Meet Randy Goble

Director of Engagement
Kent District Library

- Broad experience in B2B and B2C marketing.
- Key member of a highly respected KDL management team.
- Serves 20 branch libraries in:
  - Marketing communications (website, advertising, PR, social media, print)
  - Programming (events, special programs, performer management)
  - Community Engagement (outreach, bookmobile, workforce development)
- An important part of KDL's successful 2025 millage campaign.

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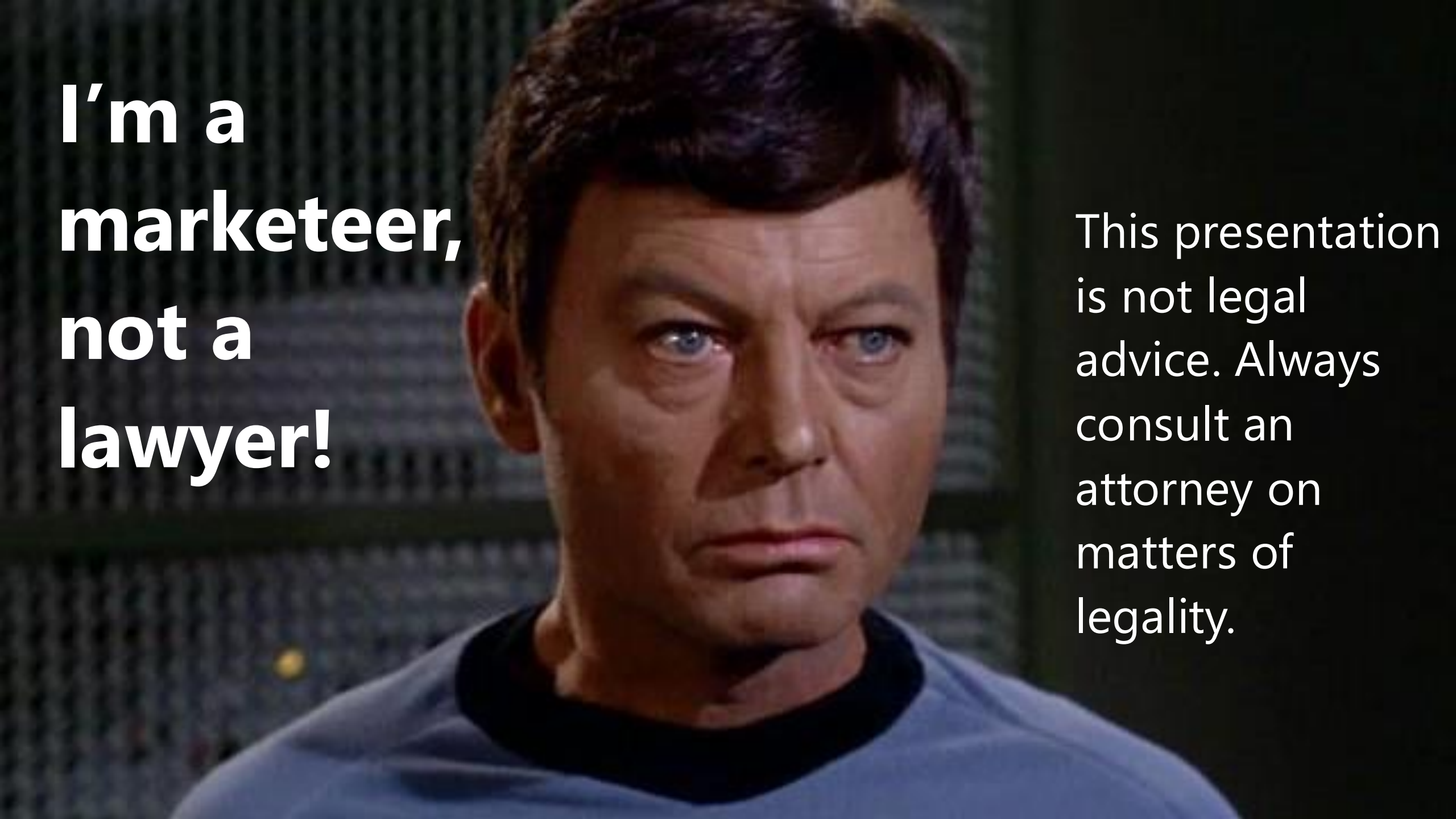
From Vision to Victory

A Library Millage Playbook

Randy Goble, Director of Engagement



I'm a marketeer, not a lawyer!

This presentation is not legal advice. Always consult an attorney on matters of legality.

How Library Millage Campaigns Work in Michigan

- Who is legally allowed to run a campaign
- The difference between:
  - Library
  - Friends' group
  - Ballot Question (Campaign) Committee

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What CAN or CAN'T You Do? It Depends on Who You Are.

