

Best Practices and *InventorFest*: Community Partners and Patent and Trademark Depository Libraries (PTDLs)

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Abstract

The purpose of this article is to discuss the development and implementation of *InventorFest* at a Patent and Trademark Depository Library (PTDL) located at the Public Library of Cincinnati & Hamilton County. This three-day convention-like event for independent inventors and entrepreneurs is an example of how PTDLs not only raise awareness of library services and resources but contribute to a community's economic development. Educational activities are presented for children, teens, and adults related to intellectual property and inventing. To successfully plan such an event, community partnerships are developed between neighboring PTDLs, local inventor groups, and like-minded regional organizations. Programs such as *InventorFest* are vital to a PTDL's future growth and existence.

Keywords: Inventors, entrepreneurs, inventions, patents, copyright, library programs, library outreach, children's programs, teen programs, and library public relations.

Introduction

In 2004, the Public Library of Cincinnati and Hamilton County (PLCH), in partnership with Wright State University (WSU) in Dayton, Ohio, inaugurated its first annual *InventorFest*. This free, all-day event focused on the need to educate inventors and entrepreneurs about patenting and marketing their inventions, and avoiding common business frauds and scams. Exhibits and presentations offered attendees the opportunity to learn from expert speakers and to avail themselves of valuable networking experiences. Over 250 people attended the event in Cincinnati. In 2005, WSU partnered with PLCH to present the second annual *InventorFest* in Dayton, drawing an audience of 350, and in October 2006, the third annual event returned to PLCH in Cincinnati as a three-day program and more than doubled its prior year attendance to over 750.

The primary purpose of this article is to share best practices leading to the phenomenal success and growth of *InventorFest*, thereby encouraging other PTDLs throughout the nation to inaugurate their own programs. Best practices include the following:

- ❖ Building outreach support through community partners to organize events.
- ❖ Public Relations best practice examples of *InventorFest*.
- ❖ Raising funds (when needed) for a PTDL program.

- ❖ Expanding intellectual property related programs throughout the year to engage one's established audience and to attract new PTDL customers.
- ❖ Developing the theme of "Inventing Is For Everyone," to be inclusive of all age cohorts, including events for children, teenagers, and adults. Expanding activities from the traditional core (inventions and patents) to include other intellectual property topics related to video gaming and the music industry.

InventorFest is an example of how PTDL librarians and staff can produce their own high-profile events, even with limited resources. However, this should not be limited to PTDLs and inventors alone. The same concept could be applied to virtually all library outreach programs for any specialized library resource and its target customer needs; for example, aspiring authors and musicians, grant writers, health or legal researchers, historians and genealogists, home gardeners, income tax preparation patrons, job seekers, pet owners, small business owners, students, teachers, etc. Best practices involve innovative collaborations with community partners to present multiple intellectual property outreach programs throughout the year leading up to *InventorFest*. Such outreach programs assist a PTDL in fulfilling its mission to proactively maintain contact with current users and to attract new ones to raise awareness of its services and resources. (Harwell, 1996; Jenda, 2005/2006)

In the Beginning...

A cliché theme from the highly popular baseball film *Field of Dreams* (1989) goes something like "if you build it, they will come." Perhaps it's no coincidence that in Cincinnati, home of the first professional baseball team, we built the programs, collaborative community partnerships, and public relations that attracted great numbers to our PTDL programs in 2006. Over a four-year period, Cincinnati's overall PTDL program attendance nearly tripled.

InventorFest is a free patent and marketing program, which not only promotes a PTDL to its local community, but the surrounding region. Because of its size and complexity, the event is co-partnered between two PTDL libraries and alternated annually between the two locations.

How did *InventorFest* come about? We developed the idea after the success of our unique and well-attended inventor-marketing programs. Turnout to these marketing programs was nearly double that of the traditional PTDL patent database searching classes. Listening to these customers, we were able to hear what their unique information needs were. Participants asked for more programs where they could network with other inventors, talk to experts, and hear subject-related guest speakers. Some specifically asked that the Library continue to present more programs related to inventors and entrepreneurs. When inventors get together to network, they tend to share success stories, as well as to inform one other about invention promotion firm scams and other questionable business-to-business services. Networking and meeting customer needs are documented factors behind the success of specialty library outreach programs. (Fama, 2005; White, 2004) Since our backdrop setting is a public library, we followed the library book "fair" concept for *InventorFest*.

