New Directions Snapshot:
How do we better promote/market the library to our community?

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Overview

Marketing and promotion of libraries and of library services is happening all across the United States and in all manner of libraries. Library staff see fewer patrons at the reference desk than in years past, for example, and therefore feel that promotion of what the library can do is warranted. These efforts, however, range from haphazard efforts not coordinated with other library functions, to full-time endeavors with associated staff. Because patrons (or potential patrons) are using tools like Google instead of library-provided databases, because patrons may have out of date notions of what the library is, and because the value of the library can not be assumed, it is hoped that promotional efforts may increase library use. Marketing in academic libraries is most likely to succeed if the message is tailored to the potential audience of such efforts (“audience segmentation”). In addition, marketing efforts need not involve great amount of resources (staff time and/or money), but may require library staff to adjust their “mind set” in order to succeed.

Trends

Academic libraries across US are promoting themselves in various ways. The literature is rife with various examples, and these include:

- Posters, graphics, displays, and the like
- Changes to the library web page
- Changes to the public computers' desktop image
- “Branding” electronic resources, so people realize the library is more than just a building
- Newsletters and other publications
- Outreaching beyond the primary clientele – e.g., to students' parents
- Using library student staff as "ambassadors" - training them to refer their friends to the library
- Using Facebook, YouTube, Second Life, and other such “Web 2.0" tools
- Events of various sort.

Marketing efforts works best when the audience is segmented into more or less homogenous groups, and messages are developed appropriate for each group. In addition, most libraries reporting successful marketing efforts had developed a marketing plan or similar document. Some libraries even hired a full time marketing librarian; others formed small marketing committees. There is consensus that these efforts must be sustained and not just be “one-shot deals," and having staff devoted to these efforts would help to ensure their longevity.
Local Issues

The UC Berkeley Libraries are a quasi-federated system of multiple libraries and Affiliated Libraries, besides Doe/Moffitt. There is variation among the libraries as to what staff will do for patrons, what their web sites look like, etc. This system, while it has its merits, does make a unified approach to marketing more complex. In addition, UCB has variation culturally and linguistically among its students. Will this require more sophistication when trying to promote our services? And of course, the budget situation is often a limiting factor in creating new programs here.

Successful promotional attempts require staff buy-in, especially to sustain the effort. The library to some extent already intimidates patrons. Part of marketing is making the library a more welcome place, and staff can help achieve that. We are also limited by what we expect our patrons to do on their own, which sometimes takes the form of a lack of information on our web pages: where is there information, for example, on how to get immediate help on proxy server problems? All patrons can do is go to a form (last updated nearly 3 years ago) and hope for the best. There is no reason to promote something that doesn't work well…

Opportunities

There are many opportunities for promoting the UCB libraries, many of which involve minimal staff time or money – so called “guerilla marketing.” Examples include:

- A periodically changing public PC desktop image with upcoming library events/classes, resource tips, etc. Possibly different libraries could have different desktop images
- Change library signage to be positive not negative (You CAN do this, instead of such and such is NOT allowed)
- Addition of prominent, professionally done photographs that show people using the library and enjoying its benefits (on web pages, print publications, etc.). See http://www.lib.utexas.edu/ for examples
- Get more involved in new faculty outreach: have an event (with food) where new faculty can meet the subject specialty librarians in their field
- “Push” new book lists out to faculty. Electronic lists of selected new books in each library
- “Top 10 lists” that changes often – maybe: “top circulating books this week” or “top downloaded articles this week”
- Other lists to promote library: Interview seniors for the top 10 things they wish they knew about the library when they were freshmen
- Make the library ubiquitous: get on bspace of as many classes as possible, at least with a link to “top 3 library resources for researching the topic of this class,” Also chat, in-course instruction: instill the idea that the library will come to YOU
- Make the physical space more desirable. Present new items prominently and attractively, capitalizing on the visual appeal of new book covers
- In order to visually unify all of the libraries’ services and offerings in the eyes and minds of our audiences, create a "University Library" graphic style, with a logo, typefaces, and color palette. Develop a realistic strategy and timeline for incorporating this unified look and feel across all library signage, websites, and printed materials. This idea is somewhat controversial at UCB but perhaps it is worth exploring.

The library has people with expertise, resources that are credible, and stuff you can’t get anywhere else. It would not be difficult to come up with concrete example to demonstrate that Google is good, but our stuff is better. We need to tie marketing to the Library’s mission statement (http://www.lib.berkeley.edu/AboutLibrary/reports/mission1193.html) – this document is worth reading: “We energetically integrate our resources and services into the research, instructional and planning activities of the campus; We provide the campus community and, especially, our students, with a welcoming place for self-education...” We need to let our audience know that we listen AND implement.