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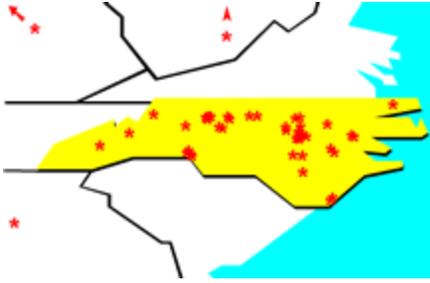


"Wanted: Regional business librarians interested in networking and sharing information. Public, academic, special, school -- all types are encouraged to reply."
--BLINC (Business Librarians in North Carolina)

BLINC of an Eye - Business Librarians in North Carolina: an easy model for developing local interest groups

In the Beginning

The idea of a business librarians' interest group serving North Carolina developed out of a need of one newly-relocated business librarian to connect with others in her state. Business librarians love to network, talk, and meet. So where was the group for business librarians here in NC? Nowhere to be found. With some simple advice from Jennifer Boettcher, Business Librarian at Georgetown University, who created such a group in her area, and help from another North Carolina librarian (co-author Steve Cramer), BLINC – Business Librarians in North Carolina -- was created in January 2003. Today we share this vision with over 50 members throughout the state and beyond. See below image for BLINC's membership reach.



Getting Started

How did we plan a business interest group? Using a simple market style plan, we developed our product – BLINC (many chuckles between us until we found a *proper* acronym!) and a logo. We planned our marketing strategy – whom did we want to target and how? Of course, e-mail was our best vehicle for promotion. We developed a flyer and sent it in January to BUSLIB, NCLA-L, SLA-CNC, PUBLIB, and to particular individuals we knew and identified on library web pages. Interest proved high! We got two excited responses within fifteen minutes of our e-mail announcement. Immediately we began developing the framework of our first meeting.

Our First Meeting

The first meeting took place in March at UNC-Greensboro, located centrally, with 14 librarians from public, academic, and special libraries. Everyone seemed intrigued with the interest group and eager to forge ahead. One librarian, Betty Garrison, from Elon College, told us she had inquired about such a group a few years back, but found nothing available. So she was thrilled to participate. Roger Magnus from Georgia State University in Atlanta wanted to participate because nothing of this kind was available in Georgia.

After introductions, we began laying the groundwork -- do we want or need a group and what do we want from it? By the end of the day, we had a list of possible goals and issues we wanted to discuss, and a plan for the organizational structure of BLINC (who will be in charge, where do we meet, etc):

- We would have quarterly meetings;
- The coordinators would be BLINC's founders (the authors), plus Jeffrey Hamilton, from Wake County Public Library;
- We would try to meet in convenient locations and vary the locations by library type – public, school, academic;
- In addition to the meetings, we would also communicate and share information through a Blackboard site that Elisabeth Leonard of Wake Forest University would create for us;
- And we all agreed we wanted BLINC activities **free and open to all**.

We ended our meeting with an educational component by sharing "best business" websites and comparing ABI-Inform, InfoTrac OneFile, and EBSCOhost Business Source Elite.

What's Happened Since?

BLINC now has just over 50 members, representing public, academic, school, and special libraries (including our State Library). We hope to attract some community college librarians soon!

We've had two meetings since the inaugural meeting in March (one at Wake Forest University, and other at Elon University). Among the activities and accomplishments:

- We reviewed new databases (ex. Morningstar Online and Marketresearch.com via ProQuest) and changes in existing ones (ex. ProQuest ABI-INFORM and EBSCOHost Business Source Premier);
- We reported on various conferences we attended;
- We learned about business-related professional opportunities, scholarships, and prizes available from ALA and SLA;
- Chad McCrillis from InfoUSA provided a demonstration of ReferenceUSA, and answered questions about it;
- We decided to petition to join the North Carolina Library Association (NCLA) as a section (see below);
- Erin Knight from NC-SLA gave us an overview of the association and discussed future NC-SLA and BLINC workshop collaborations.
- We voted on the goals of BLINC:
 - Networking and meeting other business librarians in similar and different workplace settings
 - Continuing education and training
 - Sharing about information resources (databases, web sites, books, etc)
 - Professional development
 - Being a business information resource for state initiatives

BLINC also gave a presentation called "Industry Research on the Cheap: Using NC LIVE and Free Web Sources for Industry Analysis" at the North Carolina Library Association Annual Conference in September 2003. The session ended with a BLINC general interest meeting.

Current Projects:

BLINC is working on several longer-term projects. We are petitioning to join North Carolina Library Association (NCLA) (<http://www.nclaonline.org/>) as a section. Over several meetings, we discussed the merits of remaining an informal, independent group or in joining our state library association. We finally decided to try joining NCLA, for several reasons:

- NCLA has a good conference;

- We would get some money back from NCLA for BLINC activities;
- Being a formal group should give us more staying power than we would have as an informal group;
- It would be easier to communicate with groups and librarians outside of BLINC;
- We would enjoy better name recognition;
- With BLINC as a unit of NCLA, it will be easier for some to justify going to the meetings.

However, if BLINC does become a section of NCLA, we will continue to have free and open meetings and open membership to our Blackboard communication site. The membership feels strongly about that.

Based on our first-hand knowledge of the business needs of our patrons, BLINC is also going to provide suggestions to our statewide database consortium, NCLIVE (<http://www.nclive.org/index.phtml>), on electronic resources for business. We are ranking what we consider to be the most important categories of databases (ex. company directories, articles, investment information, etc.) as well as ranking preferred databases within each category. Of course, in this time of limited state budgets, whether NCLIVE will have the budget to respond to our suggestions, or whether certain vendors would entertain statewide access to their products, is another issue. However, we hope our suggestions at least provide a blueprint for future considerations of database selections that best serve the needs of the state's business community.

We are discussing having a special BLINC meeting to focus on library instruction for business students. There's plenty of articles and presentations out in the library world on library instruction and information literacy *in general*, but there's little out there on how to teach business research skills to business students. This proposed half-day BLINC workshop would be a team effort, in which interested librarians would gather to share tips, strategies, and experiences (ex. "effective group exercises when teaching company or industry research" or "how to organize a session on secondary market research".)

The highlight at the January meeting, to be held at the Greensboro Public Library, will be a presentation on accessing and using state census data by Michele Haslett, Demographics Specialist from the State Library of North Carolina.

Conclusion

It proved easy to get BLINC started, given the enthusiasm of its members, our use of electronic communication, and the hospitality of each meeting's host library. Some of the benefits of BLINC were immediate (ex. networking and continuing education), but the longer-term projects BLINC is pursuing should also prove worthwhile. We encourage business librarians in other states or regions who feel a need to collaborate with area colleagues to consider creating their own versions of BLINC!

For copies of minutes, our flyer, other information, or to join BLINC, please contact Steve Cramer at smcramer@uncg.edu.