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Effective Techniques for Marketing Electronic Resources

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A B S T R A C T

This study examines how Australian academic librarians perceived effective techniques used to market their electronic resources and the factors influencing their perceptions of the used particular techniques. Descriptive (frequencies, percentages, means, and standard deviations) and inferential (ordinal regressions) statistics were used to analyze the collected data from an online survey. The results reveal that demographics, human capital and library variables play an important and significant role in predicting librarians' perceptions of effective techniques used to market electronic resources. The findings are useful for information professionals to reflect on the effectiveness of the techniques used, to balance the weight of the factors' influences, and to better understand various effective techniques to enable them to market electronic resources more effectively in the future.

Introduction

In the digital age, information and communication technologies are consistently evolving. They are being applied in various aspects and making numerous changes in modern society. Marketing plays an important role “in the historical and ongoing development of communication media and technologies” (Liao, 2015, p. 322). Undoubtedly, an academic library is one of the first organizations using these new technologies to market resources and services.

The increasing amount of information now available online has significantly affected the popularity and use of information tools and sources available to users. Previously, the online information tools and resources available to users were sparse, however, they have now become more prevalent, particularly in an academic library setting. Changes in approaches to the delivery and provision of electronic resources to patrons allow greater access to online information both in a library setting and also remotely, using personal computers or handheld devices. Academic libraries are now serving more online users with greater demands than before. However, academic staff, students and users may not have a clear understanding about the relevant electronic resources available, resulting in low usage statistics prior to marketing electronic resources (Kennedy, 2013). Under such circumstances, it is important for academic librarians to use a variety of techniques to market electronic resources using new information and communication technologies in order to effectively connect their users to relevant resources.

According to Kennedy (2011), 30 marketing techniques such as banners/posters, flyers/brochures, newsletter, survey, usage statistics,

use guide and word of mouth were used to market electronic resources in university libraries. However, it was not conclusive about which technique was more effective than any other technique in marketing electronic resources. While a number of studies (Alford, 2009; Dillon, 2003; Hart, Coleman, & Yu, 2000; Kennedy, 2011; Woods, 2007) discussed, explored and even analyzed the marketing techniques used to market electronic resources in libraries, there has been no real study that has examined the effective use of these techniques to market electronic resources, particularly in Australian university libraries. This study examines how Australian academic librarians perceived effective techniques used to market their electronic resources and the factors influencing their perceptions of the used particular techniques.

The value of this study exists in the provision of a better understanding of academic librarians' attitudes and views and the effective techniques used to market their electronic resources. “Librarians may use the results to reflect on the success of these techniques, to balance the weight of the factors' influences and to better understand various techniques” (Yi, 2016). This will enable them to market academic library electronic resources more effectively in the future.

Literature review

The importance of marketing electronic resources is not a foreign concept to libraries. With the rise and ready availability of Web 2.0 technologies, the ubiquity of the Internet and people's reliance on Google as a “go to” information tool, making customers more and more aware of what is available online through the library has become critical. The fact that subscriptions to electronic databases take up such a

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high proportion of academic libraries' budget further adds to the need to ensure high usage to justify the investment.

Searches conducted in library and information databases has shown an increasing number of articles relating to the importance of marketing and its applicability to libraries as a whole. The search primarily focused on the marketing of electronic resources, however, was broadened to include marketing of libraries in general and the way services are marketed to provide better context for the way electronic resources are marketed. Although there are many articles that cover marketing and electronic resources, none cover perceptions and attitudes of library staff regarding the effectiveness of techniques that can be used. The literature consulted relies on differing definitions of marketing. Many use an official definition, such as that by [Kotler \(1994\)](#) and [Lancaster and Reynolds \(1995\)](#) referring to the process of communicating the worth of a product to facilitate a mutually agreeable exchange between parties. For the purpose of this review, the definition of electronic resources is sources of information that a library provides access to electronically. Electronic resources refer to "indexing and abstracting databases, e-newsletter/magazine, electronic thesis and dissertations, full-text databases, e-journals, e-books, e-monographs, reference databases, numerical and statistical databases, e-reports, e-content pages and e-clippings" ([Jena, 2012, p. 51](#)).

A literature search indicates that previous focus has been mainly on how marketing could be applied in non-profit organizations such as libraries, archives and museums ([Doherty, Saker, & Smith, 1995](#); [Edinger, 1980](#)), how the marketing function had to be transformed in the Web environment ([Hoffman & Novak, 1997](#)), how to market databases ([Bibby & East, 1986](#)), and how to market internal business information services ([Yates-Mercer & Steward, 1991](#)) as well as exploring the techniques used to market databases and information services ([Bibby & East, 1986](#); [Doherty et al., 1995](#)). Current studies have been conducted to investigate how to market electronic resources ([Alford, 2009](#); [Dillon, 2003](#); [Hart et al., 2000](#); [Kennedy, 2011](#); [Woods, 2007](#)).

