

Public Libraries Briefcase

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Tips on Presenting a Small Business Workshop in a Public Library

By
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During times of economic hardship, when more people are unemployed, it is obvious to many librarians that libraries begin to receive more requests for job or career-related materials and sources. Although it is sometimes overlooked or not recognized, there is also an increase in the number of patrons, unemployed or not, who come to the library looking for information on how to start small businesses. These patrons come with all sorts of expectations. Some need general, incorporation or funding information. Others need demographics or statistics to present to a banker or venture capitalist. There are also those patrons that may have no idea what kind of information is available at the library or how to look for it. Frequently we can help patrons and even save them money through the information the library contains. As librarians, we can provide small business information at the reference desk or we can go one step further and provide small business informational workshops to our clientele whether they be the general public, local business groups, business development centers, associations, governmental agencies or educational groups from high schools or universities. By providing small business information, collections and workshops, we as librarians can indeed boost economic development in our communities. The following are tips on presenting and developing a small business workshop in a public library. This article is based on the PowerPoint presentation prepared for the Public Libraries Forum at Toronto.

Target Your Audience

Will your group be walk-ins, local businesspersons, chambers of commerce, entrepreneurial groups, social service agencies or secondary, vocational or college students? Creating a generic workshop based on your library's collections is recommended.

Know Your Contact Person

Discuss what is wanted and what you and your library can do. At this point, you can take the generic workshop you have created and through careful questioning tailor-make the workshop to the group. Ask how many people will be attending. Schedule a time. Schedule a room or quiet place. Reconfirm at least a week before the workshop. Keep the contact person's name in your files. Contacts may be able to help you or your library in the future. You can help them now.

Create Handouts

Create a workshop bibliography of the print and electronic sources that you will be discussing for the group. Provide library and/or departmental or service brochures as well as small business collection pathfinders and

bibliographies. Many libraries provide these brochures, pathfinders, and bibliographies on their web sites. You can look at these sites to give you a better example of how to proceed.

The Workshop

Introduce yourself, mentioning your job title and a very brief work history. Distribute handouts. Describe your library's collections and services and let the audience know where these collections are and where they can get small business reference service in your library.

Presentation Layout

Your workshop and bibliography should include material on the following categories: basic sources, local sources, business planning and start-up, marketing, industry classification, industry surveys, trade journals and indexes, databases, statistical sources, demographics, company information, financial ratios, site selection, trade names and trademarks, and the Internet.

Basic Sources

Here you list and mention titles such as *Small Business Sourcebook* or *Encyclopedia of Business Information Sources* and any similar basic reference materials available at your library. These sources will clue the patron in to the large amount of small business information available and where to find it. Some of these sources may be arranged by specific start-up category.

Local Sources

Include municipal and state government business handbooks. Government sources are now often provided on the web. If your library has a generous printing policy, the patrons can print web-based materials at the library for use at home or office. Also include local business magazines or newspapers. These sources often have small business issues or columns that provide current useful information on the local business climate as well as lists of local small business organizations and venture capitalists.

Business Planning and Start-Up

Here you discuss titles on incorporation, business and marketing plans, and grant or financing directories and sources. You can make this very convenient for your patrons by creating a reference shelf for this material in an easily accessible location.

Marketing

This is the main part of your presentation. It is in this area that your reference skills can be of the most use to your audience. All the following informational categories deal with marketing.

Industry Classification

Industries are classed by either Standard Industrial Classification (SIC) or North American Industry Classification System (NAICS) codes. Define these for your audience and discuss how they are used in arranging information in both print and electronic sources. If you have copies of the codes, bring them to the workshop.

Industry Surveys

Entrepreneurs need to know the current state of an industry. Mention the major industry surveys available and discuss how they differ. Surveys can provide industry backgrounds, but due to the increase in business and economic change today, these sources can age rapidly.

Trade Journals

The most current industry information is often found in articles or special issues of trade journals. Define a trade journal and a special issue. Your audience may be unaware of these materials.

Trade Journal Title Sources

List the sources your library owns such as *SRDS* or *Bacon's*. Patrons can use these to find a specific title that they can page through on a regular basis.

