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Abstract

This presentation focuses on a review of the external forces and dynamics that influence the processes of learning, scholarship, research, and discovery at a large university. It examines the informational/knowledge needs, behaviours, and mindsets of users ranging from undergraduates, graduates, post-graduates, and researchers, to Nobel laureates.

It maps various paths of informational needs and looks at the behaviour of users in several categories and the perceived differences in diverse subject areas. Issues of demonstrating value, in this new environment of not needing libraries and librarians, because "everything is online" are discussed. It looks at the ways librarians presently deal with today's user expectations.

Specific attention is given to the importance of managing user expectations during times of major change. Examples of recent changes at Bodleian Libraries (renovations, new ILS system roll out, etc.) are used to highlight the appropriate use of tools and communication timeliness.

It reviews how librarians validate their perceptions and assumptions. It discusses the value of a variety of assessment tools offered by commercial vendors. It evaluates traditional librarian strengths, skills and contributions to education, scholarship, and research. It maps these strengths against the needs and expectations of today's information customers.

Consideration is given to skills not learned/acquired in formal university graduate programmes in Librarianship, especially "soft" skills (presentation, public speaking, research funding processes, etc.), critical to success in librarians' 21st Century roles. It examines if these observations are valid in institutions of different focus size.

Lastly, it considers the future, the 21st Century. Can the profession, traditionally defined by physical collections, thrive in the digital world? Can librarians take advantage of strategic planning tools effecting sound strategic decisions (scenario planning for example) to secure a place for libraries and librarians in the institution's future?

With homage to Aristotle, I conclude with questions to the audience. What is the "added value" of librarians vis-à-vis learning and research process changes? What services can libraries offer to facilitate new processes? Can East meet West…can librarians significantly contribute facilitating changes to meet users' needs, their behaviour changes, and future expectations? Will there be 21st Century librarians?

Keywords: Libraries, librarians, library added value, librarians' skills, 21 century library

Introduction

To fully comprehend and appreciate the breadth and depth of the current turmoil in librarianship, one only need reference another historical event that had the same significance as the invention of the World Wide Web. In 1440 Johannes Gutenberg invented the printing press. The mass production of books allowed unprecedented distribution of ideas and knowledge never seen

before. The ability to connect to and search the Internet has changed the foundation of our society. Reading news stories, shopping, seeking health advice, using email to communicate, etc., have all seen revolutionary changes. It allowed the questioning of previously solid truisms and conventions. It was a game changing event. Since the beginning of the Internet, and especially since the year 2000, much was written about the changing environmental landscape and the impact it would have on libraries. The impact of the availability of full text electronic resources at a library, the library's staff and their skills, their organization or even their purpose has been well documented. This was seen primarily in the fields of science, technology and medicine.

Libraries felt the loss of control over collection development by the advent of 'Big Deals'. Locked into purchasing multi-year contracts, librarians lost control over a large portion of their materials budget. Acquisitions librarians needed to acquire new skills on how to organize incorporate and make available hundreds of journal titles *many of them* never subscribed to before. For the first time, the staff performing activities previously done in 'back offices' needed to interact with library users. Troubleshooting problems with accessing these resources became a very important and visible library activity. The need for new skills quickly became apparent and soon job advertisements for 'Electronic Resources Librarians' made their appearance. The high cost of e-resources brought about the need to understand their usefulness to our communities. Comparable usage data was sought and the 'Counter and Counter Compliant' movement was born. The transition of a library's focus had begun.

Libraries and librarians in transition

From a historical perspective, there have always been precedents and a constant need to reorganize our internal library operations. Some were due to budgetary situations, some due to the advent of cooperation and networking. Since the 1970s, the appearance of cooperative cataloguing and organizations like OCLC, Research Library Group, etc. have precipitated changes in the internal organization and streamlining of processes in libraries. However, most of the internal changes have had very little impact on our users and the ways that they viewed the library. Some online databases already existed, but they were not intuitive and mostly available only within the physical library. The Internet has changed this.

