

US Public Libraries

Marketing and Communications Landscape



OCLC conducted a survey among US public libraries. This report provides an overview of how they communicate to their users and the broader community.



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Marketing and Communications Landscape

KEY FINDINGS

As part of communications efforts:

- **96%** use social media
- **84%** post photos, videos, or library information on the library's social media pages
- **70%** send email messages

40% have a communications strategy, but only 17% say it's current

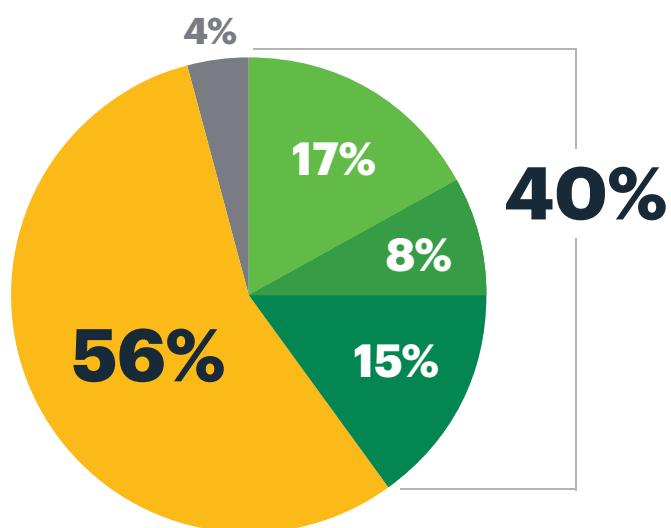
71% say they don't have the necessary staff resources

25% have marketing professionals on staff

Some survey results include an asterisk (). This denotes survey questions for which respondents could select more than one answer.*

40% have a communications strategy, but only 17% say it's current

Does your library have a communications/marketing strategy?



- **Yes**, and it's current
- **Yes**, but it's not current
- **Yes**, but it's in the planning stages
- **No**
- **Not sure**

"The creation of our Community Engagement Department has revolutionized how we get information out to our community. This department consists of three librarians who do public relations, are taking on a rebranding project, gave our library a presence on social media and have assisted in embedding the library in the community."

Library director

Making the most of limited resources

Public libraries have small marketing budgets and the majority feel they don't have enough staff resources.

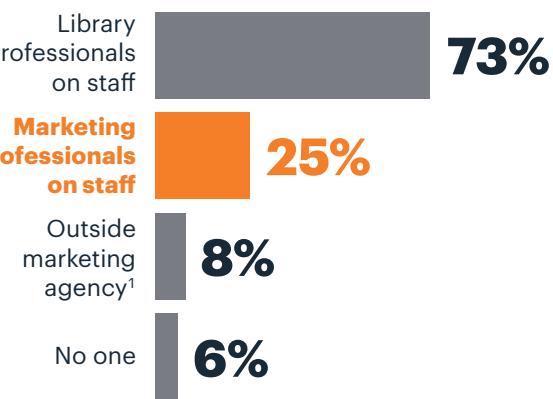
71% say they don't have the necessary staff resources

What concerns or barriers does your library encounter with respect to communications?*



