

Systematic Approach to Marketing Library Services

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Systematic approach to marketing library services

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Abstract

Dynamic and innovative library management brings about diverse projects, which are worked on simultaneously. Project outcomes as well as existing services and products need to be made visible for our customers.

Hence, services, products and innovations require promotion. Library management have identified the need for a holistic marketing strategy to cover the activities of all library departments.

During the development of the strategy, the marketing department together with library management identified target groups within the customer base, analyzed communication channels and defined product groups. We examined current marketing activities and opportunities in order to improve them. Therefore, we collected information throughout the library and its departments, revised it systematically, and merged it into a library-specific marketing strategy, which will be presented in this report.

This report outlines the systematic approach taken to developing a marketing strategy and implementing it. Our aim was to integrate marketing activities for the diverse and complex library services of the University Library of the Technical University of Munich.

Necessity

In former times, university libraries offered a small range of products and services only. Along with worldwide digitalization and globalization, services have been transformed and the traditional tasks of librarians diversified. A marketing strategy helps to structure promotional activities for all products and services and it facilitates work for the marketing team as well as managers, project groups and colleagues. Additionally, the strategy helps approaching the problem that customers sometimes barely knew about selected library services and products.

Getting started

The first step towards creating a marketing strategy is to precisely define the marketing environment which means defining what (products and services), to whom (target groups) and with which means of communication (communication channels) to promote. The most important step is to gather information on the above. This was done by interviewing the library director and heads of departments. The questions in the box below helped to start discussions with colleagues at the University Library:

- What are the main tasks of the library?
- If applicable, what are the main tasks of your department?
- Whom do you consider as target groups or customers of the library?
- What are your ideas about marketing communication of the library?
- What would you want to improve in terms of marketing communication?
- How and when do you think should we address our customers?
- What should the library improve when addressing a customer?
- Should the library use any influencer of other institutions in order to promote its products and services?
- How does promotion work right now from your perspective?
- Is the promotion of products or services satisfying right now?
- Is there a need to promote a certain product or service better than now?
- What else would you want to improve?
- Which communication channels work well?
- Which ones do you think do not work well?
- Are there any communication channels that we neglect so far, but which we should use in the near future?
- What would you promote on these channels?
- How do you evaluate the collaboration of your department with the marketing team so far?

Whenever answers were not clear to me as a “non-librarian”, I clarified the questions with the in-house experts. The detailed investigation work helped me to gain an overview of the structure of the University Library, its workflows and communication channels.

Defining the target groups

With respect to our target groups, the first questions were: Whom do we aim to address? What characteristics does this group of people have? Each of our product and service is designed to meet the needs of our customers – but who, in detail, are our customers? Ideas and definitions may have been implicit in the past, our challenge now was to analyze their characteristics.

The two major groups are obvious – students and academic staff. From a marketing point of view, however, we realized that these two groups were aggregations of five smaller groups:

- Students
 - In first semester, with the need for initial orientation, textbooks and work desks for concentrated learning.
 - Writing their thesis and in need of literature retrieval, research strategies, reference management software and citation workshop.
- Faculty
 - Lecturers for whom we set up course reserves.
 - Researchers for whom we offer consultation and our repository for research data management.
 - Academic authors whom we support with open access funding and research visibility consulting.

Apart from these five main target groups, we identified smaller groups of interest, which are:

- TUM-Librarians.
- University Board of Management.
- Other university institutions and departments.
- Other non-academic staff.
- Alumni.
- Librarians from other institutions.
- Walk-in customers.
- High-school students.
- High-school teachers.

For the groups above, we gathered information on the following aspects:

- Approximate numbers.
- Age.
- Gender.
- Education level.

- Nationality.
- Workplace.
- Turnover.
- Their interest in the library.

