Marketing and service promotion practices in the LCAS

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Abstract
Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to call for the application of marketing in the library area, especially libraries supported by public budget. Draws directly on experiences within the Library of Chinese Academy of Sciences.
Design/methodology/approach – Gives a summary of the current situation, analyzes problems and suggests new methods and provides a case study.
Findings – Explores and evaluates the use of marketing tools, service promotion experiences and new techniques in a large library context and explores the boundaries between real and virtual libraries and service provision.
Originality/value – A case study of service provision promotion practices, discusses user-centered web site design, and how market-oriented problem solutions can help to enhance a library’s customer relationships.

Keywords Services marketing, Libraries, Internet, Service levels, China

Paper type Case study

1. Introduction and definition
The Library of Chinese Academy of Sciences (LCAS) plays two functional roles: first, it is the central library for CAS, the service organizer in the academy-wide library system of CAS, which consists of three branch libraries (Lanzhou, Chendu and Wuhan) and more than 90 institutional libraries. Secondly, it is the National Library of Sciences for China, an inaugural member of NSTL (National Science and Technology Library), and it will take a great part in the national scientific platform in the near future, together with its three branch libraries.

The NSL (National Science Library) is a real library, whereas the NSTL (National Science and Technology Library) is a virtual one. NSL mainly serves researchers in CAS, while NSTL aims at serving researchers all over the country.

In addition to NSL, NSTL consists of another eight member organizations, which include the Chinese Science & Technology Information Center, Chinese Academy of Agriculture, Chinese Academy of Medicine, National Institute of Metrology in the People’s Republic of China.

NSL gets financial support from CAS (Chinese Academy of Sciences), and tries also to get financial support from NSTL. NSTL gets money from the Chinese Ministry of Science & Technology. Figure 1 helps to clarify the complexity of the information usage environment within CAS.

Before 2001 each library understood that its main purpose was to serve the users who came to the library building. After participation in the CAS knowledge innovation projects in October 2001, the library aimed to become number one in the library and...
information service field all over the world, accompanying CAS’s great aspirations in the world scientific field. Because the “academy” was only for graduate and research programs, more and more researchers, especially those who returned after finishing studies abroad, would not come to the library building for information services. They wanted libraries to provide them with full text electronic journals, seven days a week and 24 hours a day, anywhere they needed.

We faced a great challenge, not only in electronic resources but also in providing a virtual service. We would have to undertake collaborative collection management, tell the researchers what had been acquired for them, design a new service program, and initiate new methods and tools to help them to use the information constructively.

Accordingly, marketing would be used in order to ensure that the electronic resources and new services were being used as widely as possible.

Marketing is a matching process: one side is what we have and what we can do for researchers, the other side is the researcher’s ever-growing expectations, needs and wants.

2. Marketing the library
2.1 Publicizing activities
Activities that establish the general outlook of our librarians. Great changes have taken place in our library fields, but this is only recognized in the library professional research community.

General scientific citizens retained the old impression of the library and the daily work in the library building, where the service program mainly includes book circulation, reference reading, library loan and electronic information searching. Accordingly they gave the impression to our librarians of conservative ideas, inefficiency, and inability to catch up with social change. We needed to do something to improve this status throughout the whole institution.
First, we showed our faculty’s mental outlook. Twice a year we hold a ceremony to raise our national flag. Our uniforms also make a deep impression on the scientific community.

Second, we publicize activities that enhance the relationship with our scientific citizens. In mid-May every year, we invite a library specialist to give lectures aimed at enhancing the scientific consciousness of the primary school students, who will be our main user community in the not so distant future. Boys and girls come to understand the information usage environment and learn how to utilize a public infrastructure such as a library.

Third, a public leisure reading service has been added to the scientific library. It is a special reading room aimed at serving the scientific community with provision of leisure reading materials. There is a broader subject area than in the ordinary reading room, but a common information reading area. Readers can discuss, drink and watch videos in this reading area. Anybody can enter this area without any restriction. It gets the highest use rating in our library building.

*Science culture communication activities.* We invite academics who have had great achievements in their scientific fields to give lectures to our users; providing precious experience and valuable suggestions and provoking deep discussion among the users.

We hold huge not-for-profit activities, raising awareness of present endeavor in scientific research work.

