

Information Dissemination: Exploring the Librarian's Role in Public Relations

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Abstract.

organization's knowledge. In today's Information Age, increasing importance is placed on information dissemination. The management of electronic resources has been an important aspect of the Gemini librarian's job since the library's inception. In this paper, I discuss the methods that the Gemini Observatory is using to share its resources with a growing audience.

1. Introduction

The Special Libraries Association describes special librarians as "information resource experts who collect, analyze, evaluate, package and disseminate information to facilitate accurate decision-making in corporate, academic, and government settings."² Historically the astronomy librarian's role has been to gather and preserve, and to store and retrieve the organization's knowledge. We live today in an Information Age that has been transformed by the World Wide Web. It has contributed to an increased demand for the librarian's skills in effectively organizing and distributing this information. In their poster, *Mining the web: How useful is the global public library?*, the authors state, "Given the market forces which drive the Web — mainly entertainment and commercial advertising — the Web is ideally suited for dissemination of outreach-type information, and among professionals, for documentation and publications."³ Librarians are natural candidates for playing a supportive role in public relations because of their experience promoting their own libraries.

The ability to multi-task has enabled our profession to embrace emerging technologies and has saved more than a few libraries from extinction. Many of those that manage to survive budget cuts, competition, and even growth

¹The Gemini Observatory is operated by the Association of Universities for Research in Astronomy, Inc., under a cooperative agreement with the NSF on behalf of the Gemini partnership: the National Science Foundation (United States), the Particle Physics and Astronomy Research Council (United Kingdom), the National Research Council (Canada), CONICYT (Chile), the Australian Research Council (Australia), CNPq (Brazil) and CONICET (Argentina).

²Special Libraries Association. <http://www.sla.org> (10 Aug. 2002).

³Albrecht, Rudolf and Peter B. Boyce. *Mining the web: How useful is the global public library?* In: LISA IV conference proceedings, Prague, Czech Republic, July 2-5, 2002.

have done so by merging with other departments, like information technology, web site management, or public relations. This is characteristic of the Gemini Observatory, which is growing at a rapid pace.

The primary vehicle for public relations at Gemini is the Public Information and Outreach (PIO) office, which was established to educate and inspire the public about astronomy. It is a tool for informing the media, educators, and the community about the observatory's latest discoveries and developments.

When the library moved from Gemini's office in Tucson, Arizona, to the Gemini North facility in Hilo, Hawai'i, three years ago, it merged with the PIO department and became a part of its strategic plan to develop and promote initiatives that support the partnership's goals through educational outreach and public relations.

Members of the PIO office include: Peter Michaud, the PIO Manager, Janice Harvey, the Gemini North Administrative Assistant, Ma. Antonieta Garcia, the Gemini South Administrative Assistant, Andolie Marten, the Outreach Intern, Kirk Pu'uohau-Pummill, the Graphic Artist, and myself, the Librarian and Web master.

Production of the newsletters and press releases, compilation of the media archives, and distribution of the public relations materials are the primary areas in which the library interacts with and supports the PIO office.

2. Press Releases

Ten press releases were published in the first six months of 2002, which increased Gemini's visibility. Year-round production of these announcements requires the collaboration of the entire PIO team. The press release generally consists of the main article, background information, accompanying images, and Spanish translations of each element. My task is to compile all of this information into a cohesive set of web pages. Once the content is arranged, metatags are added to enhance search engine optimization, and hyperlinks are embedded to facilitate navigation.

When the press release is published, it is featured on Gemini's home page. A graphical program called Webalyzer is used to monitor the subsequent Web traffic generated by the press release.

3. Media Archives

Since the significant increase in press releases has led to increased media coverage about the Gemini Observatory, I set up a spreadsheet to monitor and record this information. Along with the science publication citations, it provides a metric for measuring Gemini's success.

The spreadsheet contains six fields: date, source, title, media type, press release, and comments. The title and press release fields are hyperlinked to a corresponding web page, if one exists. After the spreadsheet is updated and saved, I convert it to an html document, insert the metatags and header logo, and upload it to the web site.

I routinely follow up on tips received from my colleagues and conduct searches in local newspapers, popular science publications, and a collection of web sites I have bookmarked. Activity is monitored closely following the public release of a press announcement.

The archival process consists of copying the original newspaper and magazine articles onto acid-free paper and storing them in vertical sleeves in acid-free archival boxes. The originals are retained to be used later in the PIO scrapbook.

4. Newsletters

Twice each year, the PIO team collaborates on the production of the observatory's newsletter. Once the content and graphical elements are combined, a printed copy of the newsletter is passed around the department for editing. When the final proof is ready to be delivered to the printer, I receive an electronic copy to publish on Gemini's web site.

I start by creating a new web page for the current newsletter edition that includes a table of contents, and a link to a print-optimized PDF file of the entire newsletter, along with thumbnail images of the front and back covers, the inside covers, and any additional illustrations. Then I extract each article from the original document and create separate PDF files. The files are hyper-linked to the articles' titles in the table of contents. Next I create the thumbnail images of the covers and illustrations. Each is linked to a full-resolution image. Lastly, I update the newsletter archive's index page to include a thumbnail image of the cover page and a link to the latest edition.

Once the printed newsletters arrive, six copies are stored in acid-free cardboard archival boxes. Then, I distribute them to the staff, the National Gemini Offices, and subscribers to our mailing list. The mailing list is maintained in a spreadsheet that can easily be merged with a mailing label template. A library volunteer assists with the distribution, which involves stuffing, labeling, affixing customs forms, and mailing the envelopes to over two dozen countries world-wide.

5. Public Relations Materials

As Gemini's librarian, I also play a minor role in the storage and distribution of a growing collection of public relations materials created by the PIO department, such as posters, press kits, English and Spanish brochures, and a multimedia image gallery and virtual tour. I assist by providing storage space for the materials in the library and by answering requests for these items that are received through our web site.

6. The Future

Currently, the PIO team is undergoing a major effort to redesign Gemini's public web pages. The Graphic Artist and I are working together to create cohesion in the appearance and organization of the web site.

My next two objectives are to research alternative solutions for displaying our media archives and publication lists online and to create an interactive Web-based forum to facilitate planning and discussion among a consortia of astronomy outreach offices.

7. Conclusion

In closing, I would like to recognize Ruth Kneale, Gemini's first librarian, for her guidance and the knowledge she passed along in "The Gemini Librarian's Manual". I'd like to thank my mentor, Liz Bryson, for her example and encouragement. I would also like to thank the Gemini Observatory for its support of my presentation and attendance at the LISA IV conference.