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COMING OUT: MAKING THE VIRTUAL LIBRARY VISIBLE IN TODAY'S WORLD

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Abstract

This is the age of the virtual customer. A silent virtual revolution has led to tumultuous and disruptive changes in environmental, financial, educational, and information environments. As the Library becomes increasingly virtual, it is becoming virtually invisible – as are library customers. Libraries are redefining their roles, managing their migration from the print past to an online future in a time of spiralling costs and declining incomes, redefining their products and services and refocusing on their customers, many of whom they rarely if ever see. How do we position the Library in the marketplace? What is the message to be conveyed to a new generation of customers? What are the information needs to be met? What are the Library's products and services? What is the story to be told? How are the Library's products and services most effectively marketed? What communication strategies should be used to bridge the virtual and the real worlds?

The paper explores ways in which the Library and its message can be “flipped”. The promotion of goods and services that simplify client experiences is one direction. Less can be more. Ways of rebuilding relationships and establishing rapport with clients are presented. Possible approaches to the development of meaningful engaging content for particular audiences are outlined. Strategies in use by leading edge libraries are identified. Uses of social media in marketing and improving website content are obvious strategies. Designing product and promotional means for mobile devices is an essential component. Collaborating with others and using “influencers” and recommender services will enhance capacity. Ways of making the virtual library visible and telling the story effectively in a largely invisible domain are outlined and transformative strategies explored.

Keywords: Marketing, LEGO movie, Flipped library, Promotion, Websites

Introduction

As libraries become more embedded in the information infrastructure of universities, communities, governments, corporations, and other entities, the less visible they may become to their users, funders, and policy-makers. Libraries must be integral components of the information infrastructure of their organizations if they are to provide the most effective, efficient, and appropriate services to their user communities. Independence and isolation are not suitable alternatives. (Borgman, 2003)

Has Borgman's forecast come to fruition? Have libraries remained stubbornly independent and isolated and therefore less visible in 2014? Have librarians and library collections become invisible to library customers who access resources and services remotely? Is the virtual library virtually invisible? If so, what is the redefined role of the Library and how must the Library position itself in today's world? How should the Library market its products and services? How can better engagement with library clients be achieved? Where can inspiration be gained for the forward journey? This paper suggests that lessons can be learned from the LEGO group, particularly from its recent extremely successful movie (<http://www.theLEGOmovie.com/>). Recent educational thought has emphasized the “flipped classroom” (University of Queensland. Teaching and Educational Development Institute, n.d.) Traditional teaching is reversed. Students gain new knowledge outside the classroom and use class time to assimilate knowledge through discussion and debate. Focusing on the “flipped library” and reversing traditional approaches are suggested as ways of forging a successful future, with the Library “coming out” from its hiding place to engage positively with its clients and establish itself as a vital component of the social and educational fabric.

Background

Since 2003, the Library's collections have gone almost completely online. Few faculty visit the Library in person and when using the digital library, frequently think the resources are available gratis through the internet. The University Leadership Council has postulated that there is no need for traditional librarians, that users are going elsewhere for information and that academic libraries will never beat Google (University Leadership Council, 2011). Most visitors to a library today do not see a librarian. The move to self-service machines for loans and the changing patterns of reference service delivery with the removal of inquiry desks and the use of online help services tend to make librarians invisible. The position of the Library is buried on many organisation charts within their institutions, and the position of University Librarian is lower in the hierarchy than it used to be, reporting to Research, Education, Technology or Administration Managers. Learners and researchers alike rarely begin their searches for information from their local library catalogues. Libraries have not made the same advances in information resource discovery as others have and search engines (Gil, 2014) and many other sources e.g. Google Scholar, Trove, Goodreads, are the entry points for users seeking information.

The retail world is experiencing significant change with online shopping damaging sales of bricks and mortar shops. The same fate may well be shared by libraries. The library enterprise, like many retail enterprises, is not too big to fail.

On the other hand, some studies emphasize that libraries remain important to their communities and are highly valued by their users. Takeaways from such studies (Admin's blog, 2013) reveal that while libraries may not be invisible, they do have a public relations problem and an opportunity. Libraries need to ramp up their publicity and outreach efforts and better market their print and digital services.

Today's World

Constant change, uncertainty, disruption and discomfort have become the norm. Less money is available in the public sector, with higher costs leading to reduced purchasing power, downsizing, rightsizing, pressure for accountability and clearer articulation of the value the Library adds to any enterprise. It is a cloudy mobile visual wireless world and mobile technology is worn as well as carried. Everything is available electronically with increasing democratization of knowledge, the demise of newspapers, open access, changes in publishing and scholarly communication, augmented reality, games, apps, and developments like Google Glass. There is a greater emphasis on user engagement and use of social media with new modes of research, teaching and learning.

