



Marketing academic library resources and services at minimal cost

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Abstract

Promotion of library resources, technology and facilities are now needed strategic plan for marketing on minimal budget. Librarians are realizing that they need a solid strategic marketing plan throughout the academic year and create awareness about library. Many libraries don't have enough financial support to promote the library; therefore librarians need to develop a strategic marketing plan at low cost.

Keywords: marketing library, strategic plan, library promotion, academic libraries, resources and services, academic librarians

Introduction

Library resources and services are appropriate only to the extent those are used by their intended spectators. Use of resources and services is not only a reflection of how well they are developed to meet the vision and mission of the parent university, the academic prospectus, and researchers need. It is also important that how well-informed the academic community about specific resources offered by the library. Library profession is in continuous changing as resources continue to move from print formats to online complements and librarians are playing mediate role to retrieve and access rather than providing resources online or physical formats. Librarians have competition from resources providers that are easily accessed online without librarians support through Google, Amazon, Wiki and other search engines. As Duke and Tucker ^[12] stated the higher quality and relevant services of academic libraries should be communicate to demonstrate how they meet the needs of current patrons ^[10]. Both actions increase the use of library resources and facilities, and justify to management for the regular funding that supports librarians and libraries. The adoption of social media is a tool of communication for library resources and services as an innovative channel now between library and users and make users aware of library resources and services ^[24]. In a marketing context, academic libraries need to think of themselves as a brand with specific products and develop to meet the needs of users. Since libraries are having competition, librarians need to communicate users about the benefits of using the library resources and services rather than those of the competition. The best way to achieve this, librarians have a clear vision and strategic marketing plan for their library.

Literature Review

The purpose of the literature review seeks to broadly recognize diverse marketing activities that may cost academic libraries a little or inexpensive marketing methods by reviewing literature on the right topic. Wherever is appropriate, the author provides his own experience at the University of Nizwa library and includes some experiences from other library professionals in promoting resources and services at a minimal cost. Literature review determines and

combines the best marketing and promotion practices on minimal budget at other university libraries in order to create solid marketing plan for the University of Nizwa Library. Most articles in the library science literature were found to focus on either public relations or market planning ^[21]. In general, public relations articles communicative ways to develop or create a library brand image, as Hafner and Akers ^[13, 20] stated that regularly deliberates library communications, logos, slogans, employee behavior, and facilities as all contributing to the entire of client views of the perceived value and mission of the library. Russo and Coburn ^[21] reported public relations as the broadcasting of a library's message, while marketing is identified as a part of strategic planning because it analyses a library's patron base and evaluates their needs in the context of what the library has to offer ^[24]. Messages about specific resources and services can then be emphasized in the context of what patrons think is important to them ^[5, 25]. While public relations connect to the mission of overall library promotion, the charge of university of Nizwa ad hoc marketing committee was to establish as general plan for activities that would increase the awareness and use of library resources and facilities among targeted user groups. Literature is directly related to how other libraries developed marketing plans; therefore it provides better guidance for these goals than did ones on public relations ^[20, 1]. Conley and Tucker ^[7] describe marketing as a client-oriented procedure: selling a particular product to a particular group by considering their needs and how our product can fulfill their needs ^[25]. Conley and Tucker ^[7] highlight the need to understand who internal and external consumers are and how to find the ways to reach them. They also focused on the development of a marketing plan that outlines activities that fulfill the library's goals and mission. Chan ^[6] describes that a plan should describe the target consumer groups and the relevant library products, recognize the competitors, establish measurable goals, and define how outcomes will be monitored and evaluated ^[1, 18]. As a result, linking library customers to relevant products has become an increasing anxiety for librarians because collection of resources are rapidly moving from print to electronic formats ^[17, 6, 9]. It has been noticed that the traditional marketing methods are outdated in the digital age, as placing new books on the shelves or display near the

front door or locating ready reference items in a study area of the library does not apply to the electronic resource because electronic resources do not have physical view [8, 17, 21]. A number of studies have reported unsatisfactory result to usage of e-resources because of unawareness to their visibility in libraries [2, 8, 3]. Overall, academic libraries will have to reconsider their strategic plan for marketing library resources and services and move forward to implement on regular basis because marketing library is a continue process [9]. However, author discovers that usage of resources can be high if awareness levels are great and training delivered. It is also noticed that a large number of the users are not aware of the resources and services. However, there are many techniques and strategies for library promotion and marketing on minimal budget.

