Reflections on marketing and promotion of e-books in academic libraries

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Themes

- Context
  - Making e-books available and encouraging their use
  - Our research

- Communication
  - Taking a strategic approach to marketing and promotion
  - Innovation in marketing communications
  - Influencing through word-of-mouth

- Challenges

- Conclusion
Context
Making e-books available and encouraging their use

- E-books have the potential to be even more significant for libraries and learners than e-journals
  - the centrality of textbooks to learning in higher education
  - the opportunities to develop e-books as interactive learning resources.

- E-books are no longer new to academic libraries, but adoption by academic staff and students is often slow
  - libraries are hindered in their attempts to provide a reliable and responsive e-book service:
    - Licences
    - Technology
    - Publisher’s decisions on availability.
Our research

- The starting point for this paper is our research on: 
  - *The e–book management framework*
- Marketing and promotion was identified as an important aspect of e–book management.
- Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 academic librarians, in seven case study libraries, holding posts as: subject librarians, e–resources librarians, or cataloguers.
Communication
Taking a strategic approach 1

- Libraries and Marketing
  - Academic libraries often lack a marketing mind set
    - Including e-books in the library catalogue is providing information and access, not marketing....
    - Digital marketing innovations are often one-off and not embedded in wider strategies.

- The Competition
  - E-book marketing in the consumer marketplace – Amazon, Barnes & Noble, iBookstore:
    - buying and reading through mobile devices
    - User expectations
Taking a strategic approach 2

- ‘Academic libraries can no longer sit in their ivory towers waiting for customers – students, faculty, and staff – to use their libraries. We no longer have a captive audience. The competition is greater because we are no longer the only information service game in town’ (Alire, 2007; p. 546).

- Spalding and Wang (2006) suggest that only by using marketing principles and techniques can libraries:
  - better understand their users’ needs,
  - justify funding,
  - communicate more effectively with a variety of external audiences, and
  - achieve greater efficiency and optimal results in delivering products and services to meet the identified needs of their clients.
Consistent with other research in this area, none of the libraries in our research had a formalised strategy for the marketing of any e-resources.

Yet, most of the interviewees felt that the development of a formulated strategy was needed.

Some differences of opinion:

- 'formalised planning for marketing of specific resources would be better than individual subject specialists trying to do something. If we did it as a library marketed branded thing, it would make us more accessible to students and our resources more accessible'

- 'I think that it is less of an issue because people are very aware that they (e-resources) are there and they are happy to look for any information on the Internet'

- 'You don’t want to raise expectations beyond what you can actually supply but at the same time you want to build up usage to justify developing the e-books strategy. Nobody is going to put money into e-books if the students aren’t using them.'
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<tr>
<th>Number of interviewees</th>
<th>Tools for promotion</th>
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<td>21</td>
<td>Library website</td>
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Innovation in marketing communication 2

- **E-channels**
  - Library website inc. library web page devoted to e-resources, library news webpage, subject guides, subject specific web pages and online reading lists.
  - OPACs – inc. access to reading lists via the OPAC, and e-resources search option

- **People channels**
  - Information literacy sessions
  - Induction sessions
  - In person instruction
  - E-mails

- **Others mentioned, but not in top 11:**
  - Newsletters, flyers, announcement boards, library reps, word of mouth, blogs, bulletins, display screens, marketing campaign (One library only)
Innovation in marketing communication 3

- **Some other examples:**
  - Red Rocks Community College (Lakewood, CO, US)
    - Circulated iPads and Kindles to students
    - Students allowed to purchase their own books – and develop the library’s e-book collection
    - Text bombs – student staffers were asked to text library announcements to their friends, and so on.

- University of the West Indies at Mona
  - E-book public awareness campaign to promote e-book use
    - Training staff, faculty and students
    - Adding links to the library’s website
    - Writing articles for the library’s newsletter
    - Broadcasting short messages via the Campus intranet service
    - Printing fliers and placing them on notice boards around campus
    - Targeting key individuals, such as faculty deans and department heads, and sending them informational letters.
Innovation in marketing communication 4

- Have you looked at the competition?
  - E.g. How do Amazon sell their e-books?
    - Sell the Kindle through the same website
    - Kindle eBooks – a brand
    - Lots of different ‘recommendation’ lists:
      - Best Books: Best Books 2012; Best selling Kindle books (in featured categories); Winter Reads in Kindle; Editors Picks
      - Coming soon: National Book Awards 2012 Shortlist; Popular Pre-orders; Coming soon to Kindle;
      - Customer review and recommendation: Customers who bought this item also bought..; Tag this product; Customer reviews; Customer discussions.
      - Product description and details.
Innovation in marketing communication 5

- MMU Library Website – One way to find e-books
  - Electronic resources
  - E-books
  - E.g Dawsonera
  - Terms and conditions of use page
    - Access to the service, links to other sites, intellectual property rights – need to Accept
- Dawsonera
  - Latest books on Dawsonera
  - Most read by your institution
  - Most read on Dawsonera
- Or, e.g. The Classic Bookshelf
  - Completely different interface.
Many studies have identified the importance of academics in encouraging student use of e-resources.

Our study – Some academics:
- recommend e-books to students
- Demonstrate e-books to students
- Add information on how to use e-books etc to the VLE
- Collaborate with library staff in developing courses on the use of e-resources, inc. e-books.
Challenges 1

- Issues and challenges in the promotion of e-books are often associated with the challenges in other aspects of e-book management... licences, technology, availability

- Focussing on comments from librarians in our research:
  
  - Lack of time to plan and undertake marketing
  
  - Raising unrealistic expectations
    
    "One thing is that [e-book promotion] raises people's expectations especially when the people find that they cannot print them out".
  
  - Insufficient e-book stock in the library
    
    ‘The main thing is that there isn’t enough stock. You are trying to push something that isn’t generally available for the students to use.’
Challenges 2

- Accessibility and use issues
  - ‘people can be put off by e-books because of accessibility issues’
  - ‘different means of accessing …. different platforms and models’

- Budget constraints, affecting size of e-book collections, scope for responding pricing changes etc.

- Market availability of suitable books
  - ‘One of the issues partially is still the availability…not all the titles are available as e-books’
Conclusion 1

Key agendas and actions going forward:

◦ Developing a marketing strategy and a supporting marketing communications strategy in order to:
  • coordinate marketing actions,
  • ensure that all staff have shared views on key aspects such as audience, message, channels objectives
  • make effective use of marketing campaigns.

◦ Proactively managing the inherent tensions between promotion and the capacity to respond to increased demand, and:
  • moderating promotion accordingly
  • keeping library and academic staff engaged through effective internal marketing.
Conclusion 2

Key agendas and actions going forward *Contd.*

- Continuing to innovate in the range of promotion tools, including:
  - the use of promotional tools that facilitate two-way communication with users, such as social media,
  - honing appreciation of the different roles of different tools and their suitability for different user groups.

- Taking a strategic approach to influencing word-of-mouth, considering:
  - both digital and face-to-face,
  - engaging and communicating with academics and students,
  - integrating word-of-mouth into a wider marketing communications strategy.
Any questions/comments?
References