

Unlocking the Library: Marketing Library Services: a case study approach

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Abstract (English)

This paper outlines marketing strategies and market research undertaken at the University of Queensland Library. Customer groups have been identified and their information needs and satisfaction with Library services examined. Surveys, both paper and web based, have identified customer concerns. Focus groups have been held in specific disciplinary areas and to assist in the appropriate design and presentation of the Library's website. Analysis of website use has been conducted to identify the patterns of use. Suggestion boxes, both in electronic and paper form, have been used to identify specific complaints and areas for further development. As a result, the Library has restructured its service provision and identified new services in response to customer needs. The Library's services are now badged as *The University of Queensland Cybrary*. Facilities have been transformed and new promotional strategies adopted. Librarians have become *cybrarians*. An analysis of the *UQL Cyberschool* service identifies the marketing approaches used to launch this service successfully.

Abstract (French)

Cet article décrit les méthodes employées pour la commercialisation, ainsi que la recherche de marché entreprise par la bibliothèque de l'Université de Queensland. Certains groupes de clients ont été mis à l'étude pour analyser leurs besoins d'information et leur degré de satisfaction avec les services offerts par la bibliothèque. Les études entreprises sur papier et par voie électronique nous ont permis d'identifier les problèmes qu'ils éprouvaient. Des groupes de foyer ont été tenus dans certaines disciplines pour leur permettre de contribuer au développement de la page d'accueil de la bibliothèque. Une analyse de leur accès à cette page nous a permis de mieux comprendre la façon dont ils l'utilisaient. Des cadres de suggestion, sur papier et à travers notre page web, ont indiqué les sujets de plainte et les possibilités d'amélioration. Par la suite, nous avons reconfiguré les services que nous offrons pour mieux répondre aux besoins de notre clientèle. Ces services sont maintenant étiquetés *The University of Queensland Cybrary*. Nous avons modifié l'intérieur des bâtiments et adopté de nouvelles méthodes de commercialisation. Par exemple, les bibliothécaires sont maintenant appelés *Cybrarians*. Une étude du *UQL Cyberschool* permet d'identifier les stratégies qui ont abouti au succès de cette entreprise.

The University of Queensland

The University of Queensland is recognised as one of the largest and most prestigious research universities in Australia. With its largest campus located in

a loop of the river in the state's capital, Brisbane, it is a comprehensive, traditional university, publicly funded (as are most universities in Australia) and the largest and oldest in Queensland (one of Australia's eight states). In all, the University comprises three major campuses, with facilities located in major teaching hospitals and on islands and farms throughout Queensland. The University has seven faculties with 29,000 students (of whom 25% are graduate students) and 5,000 academic, research and general staff. Cooperative Research Centres operate in partnership with the faculties, external organisations and commercial operations. Increasingly, students are enrolling remotely from the major campuses. International students also comprise a growing percentage of the student population. The University has the highest employment rate of graduates of any Australian university.

The Library

The Library is the largest in Queensland, with 2,000,000 volumes, 18,000 videos, 18,000 journal titles (of which 8,000 are also available in digital form) and extensive microform, digital and primary source collections. The Library comprises thirteen branches (primarily disciplinary in basis) located on the major campuses, in the teaching hospitals (funded jointly by the Library and Hospital authorities and managed by the Library) and in the Dental School. There is also an Electronic Information Centre, the University Archives and several warehouses (containing less used materials). Service delivery through the branch libraries is supported by centralized processing, information technology and corporate services. Economies of scale are achieved through the centralised management of such services as photocopying and information skills delivery. The Innopac library system, marketed by Innovative Interfaces Inc., is used to provide collection management services and access for all clients. The effectiveness of the Library in service delivery is strongly influenced by the effectiveness of its implementation of information technology. The Library employs 230 staff and provides over 1000 computers for public use.

