



Marketing and promotion of e-books in academic libraries

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to report research into the marketing and promotion of e-books, and use this as a case study context to generate insights into approaches in academic libraries to the marketing of new services. As such it contributes to the limited empirical research on both the introduction of e-book services and on marketing in academic libraries.

Design/methodology/approach – Semi-structured interviews were conducted with 25 academic librarians, in seven case study libraries, holding the following posts: subject librarians, e-resources librarians, or cataloguers. Interviews focussed on: the existence of a promotion/marketing strategy for e-books; the marketing and promotion tools used to promote e-books; promotion via academics; the issues and challenges in promoting e-books; and future plans for the promotion of e-books.

Findings – None of the libraries had a marketing communication strategy relating to e-books, yet, on the other hand, most interviewees were able to point to a range of tools used to promote e-books, and some had plans for improvements in their promotion activities.

Originality/value – This study demonstrates a *laissez faire* approach to the marketing of potentially significant new services from academic libraries – providing access to e-books. Recommendations for development focus on taking a strategic approach to marketing and promotion, managing tensions between promotion and supply, innovation in promotional tools, and influencing word-of-mouth.

Keywords Marketing, Promotion, Academic libraries, E-books, Service improvements

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

E-books pose an interesting challenge to academic libraries, and there are many questions to be answered as to the way to manage the introduction and development of e-book collections and services. This article makes a contribution to knowledge and practice in e-books services in academic libraries by specifically focussing on the activities, approaches and perceptions associated with the promotion and marketing of e-book collections. As such, it not only contributes to knowledge on the management of e-book services, but also contributes to the limited empirical research into marketing and promotion of academic library services to their users.

E-books are viewed as having the potential to be even more significant for libraries and learners than e-journals, because of the longstanding centrality of textbooks to learning in higher education (Armstrong *et al.*, 2006; Rowlands *et al.*, 2007). Indeed, the digital format offers many opportunities for books to be developed as interactive learning resources, and in some cases substituting for locally designed learning resources and experiences. However, at this point in time, many academic libraries are only in a position to make a limited list of e-books available, and are highly dependent on publisher's decisions concerning the availability of and licensing arrangements for e-books. For example, in a recent large-scale study Newman and Biu (2009) found that



amongst 138 librarians from 13 countries, 44 per cent of the participants indicated that their libraries currently own or subscribe to 10,000 or fewer e-books. However, they predict a significant growth in their e-book budgets in the next five years. Hence, as Anson and Connell (2009) suggest libraries need to be better prepared for a future in which e-books may be as important, or more important, than print books.

Over the years there have been various books and articles urging libraries to adopt a proactive stance to marketing and promotion of their services (e.g. De Saez, 2002; Rowley, 2006). More recently there has been some significant research into the nature of the digital information consumer (Nicholas and Rowlands, 2008), and other articles commenting on topics such as promoting library services in a Google world (Schmidt, 2007), and marketing library services to the Net generation (Mi and Nesta, 2006). Other commentators have discussed more broadly the marketing of academic library services (e.g. Spalding and Wang, 2006), and there is a body of research and commentary into promotion and marketing of and through the library website (e.g. Detlor and Lewis, 2006; Gardner *et al.*, 2008; Kaur, 2009). However, empirical research into marketing and promotion in libraries is limited. It would seem, then, that the well-established research stream on information behaviour is not complemented by a similar level of interest in how libraries and information professionals are and can use communication effectively to influence such behaviour.

This article, then, seeks to contribute to knowledge on both e-books promotion and marketing and also to understanding of promotion and marketing in academic libraries. E-books have a key role in the future of academic libraries, and approaches to the marketing and promotion of e-books, and the associated services that academic libraries provide may offer insights into the approach being adopted by academic libraries to establish and promote their role in a digital age.

The aim of the research reported in this article is to provide insights into the promotion and marketing practices of academic libraries in the context of e-books.

The objectives towards the achievement of this aim are to:

- identify whether academic libraries have a formal promotion or marketing strategy for e-books and e-resources;
- profile the marketing and promotion tools used to promote e-books;
- gather perceptions regarding the role of academics in the promotion of e-books;
- explore librarians' perceptions of the issues and challenges in promoting e-books; and
- assess the extent and nature of any future plans for the promotion of e-books.

