

Readers' Advisory Outside the Box: Marketing Experts Reveal Strategies on Promoting Books and Reading

By Dana Horrocks and Heidi Schiller.

The BCLA Readers' Advisory Interest Group works to promote and facilitate innovation in readers' advisory services across BC, and the first of their two events at the British Columbia Library Conference did just that. A panel session, *Readers' Advisory Outside the Box*, featured three marketing experts from the publishing and art fields. While the panelists were proud supporters of libraries, they brought a fresh perspective from outside of library land, as moderator **Heidi Schiller**, of North Vancouver City Library, put it.

The discussion began with **Monique Sherrett**, founder of Boxcar Marketing, sharing her experiences as former internet marketing manager for Raincoast Books when the *Harry Potter* series took off in Canada. Monique offered three lessons learned from this time that she felt libraries could use. The first of which was to recognize "little somewheres," or places where people engage in discussions about books and ideas, such as kids in playgrounds or adults at cocktail parties. She advised using these as jumping-off points for campaigns, and suggested using library apps and social media to gain attention of people on the library periphery who would share and promote these campaigns. The second lesson was to use permission-based marketing strategies, and to offer valuable content in exchange for that permission, in addition to marketing and promotional content. Her final lesson involved seeking partnerships and creating events to connect people to the library's space, collection and catalogue, and to look toward other successful cultural events such as *Raincity Chronicles*, *Pecha Kucha* and *Interesting Vancouver* for inspiration.

The next speaker was **Lorna Brown**, an artist, curator and writer who is interested in the dynamics of public spaces, digital and print production and conversation-based events. Lorna talked about her recent project *Digital Natives*, a public installation commissioned by the City of Vancouver featuring an electronic billboard that hosted Twitter messages from artists and writers examining social and historic context from the first Nations land. Lorna encouraged using writers and artists to promote themselves and to do a better job of "focusing the eye," or using art to communicate the library's broad message.

The final speaker was **Alison Cairns**, who currently works as an online promotions and marketing freelancer and consultant. Alison shared several case studies from when she worked at Douglas and McIntyre Publishers as their Online Marketing Manager. Some of the strategies she used at D&M included creating backlists of older titles to go with recently released digital items, and creating YouTube videos that told the story of the company, as well as promote new titles. She also mentioned a campaign to promote the publication of John Furlong's book *Patriot Hearts*, in which D&M enlisted the support of Vancouver Olympic volunteers to pull off a reading flash-mob on the Vancouver Skytrain. The lesson learned here, which connected with points raised by the other panelists, is that there are vibrant communities of fans and readers who would be thrilled to lend their support to the library's cause, we just need to find them.

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