Many entrepreneurs understood the importance and saw the potential of the Internet. The race was on. Who would develop the best search engine to harvest the myriad of information available? Many companies were created, but only a few survived and are still in existence today.

The expansion of the Internet posed great challenges to existing businesses, including the publishing world. Soon it became evident that an Internet presence was a must. The libraries have seen the birth of Print only, Print and Electronic, and Electronic only subscriptions on offer from publishers. The pricing model previously worked out over many years was no longer valid. Publishers are still seeking a new business model and pricing model.

The self-empowerment of the Internet was addictive. With only a computer and Internet connection, you had the world at your fingertips! Thousands of young people with web skills were suddenly in great demand, making fortunes by creating websites, running online businesses – eBay, etc. The internet bubble was upon us. New generations of entrepreneurs were hired by existing businesses to create web presences for many companies. It was all about discovery *And the* information. The information found on the Internet was free.

While this was happening, other technological advances, i.e. personal computers, fiber optics, etc., aided the rapid expansion and use of the Internet. Apple and Microsoft arrived on the scene. Of course, there were others that made a blip on the horizon and then vanished.

Who are our users today?

Students

Many of today's library users were born during this time and have grown up being able to search the Internet independently, either for their personal use or schoolwork. As 'digital natives' they are accustomed to believe they find everything on the Internet. They most likely have one or more personal computers or laptops and a mobile smart phone. Texting is their way of communicating with family and friends. They connect with others on social networking sites (Facebook, Twitter, etc.), in their free time, some participate in online gaming. They are no strangers to participate in virtual realities and are willing to share their travel experiences using online photosharing. They are open and willing to try out a new tool or gadget. Google is the main starting point for their research. How do we relate to this generation of library users? How do we demonstrate our value using their language?

Academics and researchers

The composition of this group of users is mixed. Between teaching and research, this group carries the heaviest load on campus. Most of them are 'digital migrants' with varied skills and preferences on how to use information resources. Although they may have their preferred ways, they are open to consider alternatives providing it will save them time. Time is a very precious commodity. How can we relate to this group of library users? How can we save them time?

How do our libraries look today? – What do our readers want?

Surprisingly many libraries report steady or even increased attendance. Why? Librarians are making great strides to transform library spaces. Librarians are removing low use library stock and refurbishing these areas with group study and collaboration spaces. They are installing additional power, data lines, and wireless access points.

Users are seeking a variety of social, collaborative spaces and quiet workspaces. They demand variety to suit their lifestyles of multitasking. They appreciate refreshment areas and multiple vending machines. They have the facility and willingness to change their own behaviour, and adopt new tools and innovative ways to communicate. They are open to try any e-book reader or i-product we offer them. They will even provide us with their feedback. They are flexible and demand the same from libraries and librarians.

It is up to us to seize the opportunity and engage with them. Active direct engagement with users is done via surveys and direct focus groups. Today's generation of students is very open to voice their preferences, likes, and dislikes. Librarians write blogs, are on Twitter, and the library needs to have a Facebook presence. Libraries and librarians needs to be where the users are.

Transparency and management of users' expectations at a time of substantial change

The Oxford experience

Background

During the last 4 years, due to a convergence of events, the Oxford University Libraries system faced several major projects simultaneously.

Oxford had an aging Integrated Library System (ILS) GEAC. The provider notified the Libraries that it was to end support and further development. There was suddenly a need to select, purchase and implement a new system by Summer 2011.

The old ‘New Bodleian’ library was beyond capacity, and there was a need to address the future storage issues.

Number of large scale projects were planned in 2008 and put into motion in Spring 2009.