Examples:

Target group	Students in first semesters	Students writing their thesis	Lecturers	Researchers	Academic authors
Approximate numbers	31.000	9.000	600	6.500	nia*
Age	Approx. 18-30 years	Approx. 21-30 years	19+ years	22+ years	22+
Gender	33% female, 67% male	33% female, 67% male	17% female, 83% male	17% female, 83% male	17% female, 83% male
Education level	Diploma from German secondary school qualifying for university admission, Bachelor	Diploma from German secondary school qualifying for university admission, Bachelor	May differ, min. bachelor	Master, doctorate	Bachelor, master, doctorate
Nationality	78% German, 22% foreign	83% German, 17% foreign	nia*	nia*	nia*
Workplace	Branch libraries, home	Branch libraries, home, office, laboratories	Lecture hall, office, laboratories, home	Office, laboratories, home	Office, Home
Turnover	Every 2-3 years	Every year	nia*	nia*	nia*
Interest in the library	Learning spaces, literature, ...	Learning spaces, literature, reference management and citing support, ...	Course reserves, embedded librarian courses, literature, ...	Research data management, literature, ...	Open Access funding, bibliometric support, ...

*no information available

The definition of our target groups does not aim to be exhaustive, but it allows a good overview. The results need to be updated regularly and will be revised once a year. Otherwise, they will lose their relevance for the daily marketing work.

Defining products and services

The definition of services and products includes a description of the library's inventory and competences:

- Tangible products in the narrower sense, such as books, CDs, newspapers, as well as in the broader sense such as institutional repositories or online journals.
- Tools, such as computers, scanners, whiteboards or wifi.

- Library spaces and facilities, such as discussion rooms, quiet learning spaces, elevators or bathrooms.
- Support, such as consultation, coaching, loan services and the (virtual) information desk.

After describing what the University Library offers, we mapped all products and services against the target groups.

Examples:

Product / service	Categorie	Target group
Course reserves	Tangibles	Students in first semesters, lecturers
E-Tutorials	Tangibles	Students in first semesters, students writing their thesis, lecturers, researchers, academic authors
Workdesk PCs	Tools	Students in first semesters, students writing their thesis
Reference management software	Tools	Students in first semesters, students writing their thesis, lecturers, researchers, academic authors
Discussion rooms	Library spaces	Students in first semesters
Homepage	Library spaces	Students in first semesters, students writing their thesis, lecturers, researchers, academic authors
Open Access funding	Support	Academic authors
Interlibrary loan	Support	Students in first semesters, students writing their thesis, academic authors

Defining communication channels

In the course of our analysis of the current status it became obvious that the library has almost no information on current communication channels used by the groups above. The findings of our investigation did not result in a complete survey, but again, it gave a reliable overview and helped us navigate within the university structure: In addition to the communication channels within the University Library itself, we found various communication channels operated by other TUM-institutions. In our analysis, we described each of them using the following parameters:

- Type of channel, e.g. website, intranet, newsletter, mailing list, press, print work, social media, events, point of sale.
- Mode of operation, i.e. analog or digital.
- Dissemination level, e.g. mass media or media for individual contact.
- Target group (as defined above).
- Aim of the channel, e.g. promoting products, advertise services, announce events, encourage interaction, profiling, internal communication.
- Frequency of usage, e.g. x times a week, x times a year, on demand.
- Responsibility, e.g. Faculty, Corporate Communication Center, University Library.

Examples:

Communication channel	Type of channel	Mode of operation	Dissemination level	Target group	Aim of the channel	Frequency of usage	Responsibility
ub.tum.de	Website	Digital	Mass media	Students in first semesters, students writing their thesis, lecturers, researchers, academic authors	Promoting products, advertise services, announce events	Permanent	University Library
TUMcampus	Magazine	Digital and analog	Mass media	Students in first semesters, students writing their thesis, lecturers, researchers, academic authors	Profiling, internal communication	4x year	Corporate Communications Center
TUMi-Newsletter	Newsletter	Digital	Media for individual contact	Students in first semesters, students writing their thesis	Announce events	1x month	Student Service Center
Library's facebook	Social media	Digital	Mass media	Students in first semesters, students writing their thesis, lecturers, researchers, academic authors	Promoting products, advertise services, announce events, encourage interaction	3-4x week	University Library
Posters	Point of sale	Analog	Mass media	Students in first semesters, students writing their thesis	Promoting products, advertise services, announce events, profiling	Permanent	University Library

We realized that by using communication channels of other units, we can achieve synergies. There is the potential to increase the dissemination of our marketing messages and reach out better to our target groups.