Many authors reviewed electronic resources and their placement in collection development. [Kasalu and Ojiambo \(2012\)](#) examined the importance of using ICT to enhance collection development, however although electronic collections are covered, the main focus is their placement in collection development, rather than how they are marketed. Interestingly, the authors did not list inadequate marketing and promotion as a constraint with developing and sustaining use of electronic collections. [Dillon \(2003\)](#) stresses the importance of placing electronic resources within the context of the rest of the library's collection to ensure that users do not see electronic databases as separate and more distinct resources. Several authors discussed the challenges and impacts of transitioning from print to electronic resources and challenges faced by libraries in the electronic environment ([Adams & Bonk, 1995](#); [Muhonen, Saarti, & Vattulainen, 2010](#); [Premchand-Mohammed, 2011](#); [Xu, 2006](#)). Again these papers had very little focus on the importance of marketing electronic resources. [Knight \(2012\)](#) examined the impact of electronic resources on library resource usage in order to determine investment viability. The paper suggests that inconsistent marketing approaches have a direct impact on fluctuating usage statistics.

[Manda's \(2005\)](#) study found that the main technique used to market electronic resources is the library webpage however reports the major issue with this is that users generally visit the library website only when they have a specific need, implying that other methods for marketing should be employed. [Leong \(2007\)](#), from the University of New England, argues that a "multi-pronged" approach is more viable when marketing electronic resources, especially in relation to distance education students. These include a combination of methods, including a well-designed website, direct email and, more interestingly, working directly with faculty to develop gradual approaches to increasing students' knowledge of UNE's electronic resources. She espouses direct delivery via email as an extremely effective mode of promoting electronic resources which is supported by [Dillon \(2003\)](#) and [Woods \(2007\)](#) who state that emails need to be tailored to specific audiences. [Dillon](#)

(2003) cautions, however, that other promotional techniques, such as handouts, instructional classes and web pages, are ineffectual and do nothing more than inundate users with too much meaningless information. He claims the strength of these tools is not in using them to market electronic resources, but in using them to market the fact that electronic resources provided by libraries are more professional and authoritative than what is readily available on the Internet. He mentions that a variety of marketing techniques can be used to market electronic resources, but, it is not known which technique is most effective ([Dillon, 2003, 124](#)).

[Woods \(2007\)](#) refers to the strategic plan of Brock University Library in Canada, where the objective is to "promote and strengthen awareness of its services and resources". [Dillon \(2003\)](#) argues the importance of being "marketing aware" where all staff across an organisation are involved in a strategic marketing program. A vital distinction that libraries need to make is whether marketing strategies are aimed at self-starters, who are aware of what the library offers and therefore not likely to require or ask for assistance, or for the most occasional user who is less likely to know where to begin to look for information. He claims that this is the best way to achieve high impact results when marketing electronic resources. This implies the application of differing techniques across libraries, however no clear analysis of the effectiveness of these techniques was covered in the corpus reviewed.

The State and University Library Bremen in Germany implemented as many costs neutral promotional techniques as possible in order to market their electronic resources. These included, in the main, varied format of presentations, most of which did not reach the market penetration levels they were after ([Ellis, 2004](#)); many of the other techniques mentioned (newsletters, alerts, branding and giveaways) had no solid data to support success or failure of the promotion.

Another study conducted to determine electronic resource usage by faculty at Texas A&M University found that lack of knowledge of library resources by the faculty impacted on usage ([Hart et al., 2000](#)). [Dewald \(2005\)](#) in her study assessing how faculty referred students to resources, supports these findings. 12.5% of faculty members made it mandatory for students to use the library's electronic resources for assignments when compared to the 10.3% that required them to use certain websites (as opposed to library databases). The implication of this is that the less the faculty know, the less electronic resources are used and in turn promoted to students.

[Kanaujia \(2004\)](#) conducted a survey across libraries and information centres of research and development institutions of Council of Scientific & Industrial Research of India to ascertain staff attitudes towards marketing. Whilst the survey demonstrated that staff generally held a positive attitude towards library marketing, there was very little effort made to develop and implement marketing plans.

The literature shows that libraries consider electronic resources an important, if not core, addition to library collections, particularly in an academic setting, enhancing resources already on offer. However, in order to maximise uptake and use of electronic resources, consistent marketing needs to be planned and applied. [Kennedy \(2011\)](#) conducted a study examining what marketing techniques libraries used to market their electronic resources. 38 approaches were identified during the study covering 24 libraries, 15 of which were in a university. However, the study did not cover which techniques were the most effective and further identified that only three of the libraries studied had goals and strategies aligned to measuring and assessing success of the strategies. This study fills the gaps.

Study framework and hypotheses

This framework is to study the relationship between effective techniques perceived to be used to market electronic resources and three kinds of predictors: (1) demographics, (2) human capital and (3) library variables. Demographics refer to age and gender. According to [Frank and Bernanke \(2007\)](#), human capital is "an amalgam of factors

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