The senior library management structure includes three subject based information services delivery managers and three functional support service managers, reporting to the University Librarian. The University of Queensland Library delivers customer focused innovative information products, services and programs of the highest quality that are integrated with, and central to, the University's teaching, learning and research activities. The Library facilitates excellence in teaching, creates an appropriate learning and research environment, anticipates and responds to student learning and research needs, contributes to positive graduate outcomes and provides the information infrastructure necessary for leading edge research activity. The Library is committed to excellence and to principles of equity and integrity, depends on teamwork and personal responsibility, encourages flexibility and innovation, promotes open communication, recognises the importance of staff development, and emphasises accountability. The Library takes as its mission statement:

We link people with information enabling the University of Queensland to achieve excellence in teaching, learning and research¹

Marketing as the driver

In the last few years, the products and services provided by libraries have changed considerably. The challenges to library services from changes in educational approaches, the impact of technology, new methods for information provision and declining budgets have meant that marketing is now so basic that it cannot be considered a separate function. It is the whole business seen from its final results; that is, from the customer's perspective.

In determining new approaches, many libraries have come to appreciate the contribution the application of marketing concepts can make. In designing the marketing mix and developing the marketing plan, the so-called 4Ps have become central to libraries. Any library using marketing techniques to develop its operations focuses on its products (including services), the price paid, which may be in money, time or energy, the promotional strategies by which the product or service is made known to potential customers and the place where the product or service is made available or the distribution strategies by which it is provided. Relationship marketing, in particular, reflecting the mutual interests of libraries and the customers they serve, is being seen as a concept for libraries to embrace. Libraries, after all, are built on relationships². In developing and maintaining relationships, it is essential that all customers are identified and their needs understood. Market research is a useful tool for discovering and understanding customer needs and identifying better ways to meet those needs. In the change process involved, it is always easier to change oneself than it is to change others.

Who are the customers?

For a university library, the obvious customers are the staff and students of the university. They can be segmented in various ways; by level of study, by field of study, by special need, or by prime activity. Some relate primarily to teaching, others to learning, and still others to research. There are general or administrative staff within the University who have a wide range of needs and there is the university management, the wider community, internal library staff, other libraries, potential employees and suppliers with whom libraries deal.

In Australia, undergraduate tertiary education is "free", although students pay a HECS (Higher Education Contribution Scheme) fee, which varies according to the disciplinary program studied. This constitutes only part of the costs, but students do believe they are "paying for their education". Several years ago, the University of Queensland engaged a market research firm to explore the student attitudes, with the Library targeted as part of the various services provided by the University³. Students showed themselves to be self-centred, regarding

¹ *The University of Queensland Library Strategic Plan: 2001-2004*,
www.library.uq.edu.au/About/ProfileAndOpPlan_Feb.pdf

² L. Besant and D. Sharp, "Libraries need relationship marketing", *Information Outlook*, (2000) 4 (9) pp.17-22.

³ M. Olsen. *Customer service: client attitudes and perceptions*. Unpublished paper. (Brisbane: University of Queensland, 1996)

themselves as important and deserving of a University education as a right. They also considered themselves “poor”, although socio-economic analysis of the student population would deny this. They were passive in their approach to issues, unlike their activist colleagues of some years ago, but nevertheless there was an underlying anger. Inherent in their expectations was a belief that the University would somehow make everything come out right for the student. The students related primarily to their teaching faculties or disciplinary schools and had little understanding of the other types of University services available. The Library was seen as the only essential service outside of teaching, because of its direct link to academic progress.

Today’s generation of students has never wound a watch, dialed a phone, written on a blackboard, played an LP or spent a penny. They think nothing of downloading music off the Internet, burning CDs, or heating a pre-cooked meal in a microwave oven. They constitute a new breed, the leading edge of a generation that promises to be the richest and savviest ever. They drive beamers not bombs. They are technophiles not technophobes. They fax, phone, e-mail and chat on-line with their friends, frequently in preference to meeting them in the mall. Call them Generation Y, Millenials, Generation 2000, or Dot-commers, they are the cool, coddled, confident offspring of the baby boomers. As university libraries face the future, the biggest challenge is developing information services that support the learning activities of this new generation. Students are now customers. Libraries must understand what they want.

