Marketing Plan: History of Food and Drink

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Executive Summary

The History of Food and Drink special collections at the Newman Library at Virginia Tech needs to increase its visibility if it is to draw the attention of a diverse set of user groups. Digitization, coupled with the ascendancy of social media, have opened new windows of opportunity for special collections repositories to make their collections accessible to more people. While the library has made great strides to market its services and these remarkable materials, more needs to be done to heighten the collections’ profile. Outreach online is only one part of the puzzle.

It is recommended that a multi-layered strategy engaging academic departments, students, alumni, and other institutions be employed to bring this about. In addition to expanding and fine tuning its online presence, the department needs to collaborate both with students and faculty in the food and agriculture studies disciplines to host events for the campus community and the general public. Furthermore, press coverage in Virginia Life magazine would expose the collections to readers and food enthusiasts throughout the state curious to know more about Virginia’s culinary heritage. Finally, a collaboration with nearby repositories with a similar focus as well as the local museum and cultural foundation would help foster positive relationships with long term benefits.

The goals for this strategy within one year are: 1) Triple the number of followers on social media, 2) increase the number of visitors to these special collections by 20%, 3) increase the amount of financial and physical donations by 20%, and 4) increase the number of instructional sessions by 25%.
Introduction

The efforts of this marketing campaign are aimed at three groups of users - the campus community, the local community, and anyone who would primarily access the collections online. Each group stands to gain a great deal from this strategy. First, improvements to the website and blog and a thoughtfully expanded social media presence give users the gift of convenience and greater accessibility to the collection. Students, faculty, and researchers who are bound by time or place can still explore important resources. Sharing material through new outlets exposes the collections to users who may not have previously given them a second thought. The online world also offers another way for users to receive responsive and immediate customer service.

Second, the interactive nature of social media combined with events on and off campus where users can meet knowledgeable, helpful staff establishes the department as a welcoming place for students, faculty, and the greater community. Users also know they are being led through the process by reliable guides.

Third, while there are food related degree programs at Virginia Tech, the subject of food encompasses many subjects and disciplines. Effective messaging online and off can help students see how the study of foodways, nutritional standards, and advertising of other eras relates to the work they are doing today.

Fourth, local citizens and people throughout the state of Virginia can gain greater insight into their own culinary history as portions of the collection center around the foodways of Virginia and Southern Appalachia (Virginia Tech, 2018). Features in publications such as Virginia Living magazine can help Virginians to better understand and celebrate culinary traditions that are unique to them.
Implementing this marketing strategy will require the special collections staff to work together as a team while at the same time allow individuals to contribute in their own way (Augustyniak and Orzechowski, 2017). IT people will most likely be needed to help fulfill some parts of the plan such as making improvements to the website. For the planned campus events special collections need to contact students and faculty from the Food Science and Technology and Nutrition, Foods and Exercise departments to plan an event that will be both fun and instructive.

Success will be measured by accessing the analytics statistics for the various social media platforms, conducting surveys, checking door counts, and a count of the number of requested outreaches and instructional sessions.

About the Users and Potential Users

Campus Community

Virginia Tech has over 34,000 students and there are 1,520 faculty members (Virginia Tech, 2018). Colleges within the university include the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences, the College of Liberal Arts and Human Sciences, and the College of Natural Resources and Environment (Virginia Tech, 2018). Majors offered for whom these collections would be of interest include Human Nutrition, Foods and Exercise, Sociology, Agricultural Sciences, and English (Virginia Tech, 2018). This is by no means an exhaustive list.

Local Community

The campus of Virginia Tech is in the town of Blacksburg, VA which had a population of 42,620 as of the 2010 census (U.S. Department of Commerce, 2017). The town has its own cultural organization, the Blacksburg Museum and Cultural Foundation. The foundation has two historic venues where events are regularly held. The Alexander Black House, home of the prominent
family in the area, and St. Luke & Odd Fellows Hall, a building that was part of a historic African-American settlement nearby (Blacksburg Museum and Cultural Foundation, 2018).

**Online Community**

This is a group so diverse that very little is known. Most likely there will be overlap with the other user groups as students, faculty, and local citizens who may decide to follow any social media pages or blogs associated with the collections.

**Possible Collaborators**

A survey of the nearby area did not uncover similar collections in the immediate area. However, there are collections with similar concentrations at UNC-Asheville and UNC-Greensboro. Ramsey Library at UNC-Asheville houses the Pamela C. Allison cookbook collection (UNC-Asheville, 2018) and UNC-Greensboro has a Home Economics Pamphlet collection (Coward and Rau, 2017). There is a great deal of potential for collaboration involving these materials.