Entity	Can Advocate "Vote Yes/No" on a Millage?	Can Spend Money to Influence the Vote?	Governing Rules
Public Library	X No	X No	Michigan Law, Headlee and Michigan Campaign Finance Act (MCFA)
Friends' Group	✓ Yes	⚠ Limited	IRS and MCFA
Ballot Question (Campaign) Committee	✓ Yes	✓ Yes	MCFA

What a Friends' Group **CAN** do

What a Friends Group CAN do:

Advocacy and How to Vote

Compliance is defined by

IRS and **Michigan Campaign Finance Act** (MCFA)

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What a Friends Group CAN do:

Advocacy and How to Vote

IRS

- Urging yes/no vote on ballot measures is considered lobbying and is allowed.
- Must be an insubstantial portion of overall activity.
  - No more than 3-5% of total time and spending (fuzzy).
  - Up to 20% if 501(h) election is used (more precise).
- May not support or oppose candidates.
- Does not eliminate need to comply with MCFA

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What a Friends Group CAN do:

Advocacy and How to Vote

MCFA and the $500 Threshold

- Any "person" (which includes nonprofits such as a Friends group) must register as a Ballot Question Committee* (BQC) if it receives or spends $500 or more in a calendar year to influence voters for or against the passage or defeat of a ballot question, including a millage.

*BQC details coming later in this presentation.

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MCFA and the $500 Threshold *(continued)*

- Must register as a BQC within 10 calendar days of reaching the $500 threshold.
- Dollar amount includes cash and in-kind expenditures (printing, postage, ads, paid consultants, etc.).

What Friends Groups CAN do that Libraries CAN'T

- Promote or oppose a ballot measure (within financial limitations).
- Make financial contributions to Ballot Question Committees (BQC).
  - Consult your attorney to confirm and for clarification.
- Encourage members to personally support a BQC.

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What's at Risk for Friends' Groups if they Exceed IRS or MCFA Limitations?

RISKS for a 501(c)(3) who "advocates" beyond IRS and MCFA limitations

- *IRS:* Loss of tax-exempt status (worst case scenario)
- *IRS and MCFA:* Financial penalties (even if status isn't revoked)
- Risk to credibility and donors

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Additional Ways that Friends' Groups Can Be Effective

How Friends Groups Can Be Effective:

Be Storytellers

People don’t vote for budgets — they vote for impact.

- Children learning to read
- Seniors staying connected
- Job seekers using library resources
- Community spaces and programs

Examples: https://kdl.org/millage/

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How Friends Groups Can Be Effective:

Be Visible in the Community

- Community events
- Conversations with neighbors
- Personal networks

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How Friends Groups Can Be Effective:

Support the campaign in the right way

- Volunteer as individuals
- Help build positive community momentum
- Be the “trusted voice” that libraries often can’t be

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Ballot Question Committees

(or “campaign committees”)

What a Campaign Committee CAN do:

Advocate Directly for the Millage

Raise and spend beyond the MCFA $500 limit as part of urging yes/no voting on ballot measures.

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What a Campaign Committee CAN do:

Raise and Spend Money

- Accept donations
- Pay for campaign materials
- Buy advertising
- Print signs, flyers, and mailers
- Pay for campaign tools or services

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What a Campaign Committee CAN do:

Organize Volunteers

- Recruit volunteers
- Organize phone calls, canvassing, and events
- Train volunteers on how to talk about the ballot issue
- Coordinate outreach efforts

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What a Campaign Committee CAN do:

Speak Directly to Voters

- Send mail to voters
- Run social media and digital ads
- Talk about why the millage should pass
- Respond to opposition messaging

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What a Campaign Committee MUST do:

Be Legit

- Be properly registered
- Maintain campaign finance reporting
- Provide disclaimers on advocacy materials

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How to Establish a Ballot Question (Campaign) Committee

Creating a Ballot Question Committee

- A group of people decide to support or oppose a millage
  - Community members and business leaders
- Choose a treasurer and establish a bank account
- MUST register within 10 calendar days of raising or spending $500 to influence a ballot questions

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Creating a Ballot Question Committee

Register with one of these:

- Statewide ballots, file with Michigan Department of State https://www.michigan.gov/sos/elections/Disclosure/cfr/filing-dates/ballot-question-committee-forms-and-instructions
- File with County Clerk office, if it's only a county-wide ballot or the regional authority covering several counties

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Lessons & Takeaways From Successful Library Millage Campaigns

Campaign Lessons

- Strong community relationships matter more than advertising
- Early communication is critical
- Clear messaging works better than complicated messaging
- Supporters often assume “everyone loves the library” — but campaigns still need active advocacy

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Lessons

- Absentee ballot timing is extremely important
- Segment your audience as much as possible
  - Likely voters
  - Engage your advocated (library patrons)
- The magical value of PR and yard signs

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Takeaways

1. Friends' groups play a powerful role — especially in education and community trust.
2. Staying within 501(c)(3) rules protects the organization and the campaign.
3. Ballot Question Committees have superpowers.
4. The most effective campaigns are built on relationships, not just marketing.

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Additional Resources

- ***Winning Elections and Influencing Politicians***, Patrick Sweeney and John Chrastka
- ***Before the Ballot***, Patrick Sweeney and John Chrastka
- **EveryLibrary.org**
- **Michigan Library Association**

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Thank You!

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