How do we know what they want?

The simple way is to ask them. Surveys can be done, including those done via the web. Focus group interviews can be used to develop solutions to problem situations and investigate further the results of simple questionnaires and surveys. Complaints and suggestions can be analysed. Key visits can be made to significant clients, including Deans and Departmental/Faculty/School Heads. The library’s numerous advisory committees can be consulted. After service delivery, immediate feedback can be sought. Many organizations have discovered they can find a great deal about their customers from asking their staff. They, after all, are in constant contact with customers. Having asked, it is important to listen to what is said. Another approach is to watch what customers do. One can do counts, “bums on seats” surveys, analyse statistics, flowchart the movement of customers and log and analyse web use.

And what DO they want?

Overall, our library customers want basic services. They want competence, reliability, responsiveness, timeliness, honesty and a caring approach. They want everything to work properly and assistance with use. They want promises made to them to be kept and they want what they need, when they need it. Students want information content for assignments, research or knowledge acquisition. They want assistance with assignments and research support. They want e-books and e-journals. They want real books and real journal articles. They want training and motivation in resources discovery, IT skills and equitable service delivery.

The University of Queensland Library has undertaken specific research into student views of the Library. Students in general see the Library as a University icon, a haven within an alien world. On the whole, they are satisfied with services and appreciate the range available. Students tend to be crisis-driven in their approach to the Library, are task-oriented, lack information seeking skills and frequently find the Library a source of frustration. Few will ever acquire in-depth knowledge of services available, but they are interested in learning how to search more effectively. Classes in information skills are valued by those who attend, but classes only attain credibility when recommended by teaching staff. A customer survey is now conducted every two years, seeking information regarding the Library's communication, service quality, facilities and equipment, service delivery and library staff. The latest survey⁴ established a *Top 10 List* of areas which students considered most important. These were the library collection; easy access to information resources; the clarity of the catalogue; opening hours; electronic equipment in working order; photocopying facilities; library staff provision of quality service; adequacy of computer workstations; the provision of accurate answers by library staff and quick re-shelving of books and journals. The *Top 10 List* of areas in which students thought the Library performed best included three factors from the importance list, namely, quality service from library staff, accuracy of answers and the catalogue. The *Bottom 10 List* on the performance scale also included three factors from the *Top 10 List* of important items: photocopying facilities, computer workstations and the Library collection. These benchmarks offer us guidance in bettering our customer service.

And the academic staff?

Academic staff have also changed. They are more pressured. They have less time. They need assistance as they make the transition required in their teaching strategies. Research methods are also changing. More of them are working in teams, across multidisciplinary frontiers, and in a highly focused manner (particularly if the research is funded by external parties to achieve specific outcomes). Developing a customer prototype of an academic can assist with understanding e.g. a middle-aged academic, who is a dedicated teacher and successful researcher, but unfortunately tied up with administration, supervising 8 Ph.D. students; little time to visit the Library, but eats in the Staff Club. Focus group work has also been useful in exploring solutions to problems academic staff have with information access. These have been conducted at the University of Queensland in disciplinary groups with academics (and some graduate students) in such areas as philosophy and physics. These groups have revealed different findings, but in all, there has been overwhelming evidence that academics are not sufficiently aware of library services; many made suggestions about what they thought could be provided as new services, only to learn they were already available.

Responding to needs

Having developed a better understanding of the needs of the Library's customers, the Library set about implementing its responses. Providing *just in*

⁴ [The University of Queensland Library Survey, 1999,](http://www.library.uq.edu.au/about/RodskiReportCompleteFinal.pdf)
www.library.uq.edu.au/about/RodskiReportCompleteFinal.pdf

time service, just for you has taken on many facets. Library staff are now more actively involved in the planning, design and delivery of the curriculum, particularly as it impacts on flexible delivery. In this capacity, our librarians are re-inventing themselves and are actively involved in teaching staff and students alike how to find, use and evaluate information as part of a lifelong learning continuum. Closer partnerships are being formed with teaching and research staff, and beyond the university with commercial organizations, to provide targeted services for students. Information skills programs are being provided in more diverse ways, e.g. via WebCT delivery. The Library is focusing on the creation of self-sufficient, information literate customers.