Building Outreach Support through Community Partnerships

When PLCH started planning the first *InventorFest*, the Patent and Trademark Depository Library Program (PTDLP) of the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office advised us to consider partnering with the neighboring PTDL in Dayton, Wright State University (WSU). This broadened our sphere geographically as Cincinnati and Dayton are approximately 50 miles apart. Hodge and Tanner (2003) stress in their article about multiple library partnerships that collaboration between two different library organizations results in greater accomplishments than could have been accomplished by the effects of either library alone.

We have also learned that collaboration between PTDLs and community partners is essential to the future viability of the PTDLs. Since the 1950s the Public Library of Cincinnati & Hamilton County has enjoyed a close relationship with the local independent inventors' group, formerly known as the Greater Cincinnati Inventors Club and now as the Inventor's Council of Cincinnati. The Library provides the Inventor's Council a large presentation room for its monthly meetings, and assists its growth and development by distributing flyers to patent patrons and encouraging people to attend its meetings. While members of the Inventor's Council have affirmed the value of USPTO patent and trademark resources at the PTDL, they have placed even more emphasis on the knowledge, commitment and enthusiasm of the PTDL librarians as the paramount benefit for both the Inventor's Council and the inventor community. (Hayes-Rines, 2003) In return, the Inventor's Council has promoted all of the Library's inventor and small business programs. The long-term relationship with the Inventor's Council has helped the Library better understand their members' needs as users of PTDL resources. The efforts of the partnership resulted in more effective and successful programs, as documented in statistics near the end of this article.

Andrea Brady, president of the Inventor's Council of Cincinnati, recognizes that the relationship between the Library and the Inventor's Council is greatly beneficial to both parties because they support each other. She affirmed that inventors offer very positive comments about the Library's programs, as well as the librarians' ability to help with intellectual property and business questions. (Brady, 2007) This reflects recent studies that have documented how citizens rely upon and trust public libraries to assist in their online searching—even when those users have computers and Internet access at home or elsewhere. (Bertot, Jaeger, Langa, and McClure, 2006)

Structure of Committees

For an event the size of the third annual *InventorFest*, a two-tier planning committee was established a year before the event—a core committee and a community committee. The core committee was composed of library departments including librarians from Government & Business, Science & Technology, Children's Services, and Teen Services, with ongoing support from staff of Public Relations and Programming. This interdepartmental collaboration among the core committee promoted professional camaraderie within the PLCH organizational culture. In addition to the Inventor's Council of Cincinnati and WSU (the co-partnering PTDL from Dayton), a second committee tier included community support from the Cincinnati USA Regional Chamber, Cincinnati Recreation Commission, Downtown Residents' Council, and CET, the local public broadcasting service (with media support). The president of the local Inventor's Council also served as the head of the second committee tier, which was brought

together six months before the event. She coordinated many of the community partners and their role in the event. The synergy of this community committee instilled a sense of investment and ownership in the event. This networked the message to new target audiences supplementing traditional publicity efforts. Support from the local Inventor's Council proved to be especially beneficial a few months leading up to *InventorFest* as they recruited independent inventors to showcase their inventions as part of an InventorZone display.

“Building partnerships with local organizations that share a common stake in the success of related library programming has been crucial,” said John Graham, Manager of the Library's Government & Business Department at the time of *InventorFest* 2006. He also reaffirmed that the organizations helped reach out to the local community in ways the Library could not have otherwise achieved. (Hegner, 2006) An Urban Libraries Council report, documenting the successes of similar community partnerships with several branches of the Chicago Public Library, reinforces this idea: “Collaboration, complementing each other's programming, not duplicating efforts and staying engaged with other local institutions amplifies the good work done in a community,” (Kretzmann and Rans, 2005)

Organizing the Main Event

The week after the second annual *InventorFest* at WSU in Dayton, the Cincinnati Library core planning committee met to initiate the strategy for the third annual event. We followed the planning guide prepared from the first *InventorFest*, as well as our organization's programming procedures, to make certain all established policies were followed. It took the first few monthly meetings to decide, based upon customer feedback, to include more activities for entire families. We realized that we had to determine the best way to communicate with the family target group, supplementing the traditional independent inventors. Not only were we including young inventors this time, but teens and twenty-something video gamers, as well as aspiring musicians. We also confirmed the date and location of the event. We decided to extend the program to run three days; Friday for USPTO patent searching classes; Saturday for the main event including the family theme; and Sunday for a music/copyright program for contemporary hip hop musicians.