25% have marketing professionals on staff

Who is responsible for marketing activities at your library?*



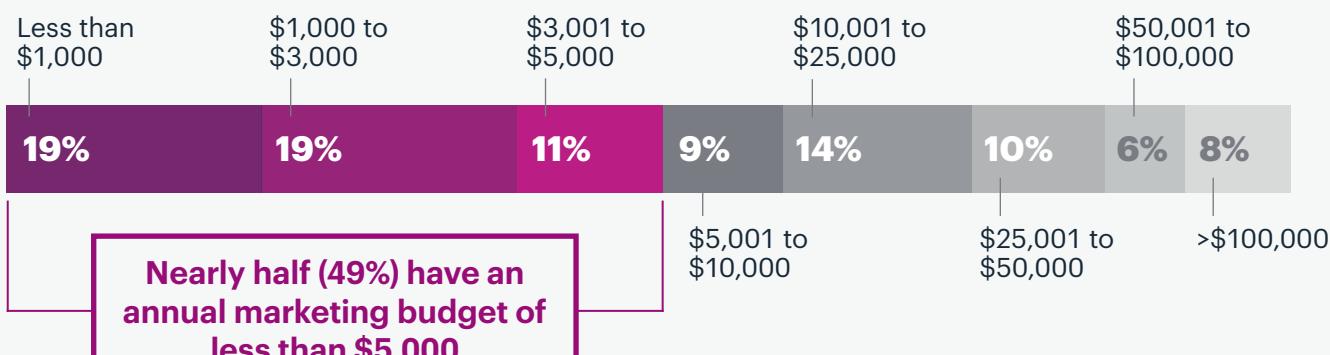
¹Also asked: For what types of projects have you used an outside marketing agency?* Results: Branding/rebranding (54%); General awareness of library (50%); Social media campaign (32%); Pre-election levy/ballot issue (21%); Traditional media (7%)



56% say they have a specific marketing budget

Also: No (43%); Not sure (1%)

What is your annual marketing budget?

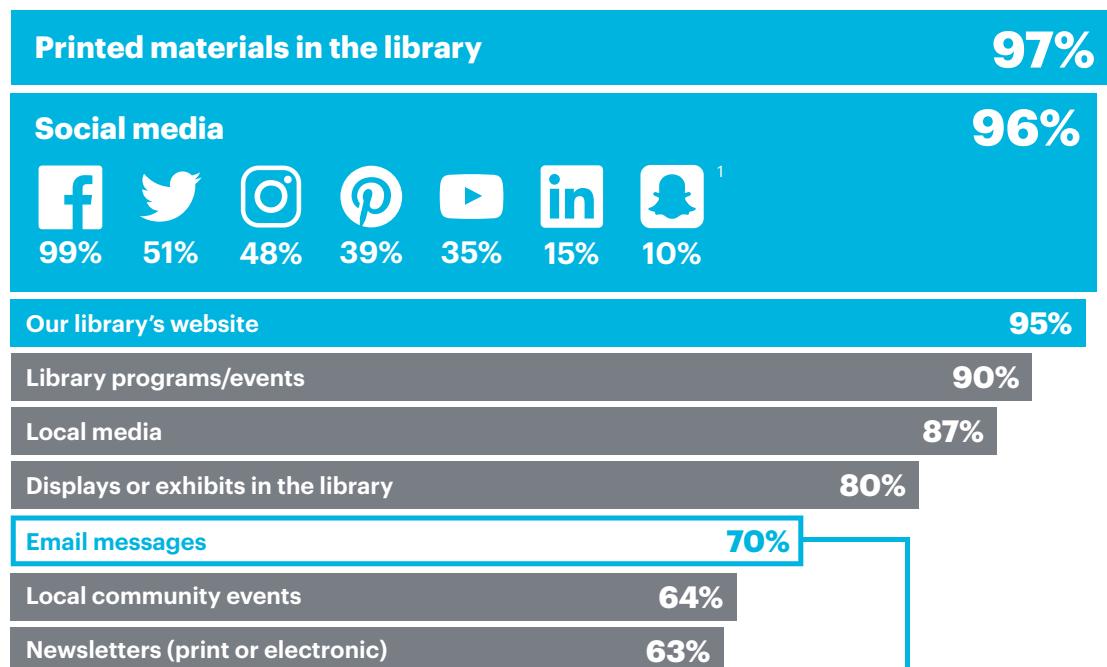


Most use multiple communication channels

Public libraries get messages out using a variety of channels. Most libraries use social media, and nearly all focus on Facebook.