Customer service has become our highest priority. Strategic planning has been re-focused on customer needs. The organisational structure has been re-aligned to emphasise service delivery; the flatter organisational structure provides a faster response to the customization and personalization demanded by a complex marketplace. Total Quality Management, defining quality in terms meaningful to the customer, has also been adopted as an improvement and re-invention strategy. Even telephone calls have been analysed to identify the most asked questions to ensure that the answers provided on the website and in various instructional programs and library publications really do provide the appropriate solutions.

Revamping the Place

One major marketing aspect addressed by the Library relates to place, the Library's physical facilities. Classical library design focused on the collection, on its projected growth and on its protection. The Library was a serious building for the storage of materials, the seating of readers and the provision of workspaces for library staff. Scholars, or users, went to such a building, an "edifice", to obtain access to recorded knowledge, while librarians sat behind desks and assisted users find their way. This traditional library paradigm was matched by traditional library design.

With its focus on customers and not the collection, the University of Queensland Library has undertaken the major refurbishment of all its library branches over the last four years. In focusing design on the customer, a restaurant analogy of library use has been used. How do customers use the Library? Some like the "take-away" method. They look up, locate, borrow, photocopy, print or return an item. Some are looking for a leisurely "eat in" experience, borrowing, studying and working in-depth, individually or in groups. Some customers use libraries to "self serve", others want detailed help and guidance with "menu" choice. Many others now remain at home or in their offices and "order in" the information they require.

In the light of these differing uses and needs, the final physical layout and facilities gained much from visits to service organizations like airports, banks, shops, supermarkets, restaurants and internet cafes. Express workstations for quick look-up, auto-loan machines, specialist study spaces with lock-up desks for graduate students, coffee facilities and laboratories for information skills training are all featured. The new look and feel is friendly and fashionable. There are different kinds of spaces to appeal to different individuals and to

different groups. Flexibility is the keynote. The appropriate flow of people using the Library has been the cornerstone of design. The Library lent 1.5 million items last year and shelved approximately 2.8 million items. 3 million people visited the various branches of the Library. The physical place is obviously still important.

Signage, or wayfinding, has been particularly targeted. The architect and a signage consultant initially reviewed the colour, shape, positioning and wording of signs, which were replicated in print publications as well as the design of the Library's home page. Spaces were first designed so that little signage was needed. To ensure easy wayfinding, layout suited to customer needs was emphasised. Separate directional and positional signs have been used, with lettering placed directly on the walls, rather than hanging from the ceiling. Supermarket approaches to signage have provided invaluable assistance.

Badging the *Cybrary*

The term "badging" is frequently used in marketing parlance. The Library decided to badge its services as the *Cybrary*; a similar concept to the hybrid library, the virtual library or the e-brary but somewhat easier to pronounce and certainly more memorable. At the University of Queensland, the *Cybrary* emphasises the combination of cyberspace and physical place, focusing on client access to and use of information. It is a gateway for customers located anywhere, to access POP (Print on Paper) and WOW (words on the web) everywhere. The Library becomes the window on the world of knowledge and a springboard to learning. A website has been developed to provide easy access and the term *Cybrary* is now used on that website, on all its publications and in all information skills programs. *Cybrary* has become an accepted term within the University community and frequently serves as a useful conversation starter.

The term *Cybrary* has also emphasised remote access. While there are multiple branch libraries with opening hours ranging up to eighty-four hours per week, the *Cybrary* is available 24 x 7 through dial-up access from home, laboratory or workplace. The Library is acquiring as many e-journals as possible, as well as electronic databases available either via the ERL (Electronic Reference Library), or directly from overseas websites. *Ezproxy* and *Innopac*'s web access management approaches facilitate access for students using commercial internet service providers. E-books are also being acquired. Links to university generated course materials are being made available on the web, as are guides known as *Find-its* and *Use-its* to aid customers in their search for information. The website receives up to 1.5 million uses per month. Cyberspace is important and growing in significance.