Periodicals Indexes

Talk about the ones in your library and how they can be used. For example, do you have *Business Periodicals Index* or the *F&S*?

Databases

Unless you are fortunate to work in a very large public library or have a massive serials budget, it is unlikely that you will have immediate access to many trade journals. You may, however, have access to databases that may include full-text articles from these journals. Describe the useful databases in your library. Mention library policy concerning use of the computers. Let the audience know if any of these databases can be accessed remotely at home or office.

Statistical Sources

Statistics are needed to back-up a business or marketing plan to a banker or venture capitalist. List and describe statistical sources available in your library. Statistics can often be found in special issues or journals as well as through searching sources such as *Statistical Reference Index* or databases.

Associations

Sometimes the required information cannot be found at the library. Associations can provide unique current industry information and some publish newsletters. All associations are different however and how much information the patrons can receive from these organizations depends on the specific mission statement of the actual association. Some will provide information to anyone who asks while others will only provide services to members. List the major association directories in your workshop bibliography.

Demographics: Who Lives There?

Entrepreneurs usually need the most specific demographic information to make decisions on site selection. Ideally this information will be by zipcode or census tract. City, county or statewide sources are far too broad to be of use. Old information is truly useless.

Occasionally, chambers of commerce may provide this information for prospective business owners. *Sourcebook of Zipcode Demographics* is an excellent print source for this information.

Company Information

List directories, databases, and local sources that provide company information. Patrons can use these to determine competitors in a local area (see below) and also manufacturers of needed supplies. Patrons can also use these to create an inexpensive mailing list. Describe here the difference between a periodicals database like ABI Inform versus a corporate database like ReferenceUSA.

Financial Ratios

Public companies can be valued through various criteria such as stock price, p/e ratio, debt, etc. Private companies are usually valued through industry ratio benchmarks arranged by SIC code. The Risk Management Association and Dun & Bradstreet and other organizations provide annuals that list various average ratios per industry. If your library does not own one of these sources, be able to refer the patrons to another library to obtain this information.

Site Selection

Entrepreneurs will of course need to locate their businesses in the most profitable spot. For retail establishments, this can be done through demographics, but for these businesses and others, there are other factors to be considered. These factors may involve tax rates, land values and as mentioned before, competitors

in a specific area. Here mention and/or list local directories, corporate databases, county tax and real estate atlases or web sites, and land valuation sources. Information found in these sources may be old regardless of the publication date. It is always advisable for the entrepreneur to visit the site before final decisions are made.

Trade Names and Trademarks

An entrepreneur will need to name the business. Define the difference between a trade name and a trademark. Mention sources that can provide lists of names already used. Many states now have web sites listing trade names and the USPTO now provides more trademark information on its web site. Patrons will often ask many legal questions during this section and this can bog-down your presentation. Remember that you are not a lawyer. You may be able to provide legal statutes or sources, but you should not interpret them. Refer patrons to their lawyer or local business development groups for legal guidance.

Create An Online Small Business Web Bibliography for Your Library

Most libraries now have web sites. If your library does not, you should strongly consider developing one. By creating an online small business web bibliography, you can list all appropriate federal, state, municipal and local small business web sources including sites on business handbooks, laws and regulations, licensing, taxation, incorporation, trade names, trademarks, patents and legal forms. Patrons would be able to search the library's pages at the library or remotely. Remember to briefly annotate each site and to make sure the URLs are current. Print your web bibliography for distribution at the workshop.

Internet

There are literally dozens of books on Internet searching. Mention your favorites to the audience. Clue them in on search engines, search strategy and authority control. You may be surprised at how little experience many people have on direct Internet searching. At this point you should again mention your library's available business databases and your library's computer policy.

Statistics

Keep them! Administrators, library board members and politicians may look at statistics to determine future funding. How many workshops did you do? How many people attended them? Which groups came to or requested presentations? What kind of information did they request? Were you able to provide the information? Did the groups or patrons find you or did you find them through your own outreach? Statistics and feedback can make you shine, make your library look good and provide information for future collection development and staff reference training.

Irwin D. Faye has recently retired as Manager of the Business Information Center of the Chicago Public Library.

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