Nearly all
use print materials, social media, and the library website

What communication channels does your library use?*

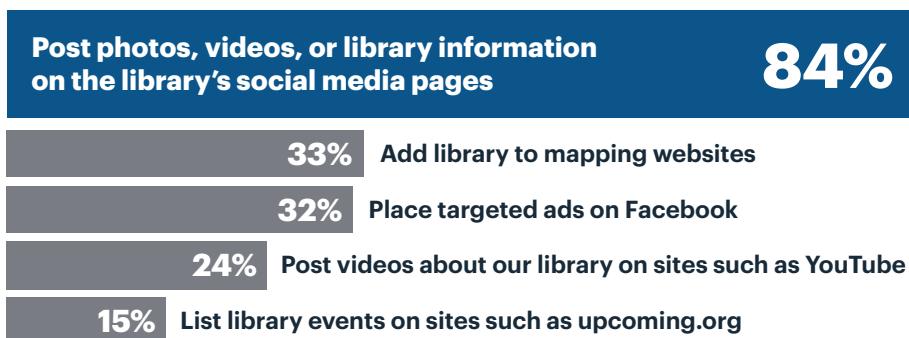


Also: Local community online sites (42%); Paid ads on the web (28%); Blogs (17%); Library app (13%); Text messages (13%); Mobile ads (5%)

¹Response to "What social media sites do you use?"

8 of 10 post photos, videos, or library information on the library's social media pages

In which of the following ways do you promote your library online?*



Also: Post library photos on sites such as Flickr (13%); Place paid ads on local community-specific sites (6%); Add references to our library on Wikipedia (5%); Partner with relevant websites, such as book-related sites (4%); Place paid ads on search engines (3%); Invest in Google AdWords (2%); Place paid ads on topic-specific websites, such as Ancestry.com (1%); Other (3%); No online promotion (7%)

How do you sign people up to receive emails?*



Email marketing is a focus

Public library staff have strategies in place to build email lists, automating when it makes sense.

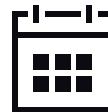
40%
use email
marketing
services

What tools does your library use in its communications efforts?*



Programs or
webinars on
how to market
your library

42%



Event
management/
booking software
(e.g., LibCal)

27%



Email
marketing
services

40%



Content design
software
(e.g., LibraryAware)

19%



Data analytics
tools
(e.g., Google Analytics)

40%

Also: Other (9%); None (11%)

What email marketing services does your library use?*

Constant Contact

41%

MailChimp

39%

Also: LibraryAware (5%); OrangeBoy Savannah (4%); Home-grown system (5%); Emma (2%); Other (9%)

"We send messages that remind the patron that their library card is going to expire on their birthday. It is a very nice feature."

Library director



1 in 5
send automated
email messages

Automated email messages are sent automatically when triggered by a specific event (e.g., a "Welcome to the library" message is sent the day after a patron registers for a library card).

Does your
library send
automated email
messages?

Yes	20%
No	76%
Not sure	4%

What types of events trigger automated emails to your patrons?*

"Welcome to the library" for new card holders

69%

Library card renewal notices

64%

Account reminders (renew/return items)

24%

"We've missed you" to inactive library patrons

20%

Anniversary of library card

11%

Also: "Welcome back" to returning library users (4%); "Happy Birthday" (3%); Other (5%)

Giving people what they want

Few public libraries send targeted email messages, but a large majority would like to.



Does your library send targeted email messages?

Targeted email messages differ in content based on who receives them (e.g., an email about an upcoming genealogy program is sent to those who have used the library's genealogy collection).

Yes 17% No 81%

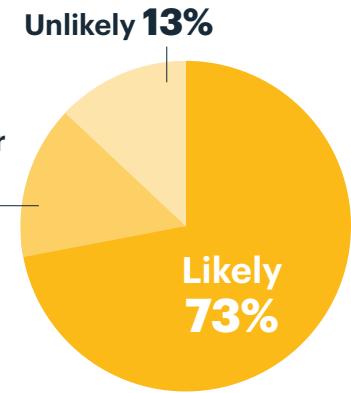
Not sure 2%

What sources do you use for developing topics of interest?*

- Opt-in lists through website 67%
- Past program attendance 60%
- Past checkout history 9%
- Third-party tools
(e.g., NovelList, Constant Contact, Cerkli) 5%

Also: Other (11%); Not sure (2%)

If your library could send targeted messages, how likely would you be to do so?