The article is structured as follows. First, the literature review summarises findings from previous research on e-books, and on promotion and marketing in academic libraries, and provides relevant definitions. Next, the qualitative methodology for the research is outlined. This is based on semi-structured interviews conducted with key stakeholders in seven case study academic libraries. Findings are reported next. The following section offers a critical discussion of the findings. Finally conclusions and recommendations summarise key themes that emerge from the findings and the critical discussion, and offer recommendations for practitioners and for further research.

Literature review

Introduction of e-books in libraries

E-books are commonly perceived as offering great potential for teaching and learning (Armstrong *et al.*, 2006), they are attractive to scholarly communities (Nicholas *et al.*, 2007) and they have “greater potential to change the information landscape than journals” (Rowlands *et al.*, 2007, p. 489). The JISC e-books user survey (JISC, 2008) revealed that e-books are a central element of the information experience of the academic population, including staff and undergraduate and postgraduate students. More specifically, 60.1 per cent of the academic population of 127 higher education institutions in the UK use e-books for their scholarly work rather than for leisure.

E-books are becoming increasingly popular and significant to libraries (Nelson, 2008) but the adoption of them as a learning resource has major effects most immediately for academic libraries. This adoption poses a range of collection development issues such as acquisition policies and processes; pricing and licensing models and arrangements; cataloguing processes as well as promotional activities (Vasileiou *et al.* 2009). Only a small corpus of research on e-books has been developed in the UK (Armstrong *et al.* 2006). However, two large scale research projects have been published in 2009 concerning the management of e-book collections in academic libraries; one in the UK and one in the USA. Both researches investigated issues surrounding marketing and promotion of e-books.

The first research project was conducted by Information Automation for the JISC National e-book Observatory and it is entitled “E-book collection management in UK university libraries: focus groups report”. The study’s aim was to investigate:

[...] the attitudes and work of library staff responsible for establishing, managing and promoting the e-book collections (Information Automation, 2009, p. iv).

For the purpose of the study eight universities were selected as case studies. The responses revealed that:

[...] promotion of e-resources is rarely undertaken as a part of long-term, planned approach (IAL, p. 51).

Those institutions that did have an agreed strategy:

[...] only included e-books as a part of the general strategy for e-resources (IAL, p. 51).

The most common promotional methods mentioned in the focus groups included: e-mails to academic staff, training sessions – one-to-one or focus groups of students and academic staff, websites, and social networking.

The second research “E-book Collections: ARL Spec Kit 313” was conducted by Anson and Connell (2009). Their research examines e-book management issues in 75 ARL (Association of Research Libraries) member libraries including selection, acquisition, cataloguing, and collection management issues, and also issues in marketing to and in usage by their clientele. According to survey responses:

[...] many libraries are unprepared for the challenges in adopting, integrating, and maintaining e-books (Anson and Connell, 2009, p. 12).

In addition, some librarians stated that the adoption of e-books is more difficult than the adoption of e-journals.

Marketing and promotion in academic libraries – rationale and definitions

Most academic articles on marketing and promotion in academic libraries do not report any empirical research on library practice, but rather communicate the principles of marketing, and urge library and information professionals to take a proactive and organised approach to marketing. Although there is a well rehearsed recognition that marketing has often been seen as alien to public sector organizations where the underlying philosophy is one of public service (Rowley, 2006), Mi and Nesta (2006) point to work by Kotler (1975) on social marketing which suggests that non-profit organizations need to understand that marketing is not about selling, and not about promotion, but about service and adding value, and that to be successful non-profit organizations must understand marketing's fundamental principles. Alire (2007, p. 546) acknowledges that interest in marketing in academic libraries (in the USA) has been slow to gather momentum, but argues that marketing is now crucial:

Academic libraries can no longer sit in their ivory towers waiting for customers – students, faculty, and staff – to use their libraries. We no longer have a captive audience. The competition is greater because we are no longer the only information service game in town.

Other commentators agree. For example, Spalding and Wang (2006) suggest that only by using marketing principles and techniques can libraries better understand their users' needs, justify funding, communicate more effectively with a variety of external audiences, and achieve greater efficiency and optimal results in delivering products and services to meet the identified needs of their clients.