**Current Marketing and Visibility**

**Online Presence**

The Food and Drink special collections is promoted online in several ways. While it does not have its own Facebook or Twitter page, the entire special collections has accounts on both platforms and Food and Drink is promoted there. The What’s Cookin’ @ Special Collections blog and the Friends of the Peacock-Harper Culinary History Friends Facebook page are the only social media platforms solely devoted to Food and Drink. The blog is accessible through the special collections home page and has 572 followers (Dietz, 2018). The Peacock-Harper Culinary History Friends page on Facebook only has 106 followers (Peacock-Harper Culinary History Friends, 2018). The stated goal of the What’s Cookin’ blog is to post a new blog once a
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week, but posting is far more sporadic (Dietz, 2018). Some promotion of the Food and Drink collection is conducted on the News from Special Collections blog which has 608 followers (News from Special Collections, 2018).

**Outreach and Instruction**

The special collections department offers outreach and instruction to classes in a variety of disciplines on campus as well as sessions for K-12 (Virginia Tech, 2018). The department also conducts outreach activities on and off campus (Virginia Tech, 2018). Links to more information about these services are accessible by a drop-down menu rather than a simple button and relatively few details are provided.

**Marketing Plan**

**Social Media Plan**

In “Unlocking the Vault” Augustyniak and Orzechowski describe their own experience making their collections at the Othmer Library of Chemical History accessible to remote researchers. The librarians discuss the importance of tailoring the message to the platform and its users, making social media marketing a team effort, and scheduling work, periodically monitoring the progress of staff members (Augustyniak and Orzechowski, 2017). While there are important differences between this institution and Virginia Tech, the guiding principles involved are basically the same.

It is recommended that Food & Drink special collections apply this type of focus to marketing its collections to off campus users and those on campus who are not aware of all the repository has to offer. Here are the steps:
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1. Consult with web team to modify the webpage to make information about instruction and outreach opportunities accessible directly through one click on the special collections website.

2. Establish a consistent schedule for the What’s Cookin’ @ Special Collections blog. Sporadic posting is frustrating to current followers and reduces chances to find new ones.

3. Create a Twitter page for the Food & Drink collections alone. Twitter is a good way to promote the collections, link them to the users who need them where they are most likely to find them, and allow users to interact in immediate ways (Dickson and Holley, 2010).

4. Create a Tumblr page promoting the History of the American Cocktail. This collection is the newest of the four and Tumblr can be a fun way to promote the collection to users on and off campus. Tumblr would provide the right mix of visual and textual elements that make it an effective tool for promoting the collection (Welch, 2014).

5. Coordinate with UNC-Asheville and UNC-Greensboro to cross promote each other’s collections. Stage a campaign in which recipes from each collection are posted and followers are encouraged to try out the recipes and post photos of their results on social media (Garner, Goldberg, and Pou, 2016).

6. Develop a schedule for posting that would include:

   a. Call initial meeting to discuss new online accounts, what types of material will be posted, who will be posting and how often (Augustyniak and Orzechowski, 2017).

   b. Designate an administrator to effectively coordinate activities and monitor progress (Augustyniak and Orzechowski, 2017).

   c. Meet as a team to set up posting schedules (Augustyniak and Orzechowski, 2017).

   d. Set up new social media accounts.
e. Meet monthly to discuss postings and to address any pressing issues (Augustyniak and Orzechowski, 2017).

f. Have staff members monitor those pages they are responsible for to make sure that comments or questions from users are being answered promptly (Dickson and Holley, 2010).

Campus Outreach

Allowing people to interact with the collections is one sure way to demonstrate its dynamic aspects. Special collections repositories, perhaps more than the library itself, suffer from negative stereotypes that too often keep the people who need its services at arm’s length. An examination of the Food and Drink collection shows that there are ample opportunities to take the materials and turn them into a fun and instructive program for students. It is recommended that the special collections stage one event per semester in which students can try their hand at recreating some of the recipes featured in the collection. These events would be held in collaboration with the food studies department.

1. Stage a welcome event for students during the first week of classes featuring creations from recipes in the collection. As much as is possible an exhibit featuring the sources of the recipes would help to make that connection.

2. Have another event in the spring that gives students an opportunity to make these recipes for themselves.

3. At each event have marketing materials that students can take with them with contact information and hours for special collections as well as any recipes featured in the event.

4. Communicate with instructors from various academic departments to make them aware of any new acquisitions that may be of use to them in their classes.
Community Outreach

As a part of its food and drink collection, Virginia Tech, features recipes and materials related to the culinary traditions of Virginia and the Appalachian South. In addition, Virginia Living magazine, a publication that features stories on food, drink, and culture throughout the state would be an ideal venue to share materials in the collection as it relates to Virginia history and culture. Because the magazine has a following of print subscribers, a website, and a social media presence, there is tremendous potential for exposure.

1. Consult Virginia Living magazine to do a feature promoting the cocktail collection.

2. Reach out to the Blacksburg Museum and Cultural Foundation to collaborate on an exhibit and food tasting event that showcases recipes from the collection that are tied to the region.

Conclusion

An exploration of the History of Food and Drink collection at Virginia Tech offers an interesting, engaging way to tell users about our nation’s history as well as that of the area. The goal of this marketing strategy is to bring a great number of people in touch with this history than ever before. Also, as the collection builds a greater following and wider support, the special collections will have more of the resources it needs to improve its services further and more fully live up to its mission.
References