According to respondents, main benefits of sending targeted messages are:

- Promoting the value of the library in a personalized way
- Connecting with the community with messages tailored to their interests
- Not overloading people's inboxes with information they don't care about

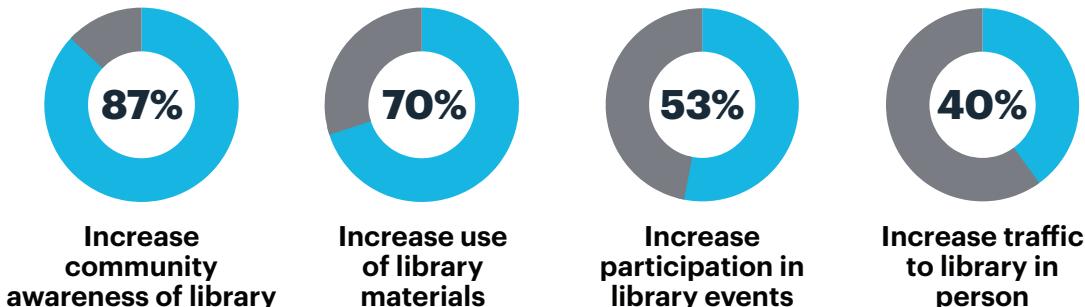
"We struggle to know what the correct balance is between too much and not enough information from the library. We don't want to flood people's inboxes with unnecessary or irrelevant information. Targeting the message to the appropriate receiver would help us in this effort."

Library director

Raising awareness with communication efforts

Public library staff aim to increase community awareness and most meet that goal.

Which of the following are the top desired outcomes from your library's communication efforts?*



Also: Increase funding for library (24%); Increase number of library cards issued (7%); Increase traffic to library's website (5%); Drive adoption of new programs (3%)

74%
say they have successfully raised community awareness of the library

How successful have you been at meeting desired outcomes from your library's communication efforts ?

■ Successful ■ Neither successful nor unsuccessful ■ Unsuccessful

Desired Outcome	Successful	Neither successful nor unsuccessful	Unsuccessful
Increase community awareness of library	74%	23%	3%
Increase use of library materials	55%	38%	7%
Increase participation in library events	69%	27%	4%
Increase traffic to library in person	54%	40%	6%
Increase funding for library	31%	56%	13%
Increase number of library cards issued	42%	50%	8%
Increase traffic to library's website	48%	45%	7%
Drive adoption of new programs	48%	44%	9%

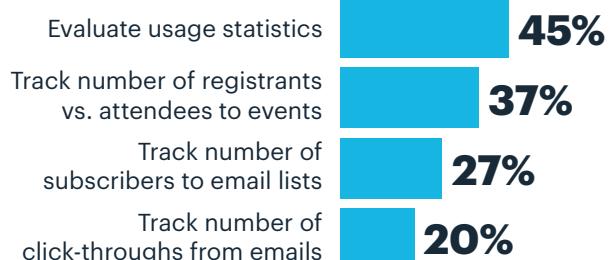
How does your library evaluate its communications efforts?*

Gather customer feedback 60%

Track statistics 58%



Also: Conduct surveys with patrons online (20%); Conduct focus groups with patrons (6%)



Also: Track email open rates (19%)

Survey Respondent Demographics

Respondents by Locale

Rural	47%
Mix of Urban/Suburban/Rural	23%
Suburban	20%
Urban	10%
Not sure	1%

Respondents by Population Served

>10K	28%
10K-25K	22%
25K-100K	25%
100K-300K	15%
300K+	9%

Respondents by Level of Responsibility

Director	87%
Assistant Director	2%
Dept Head/Manager	8%
Librarian/Staff	3%

Respondents by Area of Responsibility*

Communications/Marketing/PR	67%
Collection Development/Selection	56%
Public/Reference Services	51%
Acquisitions	50%
Circulation	40%
IT/Systems	40%
Cataloging/Technical Services	34%
Administration	41%
Interlibrary Loan	27%
Archives/Special Collections	24%
Assistant Director/Manager	10%
Other	4%

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About the research

OCLC conducted primary research in 2018 by inviting nearly 2,500 public library leaders via personal email to participate in a survey. This report details findings from the 399 who participated. Results are +/- 4.5% at the 95% confidence level.

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