Badging on the physical level is carried through to each branch library, so that each has the same look and feel, with the same facilities. The colours of blue and red have been used in each branch, as well as on the website and in publications. Each branch library has an inquiry desk, a loans point (including auto-loan), a high use area, photocopying/printing facilities, computers in either Self-Directed Learning Centres or Electronic Information Centres (the Library has the safety net provision of such facilities on each campus), an *AskIT* service point at each campus (the Library provides IT help and training within the

University), study areas which include individual and group facilities and formal and casual seating areas in a secure environment.

Promotional ploys

While surveys have determined that the Library's services are highly respected and well-used, the surveys also revealed a lack of awareness about those services. Communicating what libraries do has always been a challenge. It has become even more difficult now that many users do not come to the Library physically as frequently (or at all). Communicating to the University's key players, academic staff, and senior university management is vital. After all, it is academic staff who encourage student use of the Library and senior university management who allocate budgets.

People power

Selling and communication strategies involve all library staff. While the University Librarian and senior library staff are particularly involved in dealing with senior administrative staff within the University, all library staff are involved at all levels in dealing with customers. Simple strategies like name badges and uniforms clearly identify service staff. Part of our service strategy is to reduce the number of people with whom each customer is involved, as being directed from one to another can be frustrating. Recruiting staff who are highly service-oriented is paramount. Librarians have all too frequently been characterised as fearsome gorgons and guardians who occasionally and begrudgingly assist users - rigid enforcers of rules, more interested in themselves than the customers. What is needed are bright, cheerful, intelligent, friendly professionals providing quality services to all. All interviews for new staff at the University of Queensland Library include questions on customer service. At the librarian level and above, an academic staff library user is included on the interviewing committee. All interviewees are asked to give a five minute presentation on a set topic to demonstrate communication skills.

To ensure that all staff are able to promote the library and communicate effectively, there must be appropriate induction programs, which include customer service techniques. The Library has recently developed a video of several customer service situations for use in its training, allowing staff to reflect on the various situations where problems have been dealt with in different ways. Ongoing training is used continue to update staff and provide new techniques. Many libraries have allocated library staff to each Faculty/School and this liaison role has always been an important marketing strategy. The University of Queensland Library allocates a staff member to each School.

Sorry, glad, sure

The marketing literature tells us that every person who receives poor services mentions it to at least seven other people. Unfortunately, good service frequently goes unremarked. At the University of Queensland, the website has a suggestion box and there are physical suggestion boxes in each branch library. All letters of complaint and all suggestions are investigated and responded to – promptly. Library staff do make mistakes and an apology never goes astray. The Library has also used the concept of “lemon insurance”, based on the approach that every now and then someone does get a lemon. When everything

does go wrong for a customer, small gifts of university merchandise or several dollars worth of photocopying are provided by way of assistance with the problem. Good ideas from commercial companies have also been adopted. A supermarket chain in Australia, Woolworths, employs a very useful staff development and training program for its staff. Several elements of this have been used, in particular, the *Sorry, Glad, Sure* regime. It helps defuse a situation to say, "I am *sorry* you have had a problem with our service today, I am *glad* you have talked to me, and I am *sure* we can do something about it." The customer adage *The customer does not care how much you know, until he/she knows how much you care* has also been taken to heart – and action.

Put it in writing

A range of written promotional strategies can be used. Different ones will appeal in different situations. It can be difficult to obtain coverage within newsletters produced by one's own organisation. Write good copy. It is not easy to do, so employ professionals. Provide photographs. Issue an organisational "press release". Producing one's own newsletter is a useful alternative. At the University of Queensland Library, an internal library staff newsletter *Links* is produced in paper format and distributed to senior management within the University, as well as to Library staff. It has become extremely popular and its print version is actively sought. A copy is also mounted on the website. The Library also produces a more expensive glossy publication called *Connections*. This is distributed widely throughout the University and draws attention to new services. Communicate outside the library. Prepare and send press releases to the local press.

One can employ online communication, but quite often, it is not as effective as one would like to believe. The Library does use e-mail communication, but finds it is now frequently ignored. As many customers bookmark specific spots on the Library's website, rather than entering via the homepage, ensuring that new services are discovered by customers is frequently difficult.

Get talked about

Word of mouth is just as effective for spreading the word about good service as it is for bad. Influential members of the University community and others speaking for the Library have achieved more for the Library than any self-promotion. Borrow the business model of the *unique selling propositions*. These are usually simple statements which convey meaning in relation to service provision, but become firmly associated with specific products. The Library uses *We link people with information*. Other ideas considered have been *Profit from our Know-How*.

Get out and mingle

The Library at the University of Queensland associates itself willingly with any alumni event, parents' activity, open day, orientation session or expo within the University. The Library is represented at all functions, including graduation ceremonies. The University Librarian or senior library staff accept all invitations to speak at various sessions within the University or outside. It can be a punishing schedule, but it is vital to ensure effective marketing of the Library and its services. The Library always makes much of launching new

services, usually involving influential people. A proforma has been developed and is used for all our launches to ensure that all details are taken care of, ranging from music and flowers to food and speeches. Prominent displays and events are developed in association with special occasions or times, e.g. the Sydney Olympic Games.

Product development, pricing, positioning and promotion in action

Having sharpened its marketing approach, the University of Queensland Library has applied it to many new activities. One of these has involved a new product, the Library's UQL Cyberschool⁵. School libraries in Queensland have limited resources and new electronic services have been extremely expensive and beyond their reach. Three years ago, no vendor in Australia targeted schools specifically in their product range or sales strategy. The University of Queensland Library was receiving requests for assistance and approached international database publisher Information Access Company (now known as the Gale Group). A free trial was provided to three Brisbane schools for access to the Expanded Academic ASAP database of indexed and full text journals. The trial was an overwhelming success and led to the Library negotiating with IAC a discounted price for access to Queensland high schools. 104 schools now purchase access to up to 8 databases. A cutdown version of the University of Queensland Cybrary website has been designed, providing links to Internet sites identified for specified subject areas, to information guides and to material, including the Virtual Reference Collection, prepared for students at the University of Queensland, but also made available for students in Queensland high schools. Training is provided for Queensland school librarians, and students are gaining skills in information seeking which prepare them for life at University and beyond.

Throughout the development of the UQL Cyberschool, the marketing opportunities have been enormous, while also providing several challenges. A launch by the Minister for Education in Queensland initiated the project. Everyone who was anyone was invited, although some aspects of developing the guest list for the launch proved more challenging than expected. For example, personal names for librarians and principals of the schools were not easily available. Direct marketing fails if personal names are not used – telephone calls elicited the names and the list was prepared. Some time was spent developing the content of the launch itself, from inviting a student who had been using the service to speak, to providing a technology-proof demonstration of the service. A press release and publicity brochures were prepared. The launch was extremely successful. The Minister was glowing in his praise and the project was reported in the newspapers. The senior echelons of the University were impressed. Schools started to enrol for the service. Conference presentations and word of mouth recommendations have publicised the service. Several satellite activities have been introduced, ranging from the Virtual School of Engineering, conducted with the Faculty of Engineering, Physical Sciences and Architecture, to specialised programs in specific disciplinary areas. The service has gone from strength to strength and proved an effective marketing tool for the

⁵ UQL Cyberschool, 2000, www.library.uq.edu.au/cyberschool

entire University in its continuing aim of attracting quality students to the University of Queensland.

Re-positioning the Library

Marketing approaches have proven effective in assisting the Library adjust to changes in its customer base and have ensured that services delivered continue to fit the needs. The products and services provided by the Library range from knowledge access and research support to photocopying services and the provision of information skills, supported by excellent customer service. Strategies examining the distribution and delivery of services and their successful promotion have ensured that those who need information obtain it. The Library has consistently sought to under-promise and over-deliver and is confident it will continue to do so.

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