

# Swap and Shop

## An Undiscovered Opportunity

Pixey Anne Mosley

**F**or more than twenty years, the Public Relations and Marketing Section (PRMS) of LLAMA has offered an event at the ALA Annual Conference called Swap and Shop. I discovered it as part of my associate-editor immersion into all things LLAMA and felt it was worth bringing to the attention of LLAMA membership and other ALA members. This article is based on an interview about the event with Sally Lederer, 2009 committee chair and long-time Swap and Shop organizer.

Swap and Shop is a special type of program offered to all conference participants. It serves as an idea bank where library managers and outreach librarians can share what types of creative, promotional items and campaigns have been successful for programs and events sponsored by the library. It is usually located on or immediately adjacent to the exhibit floor at Annual Conference so attendees with exhibits-only passes can also attend. It does not require a special ticket, as similar events for some state library associations do. Laid out like a fair, Swap and Shop features materials for all types of libraries: special, public, school, academic, and even museums. As a part of the event marketing, there is a Swap and Shop theme that relates to the conference city.

There are a couple of aspects of Swap and Shop that make it great to visit. First, participants are encouraged to provide leftover public relations materials from their events on tables for librarians to pick up and take away. Want to see a catchy way to do an annual report, or the latest in giveaway tchotchkes, such as promotional buttons, bookmarks, magnets, key chains, koozies, coasters, and so on? This is the place to pick one up and show it back home. Second, Swap and Shop is actually a competition that displays and awards the best public relations and marketing programs in a variety of categories. Categories are divided by type and budget, so libraries are compared on the basis of peer program offerings. Some of the targeted categories are fundraising, websites, services available, orientation materials, special programs and events, adult and family reading materials, children's summer reading materials, young adult reading materials, calendar of events and newsletters, bibliographies and booklists, annual reports, and videos. The award categories include PR Masterpieces, which must be high impact or particularly creative. Judging

is done by individuals outside ALA from the commercial world with credentials in graphic design, advertising, and marketing. The idea is not to judge the program itself or the appropriateness to the institution, but the promotion of the event or library.

As you enter the Swap and Shop area, you may also have a chance to interact with some vendors that specialize in promotional and marketing materials. This could be a publisher offering a new book on library marketing at a special Swap and Shop discount or a vendor of custom printed knickknacks. Further in, you can browse the award-winning promotional displays for the different categories and get ideas to take back. You may want to bring a digital camera to capture the details of these colorful displays. Then there is the "Take One" area. Finally, don't forget to go behind the curtain to see the award winners from the video and website categories projected on a screen.

For those interested in submitting something from their library, the call for entries goes up on the LLAMA website in mid-February; submissions are due in early April. This is a great way to clean out that closet of leftover brochures, annual reports, and last year's summer reading program giveaways. Winners get recognized at the conference and receive a certificate suitable for display or framing. Additionally, pictures and a news release are provided for the winning library's promotional use, possibly to use in negotiating for funds for next year's programs. Winners are notified in early May. Swap and Shop generally runs from 11 a.m. to 1:30 p.m., with the awards ceremony at 12:30. With several hundred conference participants usually checking out Swap and Shop, one of the biggest challenges to organizers is trying to manage the people wandering into the area while the committee members are still setting up.

The entire event, from soliciting materials to judging to putting on the program, is coordinated by a committee of eight to twelve people. One issue that the committee has been struggling with in recent years is that Swap and Shop is a program in transition and, like much in the library

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community, is being challenged to keep up with changes in technology. Libraries are becoming less reliant on print materials and souvenirs, and when they do use print media or tangible things, they are ordering smaller quantities. Instead of using print materials, they are reaching out to library users in different ways and moving toward multimedia- and Web-based models for promotional materials. This has required Swap and Shop to evolve as well. Two years ago, the committee added categories for Web materials and videos. It is also exploring how to include other multimedia materials, such as podcasts, and examples of the use of social media to promote the library. The big issue is how to convert submissions of these new media materials into a conference experience where they can be displayed or demonstrated, featured, and shared. One issue the committee is exploring is having listening stations or setting up stations where attendees can download the materials to flash drives. There is also interest in possibly utilizing the new LLAMA website or ALA Connect to make materials available after the conference. As the move away from physical to virtual will be a lengthy one, the current committee is

really looking at how to manage the transition of introducing and enhancing the media experiences, while still supporting those libraries doing creative activities on a shoestring budget in the traditional world of print. This will be discussed more at the Midwinter Meeting. If you have ideas or suggestions regarding how to keep Swap and Shop as a value-added experience, contact Sally Lederer at [sally@melsa.org](mailto:sally@melsa.org) or the current PRMS, Swap and Shop committee chair.

To close this piece, I asked Sally to describe the most unusual or unique thing she had seen submitted, the one that just stands out in her memory as she looks back over the years of involvement with Swap and Shop. Her response was a university that had a promotional piece that was a little soft, squeaky bulldog toy with the library website printed on the bulldog's sweater. It was like a stress ball you would keep around a computer, but also promoted a service and was just irresistible. She commented that it was the type of item that people would be attracted to and find fun but also associate with the library.