

THE SWOT ANALYSIS: MARKETING AND PROMOTIONAL STRATEGIES USED AT THE UNIVERSITY OF MALAYA LIBRARY

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Abstract

A library is the place to find knowledge that accommodates various information sources. Nevertheless, the promotion of the library is an important task that should be carried out by a library to improve its image, role and credibility. A library offers various collections, services and facilities to the users. Since an academic library plays an important role in the university, marketing and promotional strategies are crucial. This paper seeks to discuss the strategies used in marketing and promoting the University of Malaya Library (UML) effectively. The SWOT Analysis is used to generate strategies and actions. Identification of SWOTs is essential because subsequent steps in the process of planning for achieving the selected objective may be derived from SWOTs. In order to keep up with globalization, UML has embraced new technology such as Web 2.0 and SMS (Short Messaging System) alerts. Social media, such as Facebook, Twitter and other social networks are applications that the current generation uses for interaction. With the existence of resources, facilities and services that exceed users' expectations, it will show that the library has promote the services effectively. Strategies and action plans designed to meet users' needs could indirectly enhance and strengthen the image of the library as an information centre that can compete with other information resources such as bookstores and electronic media. Thus, promotion and marketing of the library should take precedence and there is a need for libraries to enhance their organization inline with users' need.

Keywords: Library Marketing, Academic Library, Promotion, Library Services

1 INTRODUCTION

Recognizing the role of the library is nowadays more challenging, the University of Malaya Library (UML) is trying hard to improve its services from time to time. UML has numerous collections and offers various services and facilities to its users. Among the collections are monographs, textbooks, magazines, conference proceedings, theses and dissertations, newspapers, journals, audio/video tapes, CD-ROM, microforms, reference collections (dictionaries, encyclopedias, directories and resource guides to research) and e-resources such as e-books, e-journals, citation indexes, bibliographic management software and online databases. The services provided are loans, inter-library loans, reference, document delivery service, current awareness, guidance for obtaining information, request to search for missing items, and Internet connection. Meanwhile, reading area, photocopiers, carrels, discussion rooms, computer labs, book drop, self-check machines, Undergraduates' Information Commons, TV corner, auditorium, elevators for the disabled, lockers and prayer rooms are among the amenities available at the UML. Thus, for an organization such as libraries, these products and services should be promoted. Promotion is one of the marketing process that is very important. Meanwhile, public relations, advertising and publicity are part and parcel of promotion.

Since an academic library plays an important role in the university, where it is also affectionally known as the heart of the university, marketing and promotional strategies are crucial. Taking the example of UML, the SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats) Analysis is used to generate strategies and actions. The SWOT Analysis (or SLOT analysis) is a strategic planning method used to evaluate the Strengths, Weaknesses/Limitations, Opportunities, and Threats involved in a project or a business venture. The SWOT Analysis is often used in academia to highlight and identify strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It is particularly helpful in identifying areas for development. It involves specifying the objective of the business venture or project and identifying the internal and external factors that are favorable and unfavorable to achieve that objective. Strengths are characteristics of the library that give it an advantage over others; Weaknesses (or Limitations) are characteristics that place the library at a disadvantage relative

to others; **O**pportunities are external chances to improve performance in the environment; and **T**hreats are external elements in the environment that could cause problems for the library. Identification of SWOTs is essential because subsequent steps in the process of planning for achievement of the selected objective may be derived from the SWOTs.

2 ABOUT UML

The University of Malaya (UM) has its roots in Singapore with the establishment of the King Edward VII College of Medicine in 1905. In 1949, UM was formed with the amalgamation of the King Edward VII College of Medicine and Raffles College in Singapore. Situated on a 900 acre campus in the Southeast of Kuala Lumpur, UM is known as Malaysia's oldest university and was established in 1962. In 2011, UM has 16,333 local students (undergraduates: 10,318; postgraduate: 6,015) and 3,561 international students (undergraduates:940; postgraduate:2,621) (<http://www.um.edu.my>). The University of Malaya Library or UML was established in 1959 and currently has a total collection of more than a million titles. UML consists of the Main Library which provides library facilities for the entire campus and a network of three branch libraries, namely the Tan Sri Professor Ahmad Ibrahim Law Library, T.J Danaraj Medical Library and Za'ba Memorial Library and ten special libraries to meet the specific and special needs of the faculties. The core business of UML is to support the teaching, learning and research needs of the university.

UML is headed by the Chief Librarian, Dr. Nor Edzan Haji Che Nasir, and two Deputy Chief Librarians, namely Madam Janaki Sinnasammy and Mr. Mahbob Yusof with a complement of nine Heads of Divisions, 38 professional librarians, and 170 support staff. UML has six divisions to supports and run its operation namely Academic Services, Client Services, Acquisitions, Information Skills, Information Systems and Catalogiung & Metadata.

