How to Attract Users in Digital Libraries

Anil Kumar Dhiman[1,*] and Rajendra Kumar Bharti[2]

[1]Gurukul Kangri University Haridwar – 249 408 (Uttarakhand) (India).

[2]S.V. University, Gajaraula, Uttar Pradesh (India).

ABSTRACT

Digital libraries are getting popularity among the users. On One hand they are giving opportunities to access information round the clock 365 days on the finger tips of the users but on other hand, users are not coming to libraries because access of information is available at their workplace, be it office or home. Even users can access digital libraries while they are on the way or driving, if they are connected to internet. But this is not a good sign for libraries, because the very purpose of establishing them is diminishing. Hence, there is a need to develop strategies to attract the users in digital libraries so that they come and make use of documents and other things in libraries. This paper attempts to discuss the present situation and possible solution to overcome the problem so that the users may come in libraries personally and use them.

Introduction

Since their inception, the libraries are considered disseminator of information and knowledge that is contained therein in the form of books and other documents. Till the 19th century, most of the books were kept in lock and keys in most of the libraries but later with the awareness, the libraries started to follow open access system and books/documents were opened for vast use of the library users.

Books and printed documents were the most available forms of knowledge to be stored in libraries till the last decade of 20th century but with the development in information and communication technology (Dhiman, 2003; Dhiman & Rani, 2012), another forms of books and documents came in the market. There were available e-books on CD and DVDs (on single piece of which we can have whole of the Encyclopaedia Britannica or Encyclopaedia Americana) and sooner the online version of books/journals/magazines came in the market. Now, "libraries license access to electronic journals, which provide key readings in many courses, and set up electronic reserve systems to facilitate easy use of materials" (Lippincott, 2005) .

These dramatic changes in technology and society are having a considerable impact on libraries and their instruction programs. These changes have created an urgency to teach users how to become more effective, efficient, and independent in their information searching (Tiefel, 2006). Equally important is their attraction for the libraries which should not be diluted.

Thus, a lot of competition in today's electronic driven world felt. Now, video games, computers, MP3 players, and cell phones- all these high-tech toys are providing direct access to information, and reward the users with almost instant gratification. While traditional books, on the other hand, require time and patience, with the re-ward—the unfolding of a story or information—generally delayed (Tuccillo & Bowen, 2006).

Problems

In older days, according to Dhiman & Rani (2005) library exhibitions for users were organized periodically to attract them to use the library and its collection. Besides, display of new additions to library collection, lectures on the library use and other extension services like, the dramas, musical concerts, film show, quiz programme and essay competition etc. were organized to attract and train the users. Further, this was enriched with the help of mass media and communication technology by writing articles about the libraries in newspapers and magazines, and also talking about the library and its collection on radio and television and publishing brochures about the libraries and their services for the users.

But now, the libraries are at the finger tips of the users, where they can access everything with the help of Internet and latest communication technology. There are available e-books, e-databases and especially the e-journals in enough quantity and quality. Old issues of most of the prominent journals in each & every field, especially in science & technology are also available online on subscription basis. Further, their access is also available round the clock in faculty rooms and class rooms and even in hostels in most of the universities and technical institutes. That is why users are not coming to the libraries & making use personally and very purpose of opening of libraries is diminishing.

Today, the libraries are being challenged as not relevant or necessary to the future of information. Current news and library literature specifically are replete with information and questions about the future of libraries. There has even been some speculation that the physical library may continue to exist but only as a sort of dinosaur museum (Tiefel, 2006). Tiefel further says - If libraries do have a future, in what direction does it lie? Does library user education have a place in that future? So, this is the major problem – how to attract the users in library premises?

Tele: 09411153340
E-mail addresses: akvishvakarma@rediffmail.com

Therefore, we have to seek the alternative ways of attracting the users in modern libraries so that maximum use of the documents could be made to not only survive the libraries but also the library profession. Thus, as mentioned by Tucker (1979) a long time ago, user education is must today too:

• to develop the "art of discrimination" to be able to judge the value of books [documents] to develop critical judgment;

• to become independent learners-to teach themselves; and

• to continue to read and study-to become lifelong learners among the users.

In this regard, Boyer (1987) rightly emphasizes over the use of libraries by saying – "… library must be viewed as a vital part [and] ... the library staff should be considered as important to teaching as are classroom teachers ... to introduce carefully to the full range of resources for learning on campus. Students should be given bibliographic instruction and be encouraged to spend at least as much time in the library-using its wide range of resources".

Suggestions to Overcome the Problems

Rhodes & Chelin (2000) mention that a wide variety of methods exist to instruct users in information skills; lectures, practical 'hands on' sessions, workbooks, printed guides, videos, and demonstrations. But due to the pressure of high student numbers and reduced financial resources, libraries are striving to develop effective user education programmes that are cost and time effective.