Six months before *InventorFest*, we determined that the scope of the three-day weekend would require a spin-off library staff committee to effectively plan and present the music/copyright program for aspiring musicians. Additional librarians from the Art & Music, Films & Recordings, and Government & Business departments resumed the planning and research to expand this part of the event. They contacted more community partners to serve as guest speakers for the separate music day.

For the overall event, the core committee planned and prepared preliminary flyers, event date reminder postcards, exhibitor applications, and various letters to communicate with different target groups, including teachers, parents, inventors, small business owners, prospective exhibitors, and guest speakers. The committee met with local school science teachers and the children's librarians of PLCH branch libraries. The Library's website coordinator, meanwhile, made preliminary plans for the event website. Three areas of the Library's website were utilized to promote *InventorFest* and related programs. A dedicated *InventorFest* page covered all of the details, while web pages were created in two website sections dedicated to children and

teenagers to promote their unique summer inventor programs, as well as *InventorFest* in the autumn. Inventor, entrepreneur, and small business book lists were prepared for circulating books on display at the Library. Although the music program was promoted under the larger umbrella of *InventorFest*, separate flyers and web pages were prepared especially for the music/copyright activities.

The week of the event, we reviewed the staff/volunteer coverage schedule. This is a good time to think about logistics, such as where exhibitors will unload their materials. Do you have a staff person to assist with a dolly cart? Do you have coverage for the reception table where attendees check-in? Who is on hand to answer any general questions? Whenever your event is placed in multiple locations, consider additional staffing to support unforeseen needs. Appoint one designated photographer for the event. This should not be the director/coordinator of the event. Photographs are vital to promote future *InventorFest* programs to your administrators, potential financial sponsors, and exhibitors. (Myers, 2002)

Promoting Inventors' Success Stories

Every inventor has a story. This is what the local media wanted to cover: how they came up with their idea, how they built the product, and how they brought it to the marketplace. Radio and television broadcasters featured these stories (see Figure 1) before the event, promoting *InventorFest* and the Library for free. (Hegner, 2006)



Figure 1. Local media sought inventor stories as the main news angle. Photo courtesy of the PLCH.

InventorFest was also marketed via PTDL partner WSU's website, local inventor's councils, email alerts, regional libraries, universities, schools, partner organization websites, blogs, and newspapers. National websites and broadcasters promoting the event included PTDL and *Inventor's Digest* web event listings, Big Idea Group, Doug Hall's Brain Brew, History

Channel's *Modern Marvels*, and the United Inventors Association. The official library event website promoted the program as a regional forum open to anyone interested in inventions and the process of inventing. The website also provided pages devoted to lodging accommodations, parking/transportation, dining, and sightseeing for out-of-town guests.

Other Public Relations efforts included confirming guest speakers and exhibitors, ordering promotional signs, banners, and distributing press releases. Hundreds of flyers were sent to patrons who attended previous library patent programs and to contacts from a USPTO mailing list of patentees, available from the PTDL. The USPTO mailing list was used earlier for sending out the event date reminder postcards. Exhibitor name signs were prepared for a uniform professional trade show appearance. An event staff and volunteer coverage schedule was prepared a month in advance to anticipate all possible support needed.

In addition to related subject book displays, *InventorFest* posters were prominently positioned throughout the Library, including entryways and elevators. Large banners were placed inside the Library, as well as outside—with visibility from one of the main downtown streets. Tri-fold event brochures were the main tool used to direct people throughout the Library's two-city block facility connected with a skywalk. Bright yellow t-shirts with the *InventorFest* logo worn by the event volunteers and staff were also instrumental in helping visitors with directional questions and other support.

After the event is a good time to meet and compare notes with the event staff, partner PTDL, and community volunteers. You can determine what needs to be added or changed in the future. It's also important to review the strengths as well as the weaknesses. Remember to send thank you cards or emails to guest speakers and the event support staff as soon as possible. Write an after-event press release with photographs to send to targeted media such as *Inventor's Digest*, library journals, and the PTDL office. Once again, the content of such a report after the event is useful for recruiting exhibitors, guest speakers, and attendees to future library programs.

