

Applying for promotion

Application forms

Once your efforts to raise your profile and build a glowing reputation have succeeded and a promotion opportunity presents itself, there are further hurdles to overcome to reach your goal.

Application forms are used to ensure equality and consistency between applicants, as well as to elicit additional information that is rarely present on a CV. When going for internal promotion you may often find yourself up against external candidates as well as other internal applicants. It is therefore important that you carry over the insights you have gained from your market research, skills audit/gap analysis and CPD into your application.

Just as you would when applying for a new external job, make sure you get a copy of the job description and person specification for the new role. Also find out as much as you can about the new manager you would be reporting to, the new team if that is relevant, and the different goals/objectives of that new manager and department.

Some general hints:

- Follow any instructions, however mundane they appear
- Keep a copy of the form, ready to refer to before the interview
- Do a rough copy first and double check for mistakes
- Talk in terms of “me” not “we” – they are not considering promoting your colleagues.
- Give specific examples of using the skills you are describing

There will probably be a section on the form with a blank box headed something like “Please demonstrate how you fit the person specification” or “Please explain how your skills match this position.” There is also often a note, in small script, saying that you can continue on another sheet if necessary. This is a hint that this box is the most important section on the whole form and you really should go into quite a bit of detail.

This box is intended for you to address each of the points of the person specification, especially the essential ones, and show how you have the skills and competencies for each.

Competencies

Competencies are behaviours that are needed to undertake a task successfully. Many organisations now have competency frameworks which outline the competencies for each role type and have several levels for each competency and an indication of which level is needed for different level roles within each team.

Having an understanding of competencies will help you to phrase your responses to both the application form and to questions during an interview in a language and style that will match with managers’ expectations.

When answering competency based questions, a good rule of thumb is to use the STAR principle to structure your answer:

Situation
Task
Action
Result

Briefly outline the situation where you used the skill, then give the task, i.e. the objective or outcome you were aiming for. Put most of the emphasis of your answer into describing the actions you took to achieve this outcome and give the result, plus your reflection and learning on the situation.

Promotion interviews

Internal interviews can feel more difficult and stressful than external ones, since there could be the pressure of being interviewed by people you already know. This is where your reputation-building activities should stand you in good stead – if you know you have a positive image in the firm you do not have to worry if they are only seeing you because they have to.

Another antidote to this pressure is to ensure you prepare thoroughly. Use the information you have on the new manager’s and the firm’s goals, consider what they want the person to achieve in this role – is it a replacement or a new post? Think about how you can help them get the results they want to see and gather evidence of work, special interest groups, committee or leisure activities that allow you to demonstrate the behaviours they are looking for in action.

If the promotion panel or board is using competency interview techniques, the questions will be along the lines of:

- “Give us an example of xyz”
- “Describe a situation where you had to xyz”
- “Tell us about a time when you xyz”

Even if the interview is not structured this way, it is useful for you to bear in mind the messages you are trying to get across, in terms of how your skills will help you achieve the outcomes they want to see from

someone in this post, to avoid the interview turning into a cosy chat.

Conclusion

Promotion can be daunting, a new role, new responsibilities, and new expectations, but it can also be an exciting

and rewarding challenge. Marketing yourself effectively, within your organisation and across the profession generally, means you will be more prepared to excel in the new role without letting the challenges overwhelm you.
www.suehill.com

Footnote

¹<http://www.linkedin.com/>

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Current Awareness

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