A key reality in the 21st century is that higher education has been profoundly affected by an increasingly integrated world economy. New information and communications technology (ICT) has led to an instantly connected world. Universities have responded with more flexible, fluid and accelerated ways of teaching resulting in the integration of online, hybrid and collaborative learning. There has been a rise of data-driven learning and assessment and a shift of students from consumers of information to being creators of content.

Higher education institutions will need to transform their business models to survive, according to an industry wide study of Australia's higher education sector (Ernst and Young, 2012). The *NMC Horizon Report: 2014 Higher Education Edition* (NMC Horizon Report, 2014) has identified four important developments. The learning environment constitutes social spaces where students actively participate, critique and problem solve in the classroom, giving rise to the flipped classroom model which allows for more collaborative and personalized experiences in class time. Students benefit from customized time to explore content on their own at home and to problem solve with teachers and students during valuable time in class which is devoted to active project learning and working together to solve local and global challenges. Effective use of data is vital for success and education or learning analytics is becoming a hot topic, promising to disrupt and transform education and learning by using 'big data' to track student performance and enhance learning experiences. Two emerging technologies are 3D printing and gamification. In 2011, Gartner predicted that over 70 percent of Global Organisations will have at least one gamified application by 2014 (Gartner, 2012).

Seeking Inspiration – the LEGO Story

How do libraries and librarians become awesome, extraordinary and special, avoiding death and destruction? LEGO, particularly in view of their recently released and highly acclaimed movie is one source of inspiration. The history of LEGO spans nearly 100 years and its brand has become iconic and synonymous with quality, originality and excellence (LEGO, n.d.). The word LEGO comes from the Danish word “leg godt” meaning “play well”. It also means “I gather together” in Latin and “I connect” in Italian. Most people alive today have had a LEGO experience in one way or another. Its bricks and mini figures are ubiquitous and on average, every person on earth owns 94 LEGO bricks. The company was founded in 1932 and remains a family-owned company (Kirk Kristiansen) based in Billund, Denmark. It began with the creation of small wooden toys in the early twentieth century and plastic bricks in 1947 and provides toys, experiences and teaching materials for children in more than 130 countries. The LEGO brand is more than its familiar logo. It is the sum of expectations that people have towards its products and services, and the accountability that the LEGO Group feels towards the world around it.

It is the company’s philosophy that quality play enhances a child’s life and lays the basis for a sound adult life. *The more LEGO bricks you have, the more fertile your creativity can become.* (LEGO Group, 2014). Only the best is good enough. The company’s focus is on innovation and global expansion, with regional production sites being established.

The company’s values are:

- Imagination – dreaming, curiosity, What if?
- Creativity – new, surprising and valuable ideas and things
- Fun – full engagement in goal achievement and process, surprising oneself and others
- Learning – opportunities to experiment, improvise and discover – hands-on and minds-on
- Caring – making a positive difference in the lives of others, going the extra mile, not thinking less of ourselves but thinking of ourselves less
- Quality – trusted by all, continuous improvement to be the best for children and their development, and the rest for community and partners

The range of clients and the product range available from LEGO are extensive. Duplo is aimed at young children. The *Friends* products aimed at girls has been remarkably successful. The products available extend beyond the toys themselves to building instructions, clubs building networks of like-minded LEGO players, videos, computer games, applications, and message boards and galleries. LEGO has established theme parks with LEGOLands in several continents. VIP clubs, expert advice and assistance, online shops and worldwide distributors extend their services. The online shop is searchable via age, number of pieces, price, theme or category. Spare parts are available along with recommended items, special offers, and exclusives. The *Pick a Brick* slogan is an obvious one. *Create and Share* builds and shares ideas. The success of LEGO’s approach has been demonstrated by steady growth in the company’s bottom line (LEGO Group, 2013).

Marketing

The father of modern marketing, Philip Kotler, holds that any organization must understand the needs, wants and interests of its target clients. Products and services meet needs through an exchange process, delivering value and satisfaction to clients at a satisfactory price. The organization must operate more effectively and efficiently than its competitors and enhance society’s well-being. (Kotler, 2005) Marketing is about the 4Ps and sometimes 8Ps. *Product, Promotion, Price and other outlays, Place and time, Process, Physical environment, People, Positioning.* Others have introduced the term SIVA (*Solution, Information, Value, Access*), considering this description more customer-oriented (SIVA, n.d.).