Sponsorship and Fundraising

Although the first *InventorFest* was held on a shoestring budget (Reed Business Information, 2004), the second year at WSU in Dayton required more funding. For the third year back at PLCH in Cincinnati, a total of \$5,000 in sponsorship funding was raised to grow the event with more activities and guest speakers, as well as to include a complementary lunch by a popular Cincinnati pizzeria for the volunteers and exhibitors. Financial support of the Friends of the PLCH provided the means to bring in a nationally prominent author as the keynote speaker.

A local intellectual property law firm located in Cincinnati generously provided support that included the interactive educational family activities, souvenirs such as event t-shirts for all of the volunteers, and 250 stitch-bound inventor notebooks for the attendees. Each notebook included guidelines on how one maintains an inventor's notebook to record and track progress on their ideas and inventions. Local restaurants and other retailers provided gift certificates, while the Friends of the Library and some exhibitors donated items to be given away as door prizes. The Inventor's Council even provided two free annual memberships for teenagers as prizes.

Expanding PTDL Programming

Never losing sight of the traditional inventor audience, an increased number of PLCH intellectual property programs were presented throughout the year leading up to *InventorFest*. This reinvigorated the established PTDL customers while attracting new ones. For example, *PatentQuest* provided express, beginner, and advanced level patent searching classes at different times; *From Dreams to Dollars* focused on the marketing of inventions with an experienced inventor speaking along with a PTDL Librarian; *Invention @ Play* inspired children to create their own inventions and to learn about patents (see **Figure 2**); and *Teen American Inventor* engaged teenagers in all aspects of creating, including inventing and how music relates to intellectual property. The children's and teens' programs were tied to the Library's summer reading program entitled "Get into the Game." This, in turn, related to the video game programs planned at *InventorFest*. These programs cross-promoted one another, thus increasing overall attendance.



Figure 2. The PLCH children's inventor programs, tied to library summer reading, attracted families to InventorFest in autumn. Photo courtesy of the PLCH.

With the local Inventor's Council meetings and the PTDL's programs, PLCH averaged two inventor programs per month (excluding the youth programs in the summer). The growing popularity of the summer youth inventor programs at 17 branches and the main library attracted 500 participants, affirming the inclusion of *InventorFest* programming for kids and teens.

Inventing Is for Everyone: *InventorFest 2006*

Keynote speakers are the drawing card for any large-scale library event such as *InventorFest*. San Francisco patent attorney David Pressman, author of the best-selling book *Patent It Yourself*, attracted an audience (see Figure 3) amounting to one-third of the attendees. Another activity

offered a panel of experts (see Figure 4), including a patent examiner from the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office, a Federal Trade Commission field representative, the Inventor's Council of Cincinnati president, and two local attorneys, to answer inventor questions. The Federal Trade Commission speaker was very popular, with her background on inventor promotion firm fraud stories.



Figure 3. David Pressman, author of best-selling *Patent It Yourself*, led the main event schedule as keynote speaker. Photo courtesy of the PLCH.



Figure 4. An expert panel, including a USPTO patent examiner, an FTC field representative, the Inventor's Council president, and two local attorneys, offered helpful answers to inventors' questions. Photo courtesy of the PLCH.

During the day of the main event, the Library's first floor atrium took on the appearance of a trade show as visitors browsed three-dozen exhibitor booths including inventors and their products, patent attorneys and agents, marketing consultants, and inventor organizations. Approximately one-third of the organizational displays were repeat exhibitors from the previous two *InventorFests*.

One notable new exhibitor was a finalist, Erik Thompson, from the first season of ABC television's *American Inventor*. He not only talked about his football athletic training device and appearance on national television, he also promoted his motivational inventor support service helping inventors to pitch their ideas to prospective businesses.

During the afternoon, the family component came to life as school-aged children engaged in interactive experimenting stations that were part of an "Investigating Energy" program by COSI (Center of Science and Industry) from Columbus, Ohio. Kids were able to invent their own playthings from recycled toy parts in Happen's Toy Lab. There was an open video gaming area for teens. Gaming technology speaker Michael Fatten, Graduate student in Telecommunications at Indiana University, spoke about the ever-changing field of video game development.

