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Original Citation

Stone, Graham, Sharman, Alison and McGuinn, Kate (2015) Using library impact data to inform student marketing campaigns. *Journal of the European Association for Health Information and Libraries*, 11 (4). pp. 29-32. ISSN 1841- 0715

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Using library impact data to inform student marketing campaigns

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Abstract

This article uses an evidenced based approach using the finding of the Library Impact Data Project to help market library resources to students at the University of Huddersfield.

Initiatives discussed include the roving librarian, desk-top visits and Lemontree (library game). Reading list software is also used to drive usage and the marketing of these services is also discussed. Finally, the paper looks at the use of a marketing placement student in the library.

Keywords: Libraries, Information Science and Information Centers

Introduction

The Library Impact Data Project (LIDP) at the University of Huddersfield investigated the link between library usage and student attainment. The first phase used data from eight universities to support the hypothesis that there was a statistically significant link between library usage (book loans and e-resource usage) and student attainment (1). The second stage went on to investigate potential causal factors in the data such as demographics and discipline at school and course level (2-3).

There have been two spin off projects from the first two phases of LIDP. The first is the Roving Librarian project, which targets areas of low use; the second is Lemontree, a library

game, which was developed at Huddersfield with partners Running in the Halls to encourage engagement with students.

The third phase of LIDP has started to investigate how the library can make use of the data and insights generated (4). Research in the third phase has shown that boutique services (5), such as desk top visits can help to promote library services to staff and students in order to increase usage and therefore attainment and the student experience. The combination of service-wide initiatives and targeted boutique services will be discussed in this paper.

Roving Librarian

The concept for the Roving Librarian emerged directly from LIDP (6-7). Librarians took the decision to leave the traditional library space and with the aid of mobile technology such as iPads visit Schools, cafes and other areas frequented by students, thereby potentially reaching those students who do not visit the physical library. There is now a roving brand which is used to advertise this service. Pop-up banners have been designed using this same brand to indicate to student that the library is here to help them. The service is also publicised to students using email, plasma screens and social media. This has been productive and there have been a few occasions when the librarian has been greeted by several students waiting for them to arrive who have particular assignments for which they are struggling to find appropriate information. Freebies have also been a good ploy to attract students to the stand. Cupcakes were a popular feature and they featured the same roving brand. They have now been replaced by fortune cookies which advertise library services in an innovative way. This year they all have a unique URL, which allows librarians to trace the impact of this marketing tool. Library suppliers have sent products such as umbrellas, water bottles, memory sticks to advertise their resources to which the library subscribes.

The Human and Health Sciences (HHS) subject librarians at the University of Huddersfield have used two approaches to roving in the School since it was introduced in 2011. The most common approach is to choose a location in one of the main HHS buildings for drop in sessions (for example the Student Hub, a resource area staffed by student support workers) and pick a busy time to visit once a week for a period of a few weeks. This is advertised in the School with posters and leaflets and also via Twitter and Facebook. The second approach is to stand with iPads and a pop-up banner in a high traffic area of the School at lunch time and approach students as they walk past. Both approaches have their merits, but whichever approach is used, the librarians have found that the success of roving sessions depended very much on timing. For example, Friday was found to be a poor day for roving as many students left the School after morning lectures but Thursday lunchtimes have proved to be a popular time for both types of roving session.

Students seem to appreciate the service especially when the librarian is able to replicate a search that they are currently struggling with, helping them to find resources that they did not even know exist. One comment made to the Subject Librarian for Health whilst roving in the School labs was that the reason why they thought the library was so brilliant is that librarians come looking for students that need help rather than him having to find a librarian.

Desk-top visits

Offering individual tailored desk-top visits to academic staff was an initiative that came out of the third phase of LIDP. It was trialled initially with the School of Computing and Engineering, a School whose students were consistent low users of the library. When compiling an action plan of how best to reach these students, it was decided to target the academic staff as past experience had shown that when the recommendation to use library resources came from their tutors as opposed to the library, they were more likely to do so (8). Desk-top visits had been previously been used at London South Bank (9) and Liverpool (10)

Universities and it was thought that this personalised approach could work at Huddersfield. An email template was created to emphasise the value of the session, such as saving time, helping to find information for teaching and/or research and then adapted by each subject librarian to make the message unique to that member of staff. Staff were invited to book a visit by completing a short online form enabling each visit to be tailored to meet specific requirements. The form not only highlighted the range of resources relevant to their subject area but topics such as copyright, reference management software and social media. The visits had a mixed response from the School with just six visits being booked to date. However, when this initiative was rolled out to HHS during summer 2015, it had a much better take-up with fifteen visits being booked. The subject librarians state this method of outreach has been effective in marketing library services and resources to academics and has achieved a disproportionately bigger impact than the number of visits conducted would suggest. Staff generally were appreciative that they had been visited in their office at a time convenient to them. One member of staff described the visit as being "luxurious". Topics discussed were wide ranging and often went beyond those ticked on the form. It is too early to measure whether the aim of getting academic staff to promote specific library resources to their students has been successful, but overall the visits have helped the subject librarians build personal relationships with academics who after the event were more likely to contact them with their resource requirements and research questions as well as book them for future information skills sessions.