Teacher-librarians are facing some difficult choices as they struggle to maintain their traditional collections while facing the growing pressure to include e-books and e-readers in the resources and services they offer (Doiron, 2011). It is seen that some schools already abandoning traditional library collections and issuing students e-readers fully loaded with e-books, the future will indeed be challenging. While many school libraries seem to be caught in a wait and see attitude, teacher-librarians are facing uncertainty about the best time and most effective ways to introduce e-book services. The same case happened in the case of institutes of higher education.

Dorion further adds that, if we look at most innovations (think videocassette tapes, CD-ROMs, DVDs, Blu-Ray, iPads, smartphones etc.), we seem to have a great capacity to assimilate new technologies so they exist alongside traditional ones. As newer, more innovative devices come along, others like CD-ROMs fall by the wayside. Others maintain their place and co-exist with the new technologies. This is most likely what we will see in the near future the need to include e-books and to accommodate the users of technologies like e-readers, smart phones and any emerging mobile technologies that may come along.

So to be in the race of changes, the evolving digital libraries may adopt following choices to attract the users.

1. Library contest can be arranged. Running contests inside the library keep the patrons coming in to see what is new?

2. Library catalogues can be made online on web through library website or institute / organization sites for finding relevant documents round the clock. It will enable to make users aware of highlighted collections and/or new additions in the library.

3. Web is becoming a most popular publishing tool for providing information for either reading or downloading. "Electronic handouts help ease the financial burden of reproducing thousands of pages for free public distribution

(Alberico & Dupuis, 1995)." However, it is unlikely that web-based instruction can ever replace traditional methods, but its appeal to the undergraduate population may make it a useful ally and a necessary resource saving device.

4. Social networking is one of the most promising technologies (Dhiman, 2012; Dhiman & Bharti, 2015) that enable messaging, blogging and tagging. It provides user with chat rooms, video profiles, forum, and online tools for researchers to share, connect and discuss researches. Social networking not only enables librarians to interact, but also to share and exchange resources in an electronic format.

Facebook is efficient in knowledge sharing, and Twitter and Twitter-like Weibo are effective in facilitating communication as later two are news-feeding tools, disseminating information from one to another, who does not need to be friends or acquaintances with each other.

Library Thing is "another social networking site that enables users, to recommend books to one another by viewing one another's collections. It also enables them to communicate, blog, and "tag" their books" (Khullar, 2014). First page of newly received books/jacket of the book can be tagged through social networking sites, like facebook etc. It will create a curiosity among the readers so that they may come to see the full books on shelves.

5. RSS : Really simple syndication is a family of web formats used to publish information about frequently updated works such as blog entries, news feeds, live audio, and video in the standard formats. Throgh the use of RSS, libraries can keep their users update with the latest information (Vyas & Trivedi, 2014).

6. Wikipedia: Wikipedia is an online contributed encyclopedia that is regularly updated by the users. This tool is to share knowledge by editing, or simply point library patrons in the right direction. One can also host library websites on wiki software like PBWiki (Vyas & Trivedi, 2014).

7. Library Blogs: Blogs are just like the diaries where entries are arranged in reverse chorological order for access (Dhiman & Sharma, 2008). Users in libraries can also be attracted through updating students on new collections, or just conversing with library staff via blogs.

Besides, You Tube and alike tools can also be used for uploading informative library videos and e-learning tutorials, and other events to promote and attract the users in libraries. Further, as suggested by Tuccillo & Bowen (2006) personal connection with the users can also be made to attract them to use library premises. But limitations are there, so as suggested by Singh (1992) each library may follow most feasible methods [choice] within its own limitations.

Conclusion

Librarians are facing challenges to change not only the concept of traditional libraries into service oriented libraries and documentation centres but also to publicize their services to attract the users in present era. Because reading style is changing and reading material is evolving into new formats and new means of accessing reading materials are evolving. Moreover, technological and social factors are bringing vast changes to information and its access with considerable impact on libraries and librarians. In response to this, librarians are applying these changes to broaden objectives for access of information for their users.

Zickuhr et. al. (2013) rightly mention in this regard that "the library is the meeting point of knowledge and information; it is a place where creativity can be nurtured. Patrons are not judged or graded, but come in and are free to

access all the library has to offer. [So], libraries should continue to offer all means of giving access to knowledge that they currently offer (books, CDs, DVDs, computers, e-books) and stay on top of new ways to access knowledge (i-Pads, cloud computing, software tools, etc.)".

Therefore, the librarians must continue to study their users' reading habits, then design and redesign content collections, systems, and services to help them improve and maximize their reading experiences as advocated by Peters (2010). This will also help them to attract the users personally in using libraries in digital world. So, for a long-term commitment with readers, a vocal, flexible, and patient as the longstanding relationship between readers and the libraries that serve them continuously is needed, where we have to take the help of new evolved methods to survive in digital world.

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