The list of communication channels is not comprehensive, but it gives the University Library again a reliable overview of communication possibilities and demonstrates where opportunities for the marketing of library services exist.

Defining marketing packages

With the help of the definitions above, we are able to understand which services and products are relevant to which target group and via which communication channel we should communicate with them. Our aim is to make relevant information for one target group as easily accessible as possible.

For the University Library, this means to “switching the perspective!” and adopting the customer’s point of view. We need to have in mind which products, services and communication channels are relevant for a specific target group. This is common knowledge, but often forgotten when communicating.

Examples:

- Target group: students

Products and services: e.g. learning spaces, media (esp. textbooks and course reserves), loan services, literature retrieval services, consultations on citing and reference management

Communication channels: e.g. student representatives’ websites and mailing lists
- Target group: academic staff

Products and services: e.g. research data management, open access funding, support services on publishing, reference management and citing, databases

Communication channels: e.g. academic staff events, research staff newsletter
- Target group: non-academic staff

Products and services: e.g. loan services, media and accessing electronic and printed media

Communication channels: e.g. TUM staff newsletter, library’s website
- Target group: walk-in customers

Products and services: e.g. general orientation, media, loan services and branch libraries

Communication channels: e.g. brochure, signage

Summary

The definitions and structured analysis result in three main marketing objectives:

1. To raise awareness within in the target group for relevant products and services.
2. To help customers orientate within the University Library’s premises and services.
3. To strengthen the University Library’s position as a competence center.

All objectives are defined with subordinate objectives, each of which is described by operative marketing measures. These are tasks with preliminary workflows, timeframes and measurable results.

The following marketing measures, are in progress or at planning stage:

1. To raise awareness within in the target group for relevant products and services.
 - Apply new corporate design to all bulletins, flyers, brochures, leaflets, stamps, forms, give aways and websites.
 - Embed our logo to all project websites we are involved in or partners’ websites we collaborate with.
 - Ensure contact details are published with every academic article.
 - Promote contact details of our first level hotline on every single possibility.

- Communicate via TUM communication channels not operated by the University Library.
 - Spread the news of new products and services on more communication channels than we do now.
 - Continuously repeat messages of existing products and services via many communication channels.
 - Compile strategies for all our events, including setting up a calendar of all TUM events relevant to us and organizing a mobile stand.
 - Cross-sell wherever possible.
2. To help customers orientate within the University Library's premises and services.
- Install a signage and customer guidance system in all branch libraries.
 - Re-design all print material focusing on target groups and developing a distribution strategy for every printed material.
 - Select a motive for every event we organize, including coaching and consultations and promote them on every communication channel.
 - Set up a content calendar for the marketing team to repeatedly communicate basic information, e.g. opening hours or loan services.
 - Check every print material for easy and comprehensible language.
3. To strengthen the University Library's position as a competence center.
- Promote products and services for a selected target group on audience-specific communication channels.
 - Re-design all print material focusing on target groups and developing a distribution strategy for every printed material.
 - Embed contact details (optimally with portrait photos) on the website and, possibly, on other channels.
 - Optimize the presentation of library collaborations on the library's website.
 - Improve the presentation of library collaborations on our partners' website, where possible.
 - Report on all library-related events our employees participate in.
 - Structure and promote collaboration in innovative projects between the library and faculty.
 - Promote existing interaction channels.

The marketing strategy was developed in 2016. We will implement the measures planned therein by 2019. During this rather short period of three years, we will adapt when necessary, add or delete measures and, above all, find out if this marketing strategy works for us in terms of promotional success, workflows and timeframes. Depending on the success of this pilot phase, we will set new goals, develop new measures and adapt to the characteristics of our future target groups.

We have a lot of work to do, decisions to make and challenges to approach so that in the near future we can say: We have made all our products and services more visible to our target groups. Our customers now use them more often and effectively.