These activities set up a platform between the scientist and scientific citizens.

*Exhibitions of scientific achievements.* There are activities in the institute each year that aim to publicize the great research achievements. As a whole scientific organization, there should be a platform in CAS to show what has been achieved.

Our library is a public institution in CAS; we can organize the achievements objectively and present the great achievements in the science and technology field.

In fact, we hold a great exhibition of achievements conducted in the CAS administrative territory. President Hu Jingtao was fascinated to inspect the exhibition on 29 December 2004.

### 2.2 Publicize the resource information to researchers

*Redesign the organization portal, which highlights the resources in our library.* In traditional conditions, we show the wealth of the collections by opening the reading areas in the physical building. Under virtual circumstances, the digital portal is as important as the lobby in the library building. We began our institution portal redesign in October 2003 by highlighting the electronic resources and service program (see Figure 2). Most importantly, we devised the portal renewing mechanism, which changes the institution portal every two years by involving the main faculty in the design process. We hope to spot trends, implement the services that respond to the users’ changing needs and anticipate users’ needs almost before they are expressed.

*Open new column promoting open access resources.* We navigate on the internet to find high quality internet resources, especially free web resources such as DOAJ, HighWire, FreeFullText.

*Construct discipline-based scientific subject portals.* We organize these construction projects by investing in our digital library project. We redirect our collection building
costs to the creation of portal construction serving the international community of researchers in the definite subject field. There are eight portals at present in our library portal:

1. Physic-Mathematic Subject Portal.
2. The Chemical Information Network.
3. The Resources and Environment Science Information Portal.
4. The Life Sciences Subject Information Portal.
5. Library Information Gateway.
6. Microbiology Subject Information Portal.

*Keep the electronic resource information alive.* In this area, the resource information is the newest. Users, especially the graduate students are eager to use the new resources. We upload electronic resource information to our institution portal no more than 24 hours from the database provider giving official authorization; and we collect all the electronic resources information together to inform the users periodically.

2.3 Service promotion

*Disseminating training service to over 100 institutions geographically dispersed all over the country.* Since April 2003 our director has led our backbone faculty, going to the institute every year to get feedback on our service from the researchers. When we
asked them what they knew about the electronic resources that we made efforts to collect, they astonishingly knew little about it in 2003.

We made up our mind to train the researchers, especially the graduate students, to improve this status. We initiated the service promotion activity in August 2003. From then on, we have disseminated the training service to the institute once every year. It is difficult for us to negotiate with an institute that is geographically dispersed all over the country to have a proper chance to give training.

Even so, we have had periodic success. In the limited training sessions, we told the users how many resources we had collected to support their study and research. Until December 2005, few researchers knew about our electronic resources and the library portal. They became familiar with what they needed and expressed what they wished.

*Train the trainer.* After 2003, we explored new methods of making the training service available more conveniently.

As institute librarians work beside the researchers, they can understand the researchers’ needs more thoroughly, and they have more opportunity to give training. Training was not systematic because there is only one librarian in most institutes, and there is a lack of communication and collaboration.

Since 2004 we have cooperated with the institute librarians. Librarians in the central library provide the skeleton training service, while institute librarians train the researchers whenever they want to know something about the library.

We decided to train the institute librarians first, even if they could do the daily service work very well under their own institutional circumstances. In 2005, we trained 100 librarians (trainer) academy-wide.

Besides training services aimed at actively resolving the usage problem, we constructed a digital reference desk, which has involved the participation of 33 institutes in answering questions from users. It can be an efficient way for our users to explore new methods in the research process.

*Information literacy education.* As there are about 25,000 graduate students in the CAS graduate school, information literacy teaching levels will impact the usage efficiency of the electronic resources when the graduate students become researchers.

We have made great efforts since 2003 to persuade the graduate school authority to provide the opportunity to make an information literacy course publicly available. In 2006 we began to offer an information literacy course within the curriculum of the graduate school to support and enhance the students’ general ability in research.

*Electronic document delivery promotion.* Since 2002 we have undertaken the electronic document delivery work and have held summarizing conferences once a year. In the conferences, we commend our excellent collaborative service partner, publicize our working plan for the next year, and promote our service program.

