

# PR at Melbourne University Library

The Librarian, *Helen Hayes*, explains why this program is necessary and how it is managed

We live in a political environment where it is essential to maintain the importance of the Library in the eyes of administrators, faculty and users. We need to ensure that we are projecting a positive image and this requires focus and effort. While most libraries have many achievements to record, this is not always the perception in the community we serve. Inadequate communication can be a major reason for this perception.

The aims of the public relations program are to:

- promote the services and resources of the Library to its user groups;
- keep users informed of matters which may affect them or which may be of general interest;
- develop new lines of communication to user groups and strengthen those that already exist;
- ensure that information provided by the Library is accurate, timely and useful;
- promote the role of the Library within the University and as a regional and national resource.

We place great emphasis on this program and hold a meeting of all staff annually to discuss how we can make it more effective. A small PR Committee meets weekly for half an hour with a regular agenda of ideas and ensures that publication deadlines are achieved. A major continuing role of the Committee is to identify items of interest for the various University and Library publications.

One of the most important avenues for raising the Library's profile is through a publicity program.

A review of our existing publicity found that there was generally quality in content but not in presentation, format or consistency of the image we portrayed. A new format was developed and a desktop publishing program was purchased to improve the quality and efficiency of the publications produced.

Staff meet with the editors of staff and student newspapers to find out what kind of material is being sought for publication and how it could be presented. We build goodwill

through regular contributions and maintaining contacts with editors. We aim to ensure that all publica-



*Helen Hayes*

tions within the University have a Library content.

The need for a quality Library newsletter was considered to be important. This newsletter now contains sufficient useful information to be noticed when it is not received.

Other mechanisms for promotion include:

- faculty notice boards and student notice boards are used for general and subject information;
- suggestion boxes and a feedback board. Responses to suggestions are handled quickly, positively, sometimes humorously and the overall results are reported biannually to the student press;
- a letter of welcome and a *How to...* guide is provided to each new member of staff. Contact numbers are given for various services and an induction tour is offered;
- presentations may form part of an exhibition opening or can draw attention to an important part of the collection;
- tours can be provided for staff, students, alumni, friends or others;
- library User Committees assist in strategic planning and draw matters of concern to the attention of the Library. At the University of Melbourne all Faculties have their

own user committees who play a significant role in helping the Library to set priorities;

- acquisitions of note can be promoted in many ways, through publicity, launches, social events. Donations must be acknowledged and this may include a function or placing a commemorative plaque;
- special collections can be highlighted from time to time and the Library produces high quality bibliographies for distribution;
- displays and exhibitions bring people into the Library, are newsworthy and provide an interesting and pleasant environment for the Library's clientele. The opening of a display may include a launch with a guest speaker;
- sandwich lunches for academic staff can be useful for targeting areas of concern and dealing with them informally;
- the Friends of the Baillieu Library organise a wide range of events and help to create a pool of goodwill and increased awareness of the Library's collections and services;
- user surveys are conducted to find out more about the needs of our clients;
- the Library participates in the University's Discovery Day program by providing information to prospective students, displays and refreshments in the foyer of the Library;
- a clippings file of the Library's achievements as reported in the media. (This is also a useful measure of the success of the program);
- an important aspect of any public relations program is to use every worthwhile opportunity to promote the Library.

The management of the Library supports the public relations program. At the University of Melbourne there has been a considerable management commitment to quality service which was established under the 'Library of Excellence Program'. The focus of the program is in excellence in all areas of staffing, service and collections and includes a collaborative approach to planning involving Faculties and the Library. ■