Improving marketing involves focusing on its various facets e.g. creating the appropriate service or product, market segmentation, designing the communications mix, ensuring appropriate distribution of services, branding, improving the role of intermediaries, crafting the service

environment, managing people for service advantage, building relationships and loyalty, improving service quality and positioning services in competitive markets. While marketing basics remain the same, new approaches focus on such aspects as relationship marketing, content marketing and digital marketing, particularly with the use of social media. The LEGO Movie is an example of content marketing. Customer relationship management software tracks the progress of customer activity. The value of brand advocacy has been recognized – the Duchess of Cambridge can sell a High Street dress in seconds. A recent article highlighted marketing trends for 2014 (De Mers, 2014). The use of “rich snippets” (Google Webmaster tools) on websites improves searchability and social media enhances site referral with Facebook leading the way (21%), followed by Pinterest (7%) and Twitter (1%). “Guest blogging” gains user commitment. Other trends (Spenner, 2014) include gamification, visualization, the need for skills development and careful management and use of technology.

Learnings for Libraries

What does all this mean for libraries? Libraries have proud traditions and aspirations, develop strategies, make promises and identify values. They espouse sustainability, quality, and act socially responsibly. They provide products and services and engage with a wide range of clients with diverse needs. Libraries operate globally and build partnerships with others, marketing themselves via website and other means. Why are libraries not as effective as they could be? They seem to be way behind on their marketing thinking. LEGO clearly is closer to their clients in developing relationships, in understanding needs, and ensuring that the range of products available grows and expands in relation to client needs. LEGO understands the value of its brand and markets it accordingly. LEGO uses its website effectively to engage with its clients and promote its services and products, and uses content and digital marketing superbly to reach its client base and maximize value. Libraries can learn from LEGO and others to enhance their visibility.

Today's Library Clients

Today's library clients do not carry pencils and notebooks to a library. They no longer want to concentrate on deep study or contemplative reading in isolation – they want connections. Today's Library users “look up” rather than “view in depth”, they plug in, power up and prowl the internet, watch movies, listen to podcasts, read, review resources, chat with friends, family, teaching staff and complete strangers via email, SMS, blogs and social networking sites. They seek ideas, inspiration, solutions, solitude, solace and company online. They are information creators as well as consumers. Their learning is a blend of formal, informal and interactive learning.

People want online research services like “ask a Librarian”, apps to access library services, Amazon-like delivery times, better support in using technology (digital literacy), they want GPS apps to navigate the library and its collections including QR codes, near field communication (NFC) transactions and even augmented reality. They also like personalised, Amazon style recommendations, pre-loaded e-book readers, digital media labs, meeting rooms and interactive spaces (Rainie, 2013a). Clients want libraries to coordinate with schools, provide literacy programs, including school preparation, comfortable spaces with separation for different types of use. They want a broad selection of e-books, access to technology, including maker spaces and interactive learning experiences. Clients also want help with digitization of family treasures, online help from home, friendly helpful staff – and yes they want automated services they can operate for themselves and yes, they still want to borrow real books.

Clients want answers to questions, solutions to problems, ideas, and support for good work outcomes, results, research support and inspiration. They want successful outcomes to study and research, and they want everything delivered to them on time and on target, wherever they are. They want personalized service – *just for me*, responsiveness, timeliness and honesty. CARE – Customers are Really Everything. *I do not care how much you know until I know how much you care.* Never forget that *Most users do not know what is on offer and cannot easily find what we provide – know what they get, not what they could get.*

The Library's Products and Services

Learning from LEGO, the Library must identify clearly the Library's brand and values, operate globally and work in partnership with others to satisfy client needs. For too long, the Library has focused on its collections and not client experiences. Tod Colgrove reflected on his work at the DeLaMare Library at the University of Nevada:

If you look back at libraries over 2,000 years -- including the Library of Alexandria -- you'll see that they were involved in buying technology that many people cannot afford and making them more accessible. Along the way, it became all about having the biggest and best book collection so you ended up having identical libraries. We lost our way. (Hidalgo, 2012)

The Library's products might be books and journals in varying formats (LEGO's bricks) but the Library also provides the wherewithal for clients to become masterbuilders in constructing knowledge and learning. The Library imparts skills in locating, reading, writing and using effectively information resources and information technology. Advice and help are provided in person, online and through FAQ, chat and Ask-a-librarian services. Time-saving, speedy and cost-effective access to ideas, learning, solutions and factual data is the business of the Library. Self-service tools should be provided for those who want no personal intervention. Suggestions for new services abound – skills training in new literacies, pre-school programs, after-school programs, help for entrepreneurs, ESL and lifelong (or life-wide) learning, for example (Rainie 2013b).

New approaches to product and service development by libraries include:

- e-publishing (<http://cuizine.mcgill.ca/>)
- opening up content through the use of creative commons licenses (http://studysmart.library.qut.edu.au/module6/6_4/6_4_3.jsp)
- data management (<http://monash.edu/library/researchdata/>)
- digital repositories (<http://www.library.qut.edu.au/services/quteprints/>)
- print on demand (<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Wte2vdmxOk4>),
- games, (<http://www.library.illinois.edu/gaming/>)
- podcasts. I-tunes, vodcasts, point of use instruction videos (<http://lrweb.beds.ac.uk/libraryservices/howeare/videos>; <http://library.mcmaster.ca/itunesu>)
- plug-ins and widgets (<http://www.lib.utexas.edu/tools>)
- mash-ups (<http://yufind.library.yale.edu/yufind/Author/Home?author=White,%20Patrick%201912>)
- blogs (<http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/blog/research>)
- online reserve collections (<http://www.rmit.edu.au/library/course-reserve>)
- answers to enquiries (<http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/answers>)
- e-textbooks (<https://www.library.uq.edu.au/about-us/e-textbook-faqs>)
- 3D scanning and printing (<http://campusguides.unr.edu/3dprinting>)
- links to mobile devices and use of QR codes (<http://ypri.vic.gov.au/>)
- highlighting of search engines like Google Scholar as part of search approach (<http://www2.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/>)
- visual and pictorial resources and links using sources like FlickrR, YouTube and Vimeo (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/statelibraryqueensland/>)
- links to collaborative websites and communities like Historypin (<http://www.historypin.com/channels/view/43505/#!photos/list/>)
- support of MOOCs (<https://www.libraries.psu.edu/psul/researchguides/MOOC.html>)
- demand driven acquisition and client built collections (<http://guides.library.ucsc.edu/dda>)
- client-driven subject and research guides (<http://guides.is.uwa.edu.au/content.php?hs=a&pid=305856>; <http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/research/tool>)
- social networking tools (<http://www.nypl.org/blog/2012/08/21/join-club-talk-books-and-hang-out-nypl-google>)

- links to and from Facebook, Pinterest, Instagram, Twitter etc.
(<https://www.facebook.com/UBCLibrary>)
(<http://blogs.lse.ac.uk/impactofsocialsciences/2014/04/16/five-ways-libraries-are-using-instagram/>)
- links to and from learning management systems
(<http://www.latrobe.edu.au/library/teaching-services/online-learning/add-links-to-lms>)
- crowdsourcing to enhance access through collection tagging
(<http://www.bl.uk/maps/georef/about.html>)
- links to social tagging sites like LibraryThing, Goodreads, Digg, Tumblr or Delicious
(<http://www.wlaf.lib.in.us/index.php/teens>)
- encouragement of wikipedians and wikimedians ((IFLA blogs, 2013)
- apps (<http://www.mcgill.ca/library/services/computers/mobile>)
- provision of advice in specific areas e.g. copyright
(<https://www.library.uq.edu.au/~copyright>)
- online training programmes, including classes in other languages
<http://subjectguides.library.unsw.edu.au/content.php?pid=317434&sid=2597927>
<http://www.uow.edu.au/student/services/fye/resources/startsmart/index.html>
<http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/event/64395/library-research-skills> in Chinese)

Promoting, Positioning and Placing Library Services and Products

The Library's services and products are excellent but frequently under-utilized. Ideas emerging from the flipped classroom discussions and LEGO's "hands-on, mind-on" approach provide sources of inspiration about new approaches to branding and promoting the Library's products and services. LEGO trades on brand values and appeal – imagination, creativity, fun, learning, caring and quality – and of course integrity, warmth, friendliness, excellence, objectivity and reliability. Telling stories about the Library's products and services and using key advocates promote use. Oprah Winfrey has done more for libraries than most libraries do for themselves (Kniffel, 2011).

Physical library facilities remain a significant component of the positioning and placement of library services and products but lie outside the ambit of this paper. Accessibility via mobile devices is vital. The positioning of librarians is important and concepts like the embedded librarian and the roving librarian have focused on this aspect. Some libraries promote the online availability of their staff e.g. <http://personal.bgsu.edu/~afry/>.

Some libraries have worked hard to re-develop their positioning statements (or unique selling propositions) and clarify their branding (Gibbons, 2012). Ideally, such statements reflect the products and services, customer needs and identify distinctive benefits – cleverly. Avis devised *We're number 2 – we try harder* and De Beers *Diamonds are forever*. Some library positioning statements are:

- *Find facts fast*
- *Success and solutions at your library*
- *Connecting you – locally and globally*
- *Linking you to information*
- *Information, innovation, service*
- *Explore the world's knowledge*
- *Educate! Inform! Promote!*
- *Bringing the world to you*
- *Your library in your pocket*
- *Facts at your fingertips*

The highly successful @your library campaign (<http://www.atyourlibrary.org/campaign>) has many ideas and suggestions for effective promotion and positioning of libraries. The University of Bedfordshire Library has focused on its invisibility in its branding (<http://lrweb.beds.ac.uk/invisiblelibrary>) and also branded its use of mobile devices as the *Library Anywhere, our libraries in your pocket* (<http://lrweb.beds.ac.uk/libraryservices/apps/library-anywhere>). The University of Michigan brand is the MLibrary (<http://www.lib.umich.edu/>). The Bowling Green State University Library,

like many others, recognizes the value of branding and positioning its library staff expertise with a comprehensive Askus page (<http://www2.bgsu.edu/colleges/library/ask.html>).

The Library's website provides entry to the virtual library and is more heavily used than its physical front door. Examples of excellent library websites are difficult to find. Few seem to learn from the plethora of successful websites provided by LEGO (<http://www.lego.com/en-us/>) and organisations similar to libraries, for example, the BBC (<http://www.bbc.co.uk/>) who describes its website as its gateway. There is little commonality across library websites.

Websites should identify products and services clearly and target key clients. Website analytics will inform future development better than supposition and guesswork. Careful analysis of loans and enquiries will identify common themes for content development, including FAQs. Feedback buttons help. The user must be able to comprehend terms instantly – *Getting Started, Beginning Research*. Clarity, conciseness and consistency are obligatory. Quality graphics and strong visual impact are essential. A library website meeting many of these requirements is the University of Technology Sydney website (<http://www.lib.uts.edu.au/>) As noted already, given that library clients access information resources through search engines and social media links, the inclusion of "rich snippets" on library websites and links to and from partnership and influencer websites will improve discovery and lead to greater effectiveness.

Partnering with others is vital in product development, promotion and positioning. LEGO has partnered with educational research institutions and art galleries, movies like *The Hobbit*, *Star Wars* and *Lord of the Ring*. Libraries can collaborate with publishers, with other libraries, and institutional components like the Students Union, Research Office, Student Services, and Teaching and Learning Services. Some libraries position themselves closely with their partners, particularly in the support of teaching and learning, and have introduced novel approaches to including library services in online classes across an institution, integrating tutorials, information access and resource guides (Wright 2013). Libraries can and must engage as both participants and drivers in the use of online learning (Calder 2013).

Flipping the Library

How do we make the changes and move to the future where the Library's services are visible, well-known and actively used? The *flipped classroom* concept is leading to changes in teaching. The term *flipped library* is being used to encourage re-thinking of the role of the Library and its positioning and to encourage further thinking about reshaping the visibility of the Library. Flipping the Library involves the development of problem based services, personalized approaches, maximum use of social media and delivery of services to clients through partnerships both within the organization and outside of it. It also involves a sharper focus on ensuring hands-on experiences within libraries, as well as minds-on. And most importantly it focuses on the importance of developing staff to ensure they have the knowledge and skills to make the forward journey. Almost everything is up for grabs and the possibilities are limitless.

Dempsey summarises the issues superbly and succinctly

The library has a visibility and brand challenge. On the one hand, services need to be available which integrate well with personal and other work environments, and consequently, may be less visible to the user. At the same time, the continued competition for resources means that the library needs to be as visible as possible. This is not easy and calls for heightened marketing engagement and local political skills. The library needs a brand which is meaningful and engaging, which communicates its value, and which transcends the caricatural impression many have based around the building and print collections. (Dempsey, 2009)

Let us stop focusing on what libraries do - collecting and organizing stuff. Let us learn from Lego and flip the library to focus on what libraries are for, helping organizations and individuals succeed by opening up the digital world and using client-driven products and promotional strategies.

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