Marketing BrowZine in Michigan Universities

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Beginning in the Fall Semester of 2013-14, Central Michigan University Libraries — among eight other Michigan and Indiana academic libraries — will be working on a project with the Midwest Collaborative for Library Services (MCLS) and Third Iron, the creator of the tablet-based journal browsing app, BrowZine. We hope that the project will provide insights into an area to which CMU Libraries have not traditionally directed much attention: marketing of library services. According to David Votta, Community Engagement Librarian at MCLS, the origin of this marketing project lies at a meeting at the Third Iron booth at ALA Midwinter between MCLS Executive Director, Randy Dykhuis and Third Iron CEO, Kendall Bartsch. Dykhuis was immediately intrigued by the potential of Third Iron’s BrowZine app for use in academic libraries, and since MCLS is interested in understanding how academic libraries market themselves and their services, Dykhuis and Bartsch agreed to collaborate on a pilot project that would allow both organizations to benefit.

The agreed project involves MCLS subsidizing the first year costs of BrowZine for academic libraries on the condition that they market BrowZine to the best of their abilities and report their marketing activities back to MCLS. When Third Iron receives the marketing data from MLCS, they will be able to see if there is any correlation between the dates on which various libraries pushed out messages about BrowZine to their users, and usage of the app. These statistics would thus provide decent evidence that our attempts to promote the app had reached our users and resulted in action on their part — or not.

At CMU, we’ve taken this BrowZine project to the Libraries’ Marketing Committee and tried various approaches. Our graphic designer created an image which was loaded on the libraries’ homepage and on the libraries’ digital message boards:

![BrowZine Image]

The graphic designer also created a landing page for those who clicked on the image on the library homepage:

![BrowZine Landing Page]

These images will also be posted to the Libraries’ Facebook and Twitter accounts and we are considering creating a BrowZine video to be shown on the message boards. The subject librarians have also been active in promoting BrowZine by word of mouth to the faculty in their departments.

Of course, since this all went live (October 1st) we have yet to learn what the result will be, but the process has already been very useful in a variety of ways. Not only did we think quite a bit about marketing the library’s services, but the project also forced us to ask ourselves what our strategy for dealing with mobile devices is — not to mention asking how many of us even know how to use iPads and Android tablets! As a result of this process, plans are underway to introduce tablet technology to Libraries employees to further the BrowZine initiative and to discover other applications as well.

When I asked Votta if MCLS plans to undertake more such marketing projects, he said, “Quite possibly. This is a first step. Our goals are to discover what tools academic libraries are actually using, what works, and if our assistance enhances the process. A significant part of this project is simply to find out what works.” For CMU Libraries, at any rate, this project has already been quite helpful.

Endnotes
1. MCLS is a “non-profit membership organization comprised of all types of libraries in Indiana and Michigan. MCLS provides libraries a convenient, single point of contact for training, group purchasing, and technical support for electronic resources.” http://www.mlcnet.org/cms/sitem.cfm
2. Some may recall Bartsch from his years at CSA and ProQuest.