Projects culminated in Summer 2011 when barcoding, removal of stock and ILS migration was happening at the same time. From March 2010 to December 2011 more than 6.5 million items were barcoded and moved to the newly build Book Storage Facility outside of Oxford. The facility in Swindon has 153 miles (2,448 km) of shelving and covers 13 acres (about 5 hectares). Careful organizational planning and staffing ensures timely, ready retrieval of a myriad of materials.

This undertaking was most likely the largest and most ambitious project that any library system had ever witnessed. All of these projects were completed without the need to close the libraries and with minimum disruption to the libraries’ operations.

How did we manage this?

We succeeded by planning and executing a significant information campaign. We kept the community consistently informed about the plans, any changes and our progress.

A website was created and direct email communication was used to alert academics from around the world what they could expect to find in Oxford during our busiest period, Summer 2011. We planned ahead and created a service unit, called the “Just in Time” service to cover offsite and inaccessible materials involved in book moves. To meet the expected increase in demand, a number of measures were put into place. A comprehensive workflow, web-based request form and a range of alternative sources were developed for use during this period. Additional staff members were recruited from across the Library system to assist with the support service for the core JIT team during peak periods.

In beginning of July 2011, in anticipation of ILS migration and a short period of downtime of the ILS 18 librarians, subject librarians temporarily staffed SOLO Live Help service. The live chat was created to offer instant and remote help, answering questions relating to renewals and holds, bibliographic enquiries and locating alternative materials, before referring the users to the JIT Team. Free software ‘Meebo’, already used by the Law Library, and a Meebo widget was embedded on the SOLO front page.

The key elements of the project of transformation of the Bodleian Libraries were completed on time and within budget. This is an illustration how transparency and management of users’ expectations can help any library during the time of major library transformation.

Role of libraries and librarians at a university

As a support service, a library’s priority must be aligned with the strategic goals of the university. The core activities are defined as education, research, scholarship and wider engagement. How can libraries and librarians continue to service and enhance any of the core activities?

Role in education, research and scholarship

The changing needs of the user base, together with changes in teaching methods and changes in the ways information resources are delivered and presented, are creating a need for librarians to discover new ways to support the core activities at the university. Over the last decade, many articles were written discussing the necessary skills and characteristics of a

librarian for 21st Century library. Graduate library programs and professional continuing education struggle to prepare new generations of librarians. Is it enough? Librarians need to be information experts at the institution. They need to have up-to-date knowledge of information resources available at the institution and in diverse subject fields. They need to know how to access, evaluate, and present findings when they are needed (at the point of need). They need to be masters of the Tools of their Trade! Furthermore, expanding librarians' interaction with the teaching staff regarding linking reading materials in various courses and incorporating them in course management software (Blackboard, Weblearn or others) is another way of supporting education at an institution. Another area where libraries are yet to feel the full impact on readers' services is online education. Online education was previously a somewhat experimental field for old established institutions. Now, more major institutions have moved into this area and libraries need to anticipate that many other institutions will follow. Are libraries ready to assume their supporting role in the online education environment?

Research and scholarship

Flexibility, ability to participate and constructively engage in discussions of research projects, and information needs are currently needed skills for subject librarians. It is no longer just advising a young researcher which journal to select to submit articles to and the ABCs of Journal Impact Factors nor it is enough to engage professionally only with other librarians. *We* need to understand the research process, be part of research projects, research clusters at our institutions. We need to collaborate with the research support department and be able to contribute in grant preparations. We need to engage with all categories of academic and research staff. Another area where librarians need to seize opportunity is data preservation and archiving. As metadata experts, librarians are in a unique position; to capitalize on the fast growing need to organize digital data produced at a university. Some institutions have understood this importance. However, there are many library systems that still need to recognize this importance and participate in meeting this necessity. Otherwise, it will be a lost opportunity for those libraries. The end result of research and scholarship is discovery and new knowledge. Discovery and new knowledge equate with patents and intellectual property rights royalties. Research and scholarship generate funding, cash, money. Tens of millions of GBPs come to University of Oxford from the patent royalties of students, researchers, and scholars. The *Pacemaker* which has saved millions of lives since 1950 was invented in Canada by two medical engineers doing research in the libraries at the University of Manitoba and the University of Toronto.

Outside of the library walls…

Institutional culture and Institutional priorities

A library exists within a larger organizational framework. Historically, it has fulfilled a role and gained a reputation within the organization. It has a place that has been recognized by the organization and its members. This existing reputation and perception are difficult to change. The university organizational structure has been evolving throughout the years as well. The older the organization is, the more difficult it is to make any substantial changes to its organizational structure. These changes are often very slow and incremental. Priorities are often defined and influenced by internal politics. Prominent academics may hold a significant power as their research often brings a substantial funding that greatly benefits the university. The university itself is also very susceptible to the political and economic situation within the nation.

Social and political landscape

The position of the university and its educational and research assessment outcomes are measured and monitored via a variety of recognized measures. (Amount of research income, student satisfaction, etc.) It may be of interest to mention that the UK institutions of HE are currently preparing submissions to REF's (Research Excellence Framework) important exercise

that will determine future institutional funding. The national government provides most of the university funding through HEFCE and funding councils. The level of funding depends on governmental priorities and its budget, which in turn, depends of the state of the economy (tax revenues, etc). A similar situation can be observed in most other European countries and it also applies in a large degree to funding of the large state university systems in the U.S.

The budgets of developed countries have been under much strain and the major financial problems in 2008 only accentuated the fiscal problems of these nations. While the developed countries have been struggling with lack of growth and stagnating economies, other countries, namely BRICS countries, have enjoyed a healthy growth of their economies. Economic development allows these nations to invest in the development and support of institutions of higher education and provide increased funding to support research and innovation. There is a general recognition that human capital is a prerequisite for success in a global economy and this leads to more opportunities and competition for the best 'brains'.

At the same time, the progress in science, technology and medicine is accelerating at an exponential rate and technology is penetrating any aspects of our personal and professional lives.

Rules of engagement - rules of survival

The leadership of our libraries has a sizeable challenge ahead. How does a library prepare for the future? It now seems that once popular strategic plans cannot be written fast enough to respond to the ever-accelerating rate of changes. Other methods, like scenario planning, are attempting to foster innovative approaches to predicting the future and help the planning process. The problem is that we are thinking in a linear way while changes are happening on multi-dimensional fronts. While we can't count on accurately predicting the future, we can initiate some concrete steps. We can focus and invest in staff development and training so every member of our library staff will ultimately be able to contribute to the success of the library in some shape and form. Widespread awareness, knowledge and understanding of emerging issues, will enable more innovation and creativity from our staff. And, while we can't depend on predicting everything in the future, we will be prepared able to react quickly to future change.

To summarize:

Building on existing strengths

Librarians are known for impartiality, historic neutrality and intellectual integrity. Librarians have served well as connectors (we talk to users and can connect people on campus). Librarians are good as equalizers. Incoming students arrive often with various levels of skills and knowledge of information resources. It has been the librarians' role to accommodate and improve the various skill levels of incoming students and we have done it well.

New skills and roles

Librarians need to be comfortable with changing technologies, interacting with users outside of the library space, and honing their negotiation, public speaking and presentation skills. "Just in Time" has replaced "Just in Case" in acquisitions, collection support and readers' services. The library is a portal to services, collections and information; Librarians should aid the archival function for faculty, and data preservation. These functions require the ability and willingness to develop both private and public partnerships. Librarians need to participate in the legislative process. Librarians need to understand the research process and expand the subject knowledge for liaison subject librarians. Furthermore, librarians need to be visible and proactive.

We need to engage in institutional politics. We need to be a visible part of the campus community.

Respecting institutional traditions, librarians need to bring vitality a new perspective to the institutional life. The library needs to be known as centre of excellence distinguished by high quality, productivity and innovation.

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