3 WHY IS PROMOTION CRUCIAL?

Kotler (1979) noted that libraries need to realize that marketing is not simply promotion but should reflect a service improvement and added value. A study of UK professional library associations and information services by Madden (2008) highlighted the challenges which includes attracting and retaining users through the information services, sufficient marketing and promotion of information services, generating enough funds, keeping information up-to-date, creating bechmarks and standards and developing information policies and strategies.

Although the role of the library is not for commercial purposes, promotion is still an important aspect that should be addressed to enable the library to be known. Profit for the library is when users have beneficial knowledge and successfully produce many scholars. Promotion will disseminate information to the users about the facilities and services provided by the library. Indirectly, it will encourage users to fully use the amenities provided.

According to Brophy (2001), internal marketing to remind association staff of the membership services and benefits was seen as effective so that each staff member was informed enough to sell benefits to potential members. Library and information staff used personal selling to promote information services to staff and members. A method favoured by external marketing such as e-newsletters, e-mails and paper publications, were used to promote membership benefits to members. The library and information staff who were involved in member benefit projects, such as web site contribution and help services, found that they were more valued by their organization and got more funding for information products and services.

Therefore, the library should serve as a "client-focused" or "client-centered" entity. The services or facilities provided should be user-oriented. Thus, the existence of the library will be felt and recognized as important. Promotion play a role in ensuring the continuity of the library and the library will be able to grow and compete in the new environment in which information is at our fingertips. The libraries with promotional practices are more competitive and successful as compared to libraries that do not practice it. For that, the library should act as an information, training and publications center, far beyond its traditional role.

4 SWOT ANALYSIS: STRATEGIES AND ACTION PLANS

Students, lecturers and researchers are among the important users of UML. Thus, to enhance current awareness and promotion of UML, the SWOT Analysis was used to generate strategies and action plans. The plans have to be developed to ensure these promotional strategies can be implemented effectively.

Strengths

- i. UML has a vast amount of collection, a seating capacity of up to 2,000 seats to serve the entire campus community and a computer lab that can accommodate up to 80 students at any one time. Until 2011, UML has 1,966,248 volumes of items. This major strength of UML should be proclaimed to promote the library. A large poster showing the collection size should be placed in all strategic areas of the Library or the University. Indirectly, it can attract students to come to the Library.
- ii. UML is located in a strategic location. Situated approximately 7 km from the city of Kuala Lumpur and easily accessible through various public transports such as buses, feeder buses from the LRT (*Light Rail Transit*) station and taxis. This strategic location should be able to make UML a "one stop center" and a "second home" to users. With the availability of various facilities such as printing services, cafes, prayer rooms and extended opening hours until 12.00 midnight during the revision and examination weeks will give users ample time to study and prepare for their examinations in the Library. Perhaps, the concept of comfort, coziness and relaxation can also contribute to the users' mood or perceptions.
- iii. New technology is being embraced by UML such as QR code for mobile access, SMS (Short Messaging System) alerts and social media such as Facebook. In June 2012, the UML's Facebook has 8,747 likes. Of all the Web 2.0 applications, Facebook is the most widely used application that the current generation is more likely to use.
- iv. The staff of UML are qualified since most of the librarians hold a Master Degree in Library and Information Science. With higher academic qualifications and experiences, they are able to serve the users well.

Weaknesses

- i. In certain areas, UML has out-dated structures. Books on the shelves should not be maintained in the old way. The collection may be arranged in a more attractive and easily accessible manner so that users feel more welcome. For instance, a collection of new books or free reading books should be placed ten feet from the entrance to create the mood for books as soon as users enter the Library, just as how booksellers display their collections. If this idea is considered, the existing Library space should be fully utilized for this purpose. Existing book shelves should be more lively and vibrant with clear signage.
- ii. Limited parking area at the Library may cause difficulties to users with personal transport. This problem can be resolved with the construction of a multi-level parking space but this would have financial implications.
- iii. Other Web 2.0 applications such as YouTube, Wiki and Twitter are not widely used to promote UML. For instance, Universiti Malaysia Perlis (UniMAP) Library (<http://mylibrary.unimap.edu.my/>) is the only university library website that has created a blog to introduce their liaison librarians. Meanwhile, YouTube can be used as a medium to broadcast the procedure on how to borrow books, video tutorials to train users on how to use library resources and access various services in their Library.