2.4 Exhibition of faculty’s ability

*Lead the research in the National Digital Library Standards Development Project* ([http://cdls.nstl.gov.cn/cdls2/w3c/](http://cdls.nstl.gov.cn/cdls2/w3c/)). This is a huge research project in the library and information science field in China. It is divided into more than ten branch projects, each being collaborative research, and we have encouraged main libraries all over the
country to participate in the research activity. There are 20 libraries or library consortia involved in this project.

Our library is one of the leading organizations in this project. Our faculty played a core role in the research work.

Convene the international conference (forum). We held the international conference on topics such as cooperative electronic resources management, long-term digital resources preservation and Sino-American digital library workshop.

Convened the organization academic forum annually from 2003-2005. From 2003 until 2005 we held the organization’s academic annual conference and almost every member of staff submitted one paper.

We encouraged our faculty and staff to analyze problems in the working process, to explore new methods to solve them and to summarize the best practices.

As in the conferences, we invited the leaders of our main partner organizations such as the National Library of China, Peking University Library, and Tsinghua University Library, and also the directors from our branch libraries that became administratively sole organizations in 2004.

3. Tools and methods used in marketing
Many libraries now use the internet to promote their services. Since library web pages have become more important than ever they play the same role in the virtual environment as the building does in the real world. They have to compete with everything else on the web. Library webmasters must learn the latest techniques in web design in order to make distinctive web sites, and learn how to promote their web sites in order to get prospective users. They describe online resources to help make online library marketing efforts more successful. Our webmaster promotes our web site by using these techniques:

3.1 Circulation expire alert (loan period alert)
Three days before the loan expires, our circulation system will alert the user to return the book. This technology shows our efficiency in daily circulation work, and avoids disputes over expiry fines.

3.2 Live digital reference desk
In our library building, there is a reference desk, but it is only for answering short and easy questions. If it is a professional question, such as how to search systematically for information for a research topic, we should answer these seriously. Even more important, if we can receive a question over the internet, we can enlarge the territory of our users, and at an operational level, we can invite volunteers to help us answer these questions.

By experimenting with the offline reference service for two years, we put out the live reference service in 2006, which has involved 37 institutes in the Chinese Academy.

3.3 Cross search
On our organization portal, users can search the database one by one. If you want to search the definite subject information in a broad area, you can use the cross search technology. Buy choosing certain databases, you can enter a keyword to search for the
related subject resources in all the databases. There are 50 databases in the cross searching service program.

3.4 Institute library portals
We are exploring mechanisms for cooperation in the library system. Some institute libraries have a portal, and some of them still have no sole web site. We designed a uniform front page for the institute library. With the same structure, we can upload the common data into it, and embed it in the institute’s portal. The institute librarian can then do the maintenance work by adding or deleting the required resources. By using ever-emerging new technology, and embracing innovative service methods, we should be able to provide new service programs that are based on the users’ expectations.

4. Pros and cons
4.1 No marketing strategies but activities
We lack a complete marketing strategy at the organizational level, even though we have lots of activities.

We should have a marketing policy in our organization, which includes the library’s governing policy, acquisition policy, service policy, mission statement, user definitions.

4.2 No sustainable plan to do the marketing
At the operational level, there is no marketing plan in our library. Sometimes we duplicate things in different departments and at other times things are overlooked completely.

4.3 Challenge of ever-changing expectations from researchers
We are facing the challenge of ever-changing expectations from our researchers. From the ordinary library service to the scientific tendency to analyze, we must not give up on the expectations of our users. We are trying to take a great part in the E-science platform.

That is to say, even if we hadn’t finished our definite information service goal, we will still have to face new expectations based on automatic information processing technology. Which one should be abandoned, and which one should be sustained? It should be a decision-making process based on analysis of users’ needs, which is also the marketing strategy making process. It becomes more complex and difficult as user needs change more rapidly.

4.4 Recruit more people who are market-oriented
The library is a public organization and so there is less pressure to promote itself to the public. Most of our faculty’s characters are more academic and service like – elegant, leisurely, carefree, calm and unhurried.

As analyzed above, different situations form our impressions of the library. It faces the same challenges as any other organization in the current era.

We should have to compete with other organizations, even commercial ones, in the Chinese information service market.
Personnel are the most important factor. The library should recruit new people with market-oriented experience, while sustaining those who have kept the library profession sacrosanct.

Further reading

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