Local newsletters and magazine

Local newsletters and magazine are good channels of communication and connect to the university community. Publishing a column regarding library in an existing university newsletter is a good option for the library. Library does not need to pay anything to publish in the existing newsletter or magazine of the university. Students and faculty may write their experiences by suing the library resources and services and could be encouraged for the feedback. This channel provides a means of marketing the library resources and services free of charge.

Online publisher materials

Most publisher Websites offer links to free promotional materials, training materials and tutorials for the library patrons. Users may access free promotional materials from publisher Websites. University of Nizwa provides links to free tutorials for the following databases.

- Academic One file
- Emerald
- JSTOR
- Pro Quest Central
- Taylor and Francis and more
- Ebscohost

Instructional Services

University of Nizwa offers instructional services to the university community on campus but information literacy session is not a mandatory service for the students at the University of Nizwa. Many libraries in Oman are now offering some type of instructional services to their community. These services include such as library orientation, library instructional courses, and instructional services to individuals on reference desk, library guides and instruction manual. These services have no cost at all.

Peer trainers' programs

The peer trainers are available to join student interested groups and assist them an optimistic approach to the library resources and facilities in a way that a general staff may not be. Likewise, the University of Nizwa library has been offered peer tutors to train the student, faculty and staff at free of charge. The peer tutors are considered as library representatives and expert in peer tutoring. The Library has a reference desk and students may discuss about e-resources including e-books and journals available to them and other

issues as well. Working with peer tutors is one of the marketing tools that increase usage of electronic resources among the university community and peer tutoring has a great impact on the library promotion and awareness.

Partnership with students

Partnership with the active faculty members, researchers and students for marketing library is a good opportunity for libraries. Swartz *et al.* [23] describe that how the college library at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA) has a partnership with the students to educate the university community on legal ethical issues about using information resources. The office of the Students Deanship aggressively promotes the activities and services of the college library to faculty and students by presenting the library orientation and support teaching through the Website. It has been established in the college library at the reference area for faculty members to share with students. A main purpose of the partnership is to offer services to assist patrons in making decisions about information used and access. This marketing tool has minimal cost or no cost at all.

Word-of-mouth

Word-of-mouth is a tool of communicate about resources and facilities between library and its users. It has directly interaction between librarians and patrons about wealth of information resources and services, also librarians communicate message briefly to the university community. Word-of-mouth is a free channel that is effective and tremendously powerful method to transfer information about the library products and services [11, 19]. This method is not limited within the library boundaries; library staffs use this tool across the university campus even in the cafeteria and other public places. The University of New Mexico has effectively implemented a word-of-mouth campaign in 2005–2006 and many other universities have launched across the North America. It has been identified the libraries should do it because a few people trust what they look at advertisements, 90% of persons believe by a friend, colleague or trusted on individual. Smith [22] broadly argues the use of word-of-mouth tool for marketing, and includes the following models of how word-of-mouth can be used to library promotion:

- Endorsements and testimonials by eager clients
- Discussion groups by networking through online
- On campus training and workshop on the resources by publishers
- In-house word-of-mouth wherever employees actively communicate message about services and resources.
- Staff, especially at the Circulation and reference Service desk, actively refers library patrons to its resources and provide more information about e-resources available to them.
- Through word-of-mouth, the library builds a network of friends of the library who partner with the library in promoting the use of library resources and facilities.