Opportunities

- i. UML is not just a Library. It is also entrusted to conduct classes such as the Information Skills course which is a compulsory undergraduate university course and conduct training sessions and user education such as *EndNote* class, *Turn-it-in*, and Information Skills Sessions for postgraduates. The Library also runs a series of roadshows and workshops to the faculties, especially to guide the students and academic staff on how to use the various online databases subscribed by UML such as the *Web of Science*. This in turn would promote the Library and prove that the Library is not just a place to find information, but in fact, the Library could be more than that. For instance, some lectures for the Master of Library and Information Science course were carried out at the Library.
- ii. Besides training and educating users, UML is also actively involved in conducting research. Recently, in collaboration with the Malaysian Citation Centre (MCC), UML has successfully published two reports namely *Malaysian Scientific Performance in the Web of Science 2001-2010* and *Citation Performance of Malaysian Scholarly Journals in the Web of Science 2006-2010* in conjunction with the launch of the MCC's citation index system, MyCite. Such collaboration would enhance the Library's image as an active partner in research.
- iii. UML collaborates with the Faculty of Computer Science and Information Technology, UM to organize ICoLis (*International Conference on Libraries, Information and Society*) every two years. By organizing international conferences, UML would be promoted at the national, regional and international levels since representatives are sent to participate.
- iv. With the Inter-library Loan (IL) and Document Delivery Service (DDS), UML indirectly has opportunities to promote and enhance the Library's reputation, especially if UML has supplied more materials to other university libraries.
- v. Publishing library brochures or informative materials for users such as *Info@UMLib*, booklet, pocket guide and Library Bulletin (*KekalAbadi*) which are distributed to organizations and individuals by post. The publications are uploaded into the library's website (<http://umlib.um.edu.my>) which has unlimited access.
- vi. Organizing the Library Carnival is a way of promoting and getting the librarians and Library management to keep in contact with their users. There are various events such as donating blood, books take-away, quizzes, lucky draws and 50% discount on the late return of books. The Carnival do attract many users to come to the Library.
- vii. Conducting an outreach programme such as the School Adoption Project (*Projek Anak Angkat*) can bring the Library to the external community. Selected school libraries near UM were chosen for this project. They were guided on how to manage their school library and also their collections.
- viii. The Library's URL (<http://umlib.um.edu.my>), phone number, address or other library information should be printed on souvenirs such as t-shirts, badges, car stickers, non-woven bags, pens, files and umbrella in order to promote UML. Re-branding is also important to enhance the image of the Library. For instance, the use of black and orange colour in all souvenirs or publications will reflect the image of the Library. Souvenirs or publications should also be displayed near the entrance to make them accessible when users or visitors need to purchase them.
- ix. Participating in the Innovative and Creative Group which is organized annually by UM can promote the Library and librarians to the campus community as they have to settle existing problem via the development of a product or enhancement of a service.
- x. Organizing the Photography Contest held at the Library is one of many promotional activities as it encourages users to get to know more about the resources, facilities and services that are available at the Library. The contestants need to think of locations that can be photographed. The selected

photographs can be used as library materials or as a cover for library publications, such as *Kekal Abadi*.

- xi. Promoting and explaining about the Library to new students through a series of road shows during orientation week.
- xii. Sending representatives to the seminars, conferences or workshops locally and internationally to exchange information and disseminate Library's information are also able to contribute to promotional activities.
- xiii. Introducing different reading areas for different purposes. For instance, "Blue Zone – refrain from being noisy", "Green Zone – may discuss at an acceptable and tolerable level" and "Red Zone- total silent" in selected reading areas to accommodate students with their needs. This indirectly may attract users to come to the library as the management understands their needs.

Threats

- i. The changing perception of users with regards to the role of the Library is a threat. The rapid development of digital technology has to some extent undermine the role of the Library. Users now prefer to find information through the Internet and online databases on their own. They assume that all the materials are easily accessible and authoritative.
- ii. The emergence of big book stores with attractions such as their interior decoration, allowing users to read books and the presence of a cafe inside the book store are making the Library less popular. With the suggestions mentioned, such threats can be avoided or at least minimised so that the Library can remain relevant.
- iii. The high amount of expenses paid for the subscription to online databases and electronic full-text resources has to be borne by the Library. This is a necessity since there is a high demand for them from the users.
- iv. Some users do not act responsibly when they borrow materials from the Library. These users borrowed materials and more often than not lose them or return them in damaged condition. The cost to replace these materials is often never recovered.

5 THE IMPACT OF THE PROMOTION

After performing a SWOT analysis, in particular the identification of Strengths and Opportunities, they are numerous steps that the Library has undertaken and can undertake to promote itself aggressively. As a result of its efforts, UML has witnessed a significant increase in its usage. UML has received many visitors especially librarians and has been approached by many libraries wanting to model themselves after UML, especially our Interaktif Portal and the Web of Science remuneration system.

6 CONCLUSIONS

With the existence of resources, facilities and services that exceed users' expectations, it goes to show that the Library has effectively promote its services. If users' expectations of the Library is very low since most users accept the Library as it is, but with effective and consistent promotion, the Library is able to change this perception. Strategies and action plans designed to meet users' needs could indirectly enhance and strengthen the image of the library as an information centre that can compete with other information centres such as bookstores, electronic media and others. In conclusion, promotion and marketing of the library is important and there is a need for libraries to enhance their organization inline with users' need.

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