Saving Special Libraries in a Recession
Business Strategies for Survival & Success

Arlene Fletcher
Mary Franklin
Joyce Garczynski
Glynnis Gilbert
Sara Mathis
Ping Wang
Problem Facing Special Libraries

- Most have faced **cutbacks** or **elimination**.
- What should special librarians **do**?
- Most special librarians do not have plans.
- Literature offers **anecdotal** strategies
- We aim to identify strategies effective across **multiple** types of special libraries.
Methodology

● Survey
  ● Sample: 113 special librarians in Washington DC area March 12-24, 2008
  ● Design: 10 questions on SurveyMonkey

● Case studies of both success and failure
  ● Libraries at KPMG, WJE, EPA, and Apple

● Summary of lessons learned from survey and case studies
Our Survey Found Librarians

- Believe **marketing** prevents serious cutbacks from ever being announced - especially marketing to organizational management.
- Differ about whether they think other tactics can prevent a library from ever being cut.
- Believe there is a **limit** on what can be done to save a library, especially government librarians.
- Disagree on what, if anything, can be done when cutbacks have already been announced.
Success: KPMG’s National Tax Library

- **Background**
  - 2000 – KPMG was establishing a small, centralized HQ for tax consulting in Washington D.C., staffed by tax attorneys, as opposed to auditors/accountants.
  - The library was disorganized without collection development policy or leadership.
  - KPMG was downgrading all libraries nationally.
  - D.C. tax office managed to keep the current library, hire a new librarian, and dedicate library space.

  *How did they do it?*
Steps to Success at KPMG

- Marketing
  - **Branding** was initial key to making the library a reality.

- Communication
  - Maintain open channels with all levels of management, and view them as both users and investors in the business of the library.

- Organization/Planning
  - Define goals and develop plan to achieve the goals.

- Customer Service
  - Understand and anticipate user needs
  - Understand how users use library
  - Evaluate user needs and usage and offer solutions.
Success: Library at WJE

- **Background**
  - Wiss, Janney, Elstner Associates, Inc. (WJE) has over 300 engineers, architects, and other scientists and 18 branches throughout the country.
  - WJE had considered outsourcing until new librarian revamped library.

- **Problems**
  - Disorganized collections and underused services and materials
  - Online catalog inaccessible to others except the librarian
  - Disconnect between main library and materials at branches

- **Steps to Success**
  - New librarian put materials in more logical configuration, familiarized herself with firm’s research goals and needs, and reviewed past user requests.
Failure: EPA Libraries

- **Background**
  - EPA administrators justified the closures.
  - EPA scientists *protested* to Congress.

- **What went wrong?**
  - EPA administrators uninformed about libraries’ value and extent of services
  - GAO faulted administrators for not consulting staff or taking into account public need for access.
  - Librarians did not have *open channels* to EPA administrators.
  - Librarians did not stay *up to date* with changes in technology or users’ needs.
Failure: Apple Library

- Background
  - Founded in 1981, Apple’s library was an icon for other high technology libraries in Silicon Valley.
  - By 1997 Apple management cut the library staff from 14 to 7 due to financial difficulties.
  - The library lost its champion when Apple restructured.
  - Apple then decided to outsource library services.

- What went wrong?
  - Apple did not cultivate its stakeholders.
  - The library could not show management in-house library was more efficient and cost-effective than outsourcing.
Business Strategies for Success

“It’s all about the money. Whether you work in the private sector or the public sector, someone has to pick up the tab.”
- John R. Latham

- Don't wait until the ax falls. Be proactive. If you are not, your options will be limited.
- Make sure your product/service meets the needs of your customers.
- Align the library with the goals of the organization.
- Market yourself aggressively.
- Prepare metrics and justifications.
Thank You!

Contact Us

- Dr. Ping Wang
- Address: 4105 Hornbake Building, South Wing College Park, MD 20742
- Telephone: (301) 593-4518
- E-mail: pwang@umd.edu