Social media

A number of libraries have been using social media to marketing their products and facilities. Several academic library websites in Oman provide the links to social media on their library Website, especially Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter are active social media among the academic

community. As a result, the library website should provide a link to Facebook wall with the objective of using as a passage to approach the students and faculty. The wall combines message related to the library's resources and facilities and other non-academic issues. This type of media keeps the library patrons involved. Although, a message related to academic issues create more interest among academic community members and users actively involved in using the wall if a topic is interested for them. Patrons should be inspired to use the wall actively. Although, there is no solid evidence exist in the literature related to usage of the library's resources and services through the wall [24]. In addition, other social media tools can be used such as blogs, online chats, text messaging, My Space and YouTube.

Library Website

Academic libraries may use Web pages effectively in order to be visible to their university community and market their resources and facilities. Kaur [15] describes that a library Website may efficiently promote resources and services by using Websites. They also suggest that library Webpages should avoid using unclear and confusing expressions. Library Website can contain links such as "Highlighted Resources," "New arrival of the Month," or "Electronic Resources on trial" The University of Nizwa library includes links to the e-resources, online catalog, online reference tools, a list of new arrival items, database on trial and also regularly posts news items on specific resources under news and events. The University of Nizwa library webpages highlight key resources and facilities for the internal and external audience.

Freebies

Freebies are effective marketing tools for academic libraries as identified by Dubicki [11]. Freebies of course have a cost-effective marketing strategy for publishers. However, many vendors and publishers of both digital contents and the print are often eager to supply freebies. Giveaways can be offered when boarding on a campaign, attending exhibits, conferences and during open-house. The University of Nizwa Library offers inclusive workshops on electronic resources, and during this practice the freebies keep the participants engaged and make them workshop exciting. During the workshop and training programs, University of Nizwa Library provides participants the brand-named freebies from many publishers as the marketing materials, these items include such as highlighters, bags, ball-points, pencils, notepads, mouse pads, key rings, calendars, head cap, and flash drive (USB).

Recommendations

Because library users obtain information in a different way, therefore it is important to implement divers approach when promoting library [4]. However, the message should be constant in order to develop a buzz. Library strategic plan should focus on allocate budget for the library promotion and activities. Dubicki [11] identified that strategic plan and determinations to market library resources and services are constrained by lack of financial support; 47.3% of the libraries did not allocate any budget to marketing plan. Smith [22] strongly recommends that libraries must create a strategic plan for marketing [25]. The plan may efficiently be used to discuss a budget for the marketing activities [16, 20]. Kanaujia [14] recommends that a marketing plan of the library must include

an operation framework, goals of the year, resources and services, location, promotion cost, employees training, financial plan and necessities [14, 10]. In general, a marketing plan should set up a specific time frame, objectives, and measurable goals, key messages, strategies, directions and means of assessing the outcomes.

Conclusion

University management should allocate budget to promote library and increase awareness about resources, services and facilities but librarians have to show the university management a solid return on the investment in order to get continue support from the administration and management. The process of marketing should be evaluated step by step and first step is to create awareness of wealthy resources, technology and facilities. An assessment process includes library survey that provides feedback to improve services, resources and collection development. It is important to measure efforts by carrying out a survey regarding success of the library awareness and feedback. A survey provides librarians an opportunity to good understanding of the patrons they serve. There are many community members who do not have direct link with librarians but they want a library survey because it is an opportunity for them to feedback about the library in general. On the other hand, electronic resources should be evaluated based on usage statistics that can be a good measurement tool for evaluating success. It is essential for library promotion to be part of the library's strategic marketing plan and recognize targeted user group and key resources, set an achievable goal within realistic time frame, create dynamic marketing strategies and methods for assessing and evaluating the results. Strategic plan must be allocated funds for the library promotion and marketing on a minimal budget. Marketing plan is a key responsibility of academic librarians in order to awareness of library assets and benefit with full range of facilities and resources.

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