Library Game

Another project to be influenced by LIDP was the gamification project, Lemontree. It was designed to be a fun, innovative, low input way of engaging students through new technologies and increasing use of library resources (11). The game itself builds upon the

ideas developed at Manchester Metropolitan University to support inductions and information literacy (12) as well as a reward system similar to Foursquare (<https://foursquare.com>).

Promotion for Lemontree included use of plasma screens in the university, website banners and a social media campaign via Twitter. As the game has developed physical objects such as cards and freshers fair badges, which link to virtual badges and bonus points within the game have been introduced.

Based on comments received, initial feedback was broadly positive. In January 2013 a survey of all 762 registered users solicited a 20.5% response rate (13). One question asked whether use of Lemontree encourages users to use more library resources. Users were invited to tick all options that applied. 44% felt that they were encouraged to come into the library more often, although research suggests that this alone does not have an impact on final degree outcome (1), it does result in interaction with the library. 36% of those surveyed said that they borrowed more books, 23% felt they borrowed a wider range of titles and 37% used more e-resources. These interactions could lead to increased attainment as one of a number of other factors. 40% of respondents felt that their behaviour had not changed, although it is not known whether these were high or low users of the library facilities.

Reading list software

In 2010, the Library developed its own bespoke reading list package (MyReading) to ensure that for every taught module, where applicable, an online reading list is available. The reading lists are created by academics but librarians can check which items have been recently added to ensure that all materials are available in the library or online. The aim is to improve the student experience and potentially increase student grades as a wide range of materials from books and journal articles, to websites and videos and now more readily available. In order to market the product to students, an external organisation comprising

former students was commissioned to produce a short 90 second animation using a narrative-based marketing approach (14-15). Story-based advertising was employed to demonstrate to students how MyReading could simplify the process of finding resources in the library. The librarians came up with a storyline, but the script was developed by the company to leverage their student experience in the creation of the animation's languages and images. Using the same graphics as the animation and using some of the wording as a strapline, *Take your degree to the next level*, leaflets were also published. These are given out in sessions and displayed next to the catalogues. As well as featuring the software, they also highlight the potential impact of using the library referring to the findings of LIDP, that "Research shows that students who use more books and articles may also get better degrees" (1-3). Posters were also produced using the same graphics and logo and as well as being visible throughout the library they are also displayed on frames on the back of toilet doors where they can be read by a captive audience! A questionnaire was deployed to evaluate the usage of MyReading by students and ascertain what they liked and disliked about the product. Questions were also asked to find out more about the impact of the marketing campaign. Two thirds of the 772 responses claimed to have seen the promotional materials. The posters were the "most seen", probably as they were displayed around the Library and the Schools. The animation was not as memorable despite being displayed on plasma screens in the Library, being shown at all first year inductions and linked to from the Library's web scale discovery system, Summon. However, despite this, it is the most popular video on the Library's YouTube account (hudlibrary) with 6,236 views in the first 14 months online. Comments made by students in the questionnaire were used for this year's marketing and banner pens featured two quotes made by students and again used the same graphics as the animation.

Marketing placement student

In the summer of 2014, the Library recruited a marketing student for a twelve month marketing placement. The student was very much a trailblazer in terms of finding a role for herself especially as the department does not have any staff who are marketing professionals. Having a student on board was very beneficial as she had inside knowledge of what marketing approaches would appeal and have more impact with the students. One of her roles was to help assess the impact of specific marketing campaigns as well as finding out more about the user experience. For the MyReading project she created the questionnaire described above as well as advising on how it should be successfully deployed to students.

Conclusion

The article has shown how the University of Huddersfield has used the findings of the library impact data to inform decisions on targeted marketing, such as roving and desk-top visits. The use of data from LIDP has influenced the marketing of library services and resources by helping to strategically target specific groups such as academic staff and low users of library services with the aim of driving up usage in order for students to get better grades. This is not the end of the process, however, and the marketing is still ongoing. Future plans include the roll out of the upgraded Lemontree, continuing to reap the rewards of a marketing placement student, extending the roving role offered to Schools and rolling out desk-top visits with all academic staff.

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