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# Why market? Introducing a marketing approach at the University of Lincoln Library



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## INTRODUCTION

'We built the Model T; it was black and a lot of people bought it. But we found that not everybody wanted it.'<sup>1</sup>

Marketing has been defined by the Chartered Institute of Marketing as 'the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably'.<sup>2</sup> It is a process that librarians can use to bring together various activities which we already undertake (as well as some new ones), to help us to deliver the services and resources that our users require. The following is an account of how we at Lincoln adopted a marketing approach to our service.

## SETTING UP A MARKETING GROUP

In 2004, we moved into our new library (a converted grains warehouse), and decided to use the opportunities that this presented to raise our profile within the university. We set up a marketing group with representatives from all campuses and teams, which had the task of developing a marketing plan. The group is chaired by a member of the library's senior management team, and this helps to ensure that intelligence gathered by the group is fed directly into the departmental

planning process. In general, our marketing plans, which are revised annually, contain the following key elements: market intelligence about our users, user feedback, action plans, promotional activities, and evaluation and revision. Before we created our marketing plan, we first undertook some preliminary work to:

- present an overview of our users and products: we considered user segmentation (who are our users, what are their characteristics);
- conduct and collate market research of user needs and expectations: like most university libraries, we gather user feedback from a number of sources, including an annual library survey, student panels, subject committees and informal comments and suggestions;
- identify the main trends of our operating environment: as part of this exercise we conducted a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) analysis;
- analyse our library action plan, to agree priority areas to address.

Once we had completed this exercise, we used our findings to develop our first marketing plan.

## MARKETING PLANS

Our early marketing plans emphasised improving communication with our stakeholders and promoting our services; for example:

*Marketing plan (2003–2004)*: this first plan had two main aims: to raise the library's profile with academic staff and to create a new corporate image.<sup>3</sup> We decided to target academic staff, as we believe that they are key to influencing students' perceptions and as such would present us with a 'quick win'. With this in mind, we conducted a survey of academic staff, to find out how they use the library, and also how much they know about our services and resources. Analysing the results of this survey identified areas where we could improve our communications with academics, and this formed the basis of a number of action plans (for example, a special event for academic staff, in which new titles and products were displayed and demonstrated, which was subsidised by publishers and suppliers). Feedback from this event was positive, and students have benefited from our closer partnership with academic staff.

*Marketing plan (2005–2006)*: this contained a number of new services we wished to promote, including the introduction of access control.<sup>4</sup> The

introduction of access control represented a significant service change for us, and we ran a major publicity campaign to ensure that all stakeholders were kept fully informed.

In recent years, we have embedded a marketing approach into our management and operational processes and, while part of the work of the group is concerned with promotions and communications, we are increasingly concentrating our efforts on improving our understanding of our users' needs, to inform strategic planning. For example, the current marketing plan includes:

- actions to address priorities identified in the library student survey;
- actions to address priorities identified in the library survey of researchers' needs; this took the form of an action plan to market research support.

As part of the process of agreeing an action plan, we have found it helpful to complete a project template, which is then presented to the marketing group for approval. For example:

#### **ACTION PLAN FOR MARKETING RESEARCH SUPPORT, JULY 2007**

##### 1. Scope

- To raise awareness of the services and support that the University Library provides for academic staff and researchers.

##### 2. Aims

- To improve our understanding of researchers' library and information needs.
- To raise awareness of the role the University Library plays in research.
- To improve user understanding of available collections and services and how to use them to achieve research goals.
- To raise the profile of the library with academic staff and researchers.

##### 3. Objectives

- Respond to the researchers' survey
  - When the results of the researchers' survey are available, consider them in the context of the annual marketing plan, to identify additional priorities
  - Success measures: Respond to feedback obtained from the survey
  - To be completed by: August 2007
- Hold event for researchers to showcase our resources

- This event will be held at the beginning of November, inviting all researchers. We will showcase our resources and provide coffee and biscuits.
  - Success measure: A well-attended event, with positive feedback
  - To be completed by: November 2007
- Liaise with Research Office to ensure that they know what the library offers researchers
    - Meeting to be held with Research Office to discuss researchers' needs and in particular, the promotion event in November
    - Success measure: Evidence of liaison
    - To be completed by: September 2007
  - Update portal pages
    - Revise the wording on the portal area to make more inviting, check with researchers that these are the services they find most useful
    - Success measure: Evidence of updates
    - To be completed by: September 2007
  - Create an archive for current awareness services
    - Develop improved access to archive and news pages for researchers
    - Success measure: Development of an archive
    - To be completed by: August 2007
  - Create flyer to go on notice boards and in the graduate centre
    - This flyer, in corporate colours, will highlight the services that we offer to researchers – promotion tool
    - Success measure – Action completed
    - To be completed by: September 2007.
  - 4. Identify stakeholders: Researchers, academic staff, academic subject librarians, Centre for Educational Research and Development, Research Office.
  - 5. Link to departmental action plan: show how, and where, this action plan supports the departmental action plan.
  - 6. Estimate costs – minimal, (printing and refreshments).
  - 7. Evaluation and review: The event was reviewed by producing an evaluation report (extract follows): 'Feedback was very positive and lots of questions were asked regarding RefWorks and services for researchers. All

expressed an interest in a full 2 hour workshop on RefWorks and this will be taken forward by ... . All of those in attendance said they would attend a future library research event – one suggestion was to include something on e-repositories. There was one query, regarding why we did not subscribe to Jstor – the rest of the attendees were happy with Library services and resources and appeared to enjoy the chance to get together with other researchers.’

## **CONCLUSION**

So, why do we market? Our experience over the last four years is that marketing provides a cohesive framework, in which we bring together representatives from all teams, to work together to understand the needs of our users and raise our profile by strengthening our corporate brand. As the marketing process places customers / users at its centre, taking this approach helps to ensure that the real priorities of users (rather than our views of their priorities) inform strategic planning. Now we can offer green Model T Fords, but only if someone asks for one!

## **NOTES**

- 1 R. Smith, ‘On no-frills flying’, *New York Times*, 25 June 1986, from [www.bartleby.com/quotations](http://www.bartleby.com/quotations) [accessed 07.12.07]
- 2 <http://www.cim.co.uk>
- 3 See Lesley M Thompson, Lys Ann Reiners, ‘Creating a new corporate visual identity at the University of Lincoln Library’, *SCONUL Focus*, 38, Summer / Autumn 2006.
- 4 See Oonagh Monaghan, Philip Cross and Lys Ann Reiners, ‘A big change = a big publicity campaign: introducing access control to the university library at Lincoln’, *SCONUL Focus*, 40, Spring 2007.