Teenagers from the Library's Teen Council volunteered and some were even willing to dress up as famous inventors (see Figure 5). The teens came as Granville Woods, Ben Franklin, Madame C.J. Walker, and Violet Baudelaire from the popular book serial and movie *A Series of Unfortunate Events* by Lemony Snicket. Cincinnati Mayor Mark Mallory read a proclamation honoring Granville T. Woods, a prominent African-American inventor who created some of his greatest patented electrical railroad devices while living in Cincinnati in the 1880s. An exhibit featuring Granville Wood's patents was displayed in honor of his recent posthumous induction into the National Inventors Hall of Fame.



Figure 5. Teen volunteers dressed in costume as famous inventors Madame C.J. Walker, Violet Baudelaire, and Ben Franklin. Photo courtesy of the PLCH.

A Patent Professional Day preceded *InventorFest* with two patent training classes conducted by the U.S. Patent and Trademark Office. The first class was for librarians in the region who were interested in learning basic patent searching skills, while the second class was for advanced training of patent librarians, attorneys, and agents. The day after *InventorFest*, the Library hosted *Listen to This: Music Business and More* for aspiring hip hop musicians wanting to learn more about the music industry and how to copyright their works. Audience members provided live performances or played demo musical recordings afterwards.

Previous research has suggested that the attendance of PTDL community outreach programming is generally higher at public libraries. Also, the larger PTDL events are usually presented at Public Libraries. (Harwell, 1996) Although the academic environment lends itself well to the informative guest speaker presentations, some attendees of *InventorFest* 2006 affirmed their preference for the public library environment because of its casual book fair type crowd. Academic libraries might want to consider these comments as they initiate such a program. There are many models of literary festivals at public libraries available, such as Queens Borough Public Library, which also relies on regional partnerships to fulfill their goals as we did with *InventorFest*. (Dempsey, 2005)

Community Impact

InventorFest and its related programs throughout the year had a quantifiable and qualitative impact on PTDL usage and services offered by our community partners. Although patent searching statistics of onsite patrons are no longer maintained on a regular basis, the staff observed a substantial increase in onsite patent searching after *InventorFest* by inventors utilizing PTDL services. As a matter of fact, the local law firm that helped sponsor *InventorFest* also donated a new computer hardware and software package to add a third patent searching station at the Main Library to meet the growing needs of onsite patent searching with PubWest, a database only available at the USPTO and PTDLs.

The primary inventor organization, the Inventor's Council of Cincinnati, saw its number of new members double the few months following each *InventorFest*. Attendance at the Inventor's Council meetings has increased between 5% to 10% per year since 2003. (Brady, 2007)

Attendance at PLCH's intellectual property programs has increased significantly since 2003. (See Table 1.) All three *InventorFests* and the cross-promotional affect among related programs throughout the year, including the support of community partners such as the Inventor's Council of Cincinnati, are credited for these growth figures.

Table 1. Inventor and Entrepreneur Programs Attendance

Year	All Programs	Adult Programs	Youth Programs
2003	584	464	120
2004	1018	868	150
2005	1188	1014	174
2006	2022	1503	519
Four-year growth	246 % increase	224 % increase	333 % increase

As a returning exhibitor, the local SCORE (Service Corps of Retired Executives) Chapter reported 18 quality applications for counseling and a few interested in becoming counselor support members. (Haman, 2006) SCORE relies on alliances with local businesses and organizations such as libraries to expand their small business counseling. SCORE is also a resource partner with the U.S. Small Business Association. SCORE's participation at *InventorFest* is another example of how collaborative partnerships assist a PTDL to build a community's capacity for economic activity and resiliency. (Manjarrez, Cigna, and Bajaj, 2007).

Conclusion

Collaboration between library departments, different libraries, and community partners, accomplishes what cannot be done separately. Libraries can achieve great things when they work with others, according to Kate Nevins, executive director of SOLINET. Partners can facilitate and support library efforts because they are linked into communities that libraries may not reach. (Nevins, 1997)

Besides increasing attendance at PTDL programs and the use of PTDL resources, an *InventorFest* contributes to the economic development of a community. Youth learn about intellectual property and creativity to enhance their future; today's inventors and entrepreneurs network and learn from one another and from the experts at PTDL programs; and the general public is warned of questionable invention promotion firms and how to avoid common business scams. What more could a PTDL ask for?

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