One of the difficulties associated with the adoption of a marketing philosophy, and implementation of appropriate marketing actions in academic libraries lies in confusion as to what marketing entails. As Gupta (2002) explains, some librarians view marketing as being about marketing communication, and promotion, whilst others view marketing as customer satisfaction. A useful and context specific definition of marketing has been provided by The Association of Research Libraries (Smykla, 1999, p. 3). Marketing is:

The organized process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that will (if applicable) satisfy individual and organizational objectives. Marketing collects and uses demographic, geographic, behavioral, and psychological information. Marketing also fulfils the organization's mission and, like public relations, inspires public awareness and education.

This is the definition of marketing adopted in this article. On this basis, marketing is:

- an organised process, that involves planning, conception and execution;
- concerned with pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services;
- concerned with exchanges, between the organization and its users/customers and other stakeholders; and
- aligned with and contributing to the fulfilment of the organization's mission.

The other key concept used in this paper is promotion. This definition clearly positions promotion, also described as marketing communications, as an essential component of marketing, and as such, suggests that promotion also needs to be organised in such a way that it contributes to the fulfilment of the organization's mission, i.e. strategically.

Consistent with the definitions proposed above, when discussing promoting library services in a Google world, Schmidt (2007) emphasises the need for a clear understanding of users, the library's products, the appropriate place for service delivery, an appropriate pricing strategy, and effective promotional strategies, and bemoans:

Many libraries have wonderful services and products but users are unaware of their availability (p. 341).

In order to remedy this situation she emphasises the importance of taking a planned and strategic approach to marketing.

Previous empirical studies on marketing in academic libraries

Empirical studies on marketing in academic libraries are surprisingly few. If the number of studies is any indication of the level of interest in marketing, then the voices of those who have argued for the relevance and importance of marketing to academic libraries have fallen on deaf ears. There is one significant study on marketing orientation and culture in Finnish research libraries (Singh, 2009). There are a few case studies on marketing in academic libraries reported in the academic journal literature, on, respectively: the development and management of a marketing programme at the University of Northern Iowa, Rod Library (USA) (Neuhaus and Snowden, 2003); the impact of a virtual reference marketing campaign at Texas A&M University (MacDonald *et al.*, 2008); marketing and service promotion practices at the Library of Chinese Academy of Sciences (China) (Wenhong, 2006); word-of-mouth marketing at the University of New Mexico Libraries (USA) (Alire, 2007); and, the implementation of customer relationship management (CRM) in an academic library in Taiwan (Wang, 2007). One aspect of marketing that has received a greater level of attention is marketing the academic library on the web (e.g. Detlor and Lewis, 2006; Gardner *et al.*, 2008; Kaur, 2009; Welch, 2005).

Methodology

Both the limited previous research into e-books and into promotion and marketing practice in academic libraries, and the research aim suggest that an inductive approach to this research is appropriate (Saunders *et al.*, 2003). This is consistent with the collection of qualitative data, gaining an understanding of the meanings humans attach to events, and a lower level of concern with generalization. In addition, an interpretivist stance has informed the research design. The intention is not the mere gathering of facts, but also listening to the way in which academic librarians talk about "marketing", thereby gaining insights into what "marketing" means to them, and their attitudes and opinions. As Saunders *et al.* (2003) suggest, as interpretivist researchers we are seeking to understand the subjective reality of our respondents to gain insight and understanding into their motives, understanding, attitudes, opinions, behaviour, and intentions. Further, our qualitative research design provides in-depth insights, is flexible and exploratory in nature and the data acquired is rich in meaningful information and insights (Bryman and Bell, 2003).

Interviews with academic librarians were chosen as the main research method. Findings reported in this article emerged from the interview conversation conducted for a wider study on the implementation of e-books. Information on job role was gathered and noted. The questions asked relating to marketing were:

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- (1) Do you have a promotion/marketing strategy for e-books (or e-resources)? If not, is there a need for one?
 - (2) What are the marketing and promotion tools you use for e-books?
 - (3) What are the issues and challenges in promoting e-books?

In questions (1) and (2) both of the words marketing and promotion were included to accommodate variations in use and understanding of these concepts amongst interviewees. Question (1) included reference to a strategy for e-resources as well as e-books, because anecdotal evidence suggested that any strategies for e-books might be embedded in strategies for e-resources.

All questions were open and non-judgemental; the interviewer was prepared with prompts to ensure that as rich an interview transcript as possible was gathered. This aligns with the approach recommended by Willig (2008) of an interview agenda, of key themes, which seeks to keep a focus on the original research question, whilst also allowing the interview to offer “novel insights”. The interview schedule was piloted with two subject librarians from Libraries 1 and 2, and the e-resources manager from Library 2. The pilot interviews assisted in the improvement of the interview schedule by adding some extra questions and rephrasing some expressions.

The identification of potential interviewees started with the selection of case study libraries. A multiple case study approach was adopted for a number of reasons:

- gathering responses from different staff in the same library offered deeper insights into the context for a specific case library;
- the approach supported the selection of case libraries on the basis of criteria deemed to possibly be relevant to e-books and their marketing, such as research or teaching focus, and size; and
- clustering interviews aided convenient and efficient use of researcher’s time.

A multiple case approach was adopted in sampling, because our intention was to examine an issue, marketing and e-books, rather than to understand an individual case (Stake, 2008; Yin, 2008). According to Miles and Huberman (2005) multiple case sampling adds confidence to the findings and enhances their validity and stability. Once the set of case study libraries had been selected, the library staffing lists were examined, and contacts made with senior librarians in order to identify key informants. Typically such key informants held the roles of e-resources librarian, subject librarian, or cataloguer/metadata officer. Ultimately, 25 interviews were conducted, distributed across the case study libraries as shown in Table I.

The interviews were digitally recorded and transcribed. All the interview data was used throughout the analysis. Thematic analysis was conducted for the data cross cases and coding was used as the basic analytic strategy. As Lapadat (2009, p. 927) highlights, thematic analysis:

is widely used as an analytic approach across methods and paradigms by case study researchers, qualitative researchers in general, and scholars of humanities because of its power to yield insightful interpretations that are contextually grounded.

Table I.
Profile of respondents

	University type (research/teaching)	University size	Job roles and codes of interviewees	Size of e-book collection
Library 1	Research-led	Large	E-resources delivery manager (P3) E-learning support manager (P4) Subject librarian (P5, P6, P7, P8)	~500,000
Library 2	Teaching-led	Large	Subject librarian (P9, P11) E-resources coordinator (P10)	~113,000
Library 3	Teaching-led	Large	Subject librarian (P13, P14, P15)	~16,000
Library 4	Research-led	Medium	Subject librarian (P17, P19, P20) Acquisitions and metadata officer (P18)	~24,000
Library 5	Teaching-led	Small	Subject librarian (P22, P23) Collection development manager (P21)	~9,000
Library 6	Teaching-led	Large	E-resources officer (P25) Subject librarian (P26)	~13,000
Library 7	Research-led	Large	Subject librarian (P29, P30, P31, P32)	~100,000

Analysis was guided, but not constrained, by the themes identified in the interview schedule. An inductive approach to coding was employed for the thematic analysis in order to avoid:

[...] rigidity and premature closure that are risks of a deductive approach (Lapadat, 2009, p. 926).

Findings

Introduction

This section reports on responses relating to the existence of and need for a marketing strategy, the tools used by the libraries for the promotion of their e-book collections, working with academics in the promotion of e-books, and issues and challenges and future plans relating to the marketing of e-books.

Marketing/promotion strategy for e-resources

The study sought to determine whether the libraries had a formulated strategy for the marketing and promotion of e-books or e-resources. The responses revealed that none of the libraries had a formalised strategy for the marketing of any e-resources. Nevertheless, there was recognition among the interviewees (19 out of 25) that the development of a formulated strategy was needed. The following two quotes illustrate the position taken by most respondents:

We haven't got a promotion strategy [...] You don't want to raise expectations beyond what you can actually supply but at the same time you want to build up usage to justify developing the e-books strategy. Nobody is going to put money into e-books if the students aren't using them. So, yes, it would be worthwhile from that point of view. But it would need to be done carefully (P5).

Not as a formal strategy. I think that we need one (P20).

Another respondent described the benefits of marketing planning in the specific context of awareness weeks:

I think that when we did the awareness weeks, it seems they worked really well. That was formalised. We did it as a part of a little project. So, we had a project plan and everybody knew what we were doing [...] but we had funding to buy marketing material. That worked well. To maybe formalise planