



AT THE LIBRARY

By Julie Winkelstein
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“Indeed, the question is not whether libraries are relevant today. But whether they can keep pace with the increased demand for their services and materials. With your help, they can.”

-From WeAreFree2.org

Several weeks ago I attended a presentation on the about-to-be-unveiled Bay Area Library and Information System (BALIS), Silicon Valley Library System and Peninsula Library System marketing campaign for public libraries. Representatives from libraries around the Bay Area met together to hear from marketing specialists on such ideas as branding, key messages, logos, elevator pitches and color combinations.

During the presentation, we were shown familiar and not-so-familiar logos and asked to identify them and the accompanying slogan. It was fascinating to see how many we could identify and recite. The one I remembered was the slogan for Apple, “Think different” - because I always wonder whether or not it’s ungrammatical.

Now, in coordination with National Library Week, the campaign has been released. All over the Bay Area are signs on buses, flyers, postcards, posters and links on library websites. The slogan is Free2 - encour-

aging people to come up with their own ideas on what they are free to do at a library. Examples include explore, imagine, learn, volunteer, play, visit - and yes, read. As it says on the website, this campaign “challenges stereotypes of dusty bookshelves and shush-happy librarians. It promotes how libraries sit in the heart of our communities. It recognizes that our libraries are among our most revered public institutions.”

The campaign includes a contest that runs through May 15, 2008. By going to the website, participants are able to enter by describing - in 25 words or less - what they are free to do at their local library. Winners will receive prizes and a chance to be featured in future campaign ads. So far, contestants include California Senator and Assistant Pro Tempore Leland Yee, who says libraries are a place where we are “free2make history” and David Talbot, founder of Salon.com, who says libraries

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are a place where he was “free2wander.”

At the end of the online entry blank are various boxes that can be checked. I particularly appreciate the inclusion of “Yes, I would like to be contacted as a possible volunteer for my local library” and “Yes, I’d like to receive news from my local library system.” Both of these not only encourage the public to support their local library, but also help them become more involved.

It will be interesting to see how many people discover their public libraries during the 18 months of this campaign. Marketing is one of the most challenging issues for librarians, even though what we offer is amazing. Millions of people across the United States take advantage of our free Internet access, bountiful collections of books, CDs, DVDs and magazines, literacy programs, meeting rooms, homework centers, subscription databases and

varied and rich programming. Yet there are many more who know nothing about what we have to offer, no matter how many press releases, fliers and bookmarks we hand out.

Being a small part of a campaign like this from the very beginning is a great chance to see marketing in action. I appreciate the in-depth information we have been offered with our “free2 style and messaging guide.” The hard work and creativity that have gone into this far-reaching approach to catching the public’s attention are thought provoking and I think we can all learn from them.

I would like to see this campaign succeed, so there is an excitement about public libraries that is represented by this new logo and slogan. For me, libraries have always been exciting. And while there are many new reasons for this, you can’t beat the old one - connecting people with books.