Marketing of electronic resources: projects and experiences

This article focuses on different projects and ideas for marketing electronic resources at the State and University Library Bremen, Germany. It outlines the advantages and disadvantages of various methods that were tried. The most successful projects were the ones focusing directly on different needs of the departments and working groups at the University.

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Introduction

We all want to make the most of our investments and resources. This has become more important with electronic resources as these take up quite a large part of our library budgets. In our library, at least, marketing of resources is a relatively new feature for the librarians. The following article outlines ways we have tried to promote electronic resources here and our experiences with these different methods. Unfortunately, we do not have a special budget that can be used for marketing, so we had to think of marketing techniques we could afford with the general resources we have in the library. The following are some of the methods we have used so far and their advantages and disadvantages:

■ **General presentations of our electronic system internally (for colleagues working on the information desk)**
One of the key points of contact with the user is the information desk. Therefore, when we migrated from a static list of online journals to a database-oriented system called E-LIB in 1999, one of the starting points was to promote the system internally to improve the acceptance of the new service. The level of success of this presentation method could not be defined.

■ **General presentations for users and academics in the library**
In the usual tradition of presentations and training courses we offered a general introduction to the electronic library about twice a year. This proved to be highly unpopular as

hardly anyone turned up for these presentations! We therefore decided not to hold any further presentations in the library. One of the difficult points we found with this kind of presentation was that people who had not worked with the electronic library so far were not interested in a presentation at all, and people who had worked with the system did not seem to see the need for a general presentation.

■ **Subject-focused presentations in the library**
A subject-focused approach was taken to replace the general presentations on electronic resources and databases. These proved to be slightly more popular than the general presentations. We targeted one broad subject audience for the presentations, for example, 'Electronic library for Maths'. We sent direct e-mails to the departments in question. Although the number of people attending such presentations rose, they were still not attracting the number of people we hoped to reach.

■ **Presentations in the departments and institutes**
These focused directly on the information needs of the departments themselves with a short introduction to the most important databases in that subject area. We then focused on special groups of users. We approached these groups directly – either via the subject librarian or via contacts we made through the helpdesk offering this new service. These presentations had to be well prepared. We tried to get in advance a list of journals in which the

members of the institute were interested so that we could compose a package with information material from the most popular publishers on that list. At the same time we checked the publication list of the targeted audience for the same reason. The venue for the presentation varied. Usually we tried to go directly to the institutes and departments in order to reproduce the normal work environment. (It also proved to be important to communicate to the person organizing this event in the institute that we had specific requirements, e.g. Internet connection, beamer, etc.) The average length of these presentations was about 45 minutes and these included an overview of the electronic journals and their special features, focusing on the journals that were on the list of interest. We also included a short presentation of the most appropriate database for that particular subject group (usually a basic search for the head of the department or some other scientist proved to be most memorable). This kind of presentation is rather time-consuming as every presentation has to be prepared separately but this method has been successful so far as the presentation focuses on the special information needs of the audience.

■ **Resource of the month**
Every month we feature a different resource on the first welcome screen of the electronic library. On this page we offer a short concise description of the content, source list, dates of coverage, search modes, special features and a detailed search guide that features our logo and search examples from our own university environment. We have a number of posters (using images rather than text) around the library building announcing the 'resource of the month' as well.

A lot of the databases offer the facility to search for the author affiliation so we use that search facility to see what publications from the local academics are included in the resource. These academics receive printed mailings with the information about this database.

Usage has always gone up in the month where the database was selected as 'resource of the month'. With some resources, usage stayed on a similar high level afterwards as well, but in other cases usage fell back to the level it had

been prior to the highlighting month. This usage pattern in combination with other data such as cost and statistics is used when deciding on cancelling or reselecting sources.

■ **Alerting service**
We have implemented an alerting service in our electronic library system. Anyone interested in a special subject area can register for this alerting service by entering their name and e-mail address. New electronic resources that have been included in the system are set on a certain status and twice a week a list of the resources with the 'new' status is mailed to the interested groups. We also placed an advert for this service in the University's newspaper and have designed special flyers for this service.

■ **Newsletter**
A general newsletter is published on an irregular basis with news about new databases, journal packages, new features from publishers, etc. Usually the newsletter consists of two A4 pages. We use short texts with graphics (such as journal covers, publisher logos) to raise interest in the various resources. Currently we have about 350 subscribers to this service. The newsletter is available in electronic and in printed format.

■ **Branding**
We use the E-LIB logo on every handout, letter, flyer, search guide, etc. We use stickers with our logo on to put on posters and flyers we get from publishers. When we license a new resource we always request promotional material. Many publishers/aggregators also offer branding options on the web pages that we always try to use. It is important to emphasize that the electronic resources are licensed by our institution, as sometimes people have been pointed to a resource through a search engine and if there is no branding or information on the web page the users think the resource is freely available and not a service of their library.

■ **Material from publishers**
When licensing a new product I always try to get a bundle of promotional material from the publishers. Usually they have things like

posters, flyers or pens to hand out. I use this material for focused information, e.g. sending it out to the appropriate departments and institutes. We have special stickers with the logo of our electronic library to put on material we receive from other sources. Most publishers are quite willing to send different kinds of materials that can be used to promote their service. Many publishers also have special sections for librarians on their web page where print material can be downloaded.

■ **Postcards**

For our project of digitized historical maps we designed postcards with a high resolution screen shot of one of the historic maps of Bremen with the URL for this service. These cards will be presented to the Tourist Information Centres for a free promotion.

■ **Notepads**

We noticed that we usually handed out paper with class marks or other information written on at the information desks. So we decided to design a small notepad with the relief of our library building in light grey and the URL of the home page that can be used at the information desks throughout our campus. We also have notepads of a bigger size we can use at business meetings with the University.

■ **General information**

We try to get new features of the system published in the University's own newspaper on a regular basis. A short flyer to promote the alerting service and newsletter has been developed and this was handed out on the campus. At the beginning of term, the flyers are always put out on the tables in the main cafeteria.

■ **Feedback**

We have put contact information on the home page for users to contact us. We also established a form to use on the information desk if the problem cannot be solved on the spot. The feedback ranges from access problems to requests for new journal titles. This information is included in a special user database so when a new product is licensed or there is some change in the publisher's service, we can inform the users that have shown an interest in that product directly.

■ **User meetings**

We arrange a user meeting in combination with a lecture about twice a year. We had the first meeting of this kind this year with a lecture by Thieme-Verlag about the publishing process of a journal. The meeting was for the users as well as interested members of staff and the response was better than anticipated. We had a second event with our newly-licensed product, JSTOR. For this we also had somebody from the publisher to present their product in more detail. We placed information and a registration form about this event on the web pages and had a press release. These events proved to be quite popular and have been attended by 40–50 interested people.

Future Plans

This year we have designed an A3 calendar with the logos of some of the popular resources on it to use in the library and as a giveaway in the library. We will offer it as a free download from our web page for interested users.

We are also in the process of designing a screensaver with the logos and URLs of our main services (Library, Electronic Library, Intelligent Search System, Digitized maps) to use on all our public terminals. This will also be available as a free download.

Further resources

Gale Free Resources Marketing Materials:
http://www.galegroup.com/free_resources/marketing/

Marketing our libraries:
http://www.librarysupportstaff.com/marketinglibs.html

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