

The cost of inaction is too great

The North American economy is cyclical, a 7-9 year roller coaster ride of ups and downs, and so over the years, we have lulled ourselves into a sense that, “this too will pass.” Yes, this economic downturn will pass: in fact, we are on the upturn right now. However, this does not give us credence to retreat into inaction. In fact, the opposite is true. This is a time when action is essential.



An organization moves only as fast as its leader. I am sure you have witnessed this phenomenon; a library director gets ill, gears down in pre-retirement mode, or burns out. Over a short period of time, the whole library slows down. As the economy begins to rebuild this is the time for actions that will grow our market share and improve our services. How do we harness and capitalize on our need for action to drive recovery when money is scarce and our customers are tentative?

1. Actions truly speak louder than words. Have a look at the work of Carlton Sears at the Public library of Youngstown and Mahoning County (<http://www.youtube.com/plymc>). View the five minute video called “The Library is a Solution”. It’s an awesome example of a positive action and wise promotion speaking volumes!! I am using this clip to begin a staff workshop and open a board meeting. “The Library as a Solution” has a great message, but it is also a great example of recovery in action.
2. Now is the time to be inquisitive and test new program ideas. For example, rather than hosting another story hour but about:
 - Big Truck Day!!! Fill the library parking lot with fire trucks, dump trucks, farm trucks and a story reader in each. This will be huge!!!!
 - Organize a “How to Plan a Great Low Cost Summer for Your Kids”
 - Present a “How to Save for Your Child’s Education” event
3. Now is the time to be inquisitive and test new services that will reach out to a whole new community of users. For example:
 - Test text messaging a question to your favorite librarian. This is the hottest thing out there right now.
 - How successful would a roaming greeter be during peak hours, not to just stand there, but to answer basic questions, do spontaneous book reviews, and encourage borrowing? I’d volunteer for that job!!
 - Select a “cool/relevant website of the day” and show it to every OPAC user via a thirty second demo just as they sign on.

Now, as we begin to rebuild, is the time for action, for promoting the library, developing new programs, and testing new services. The cost of inaction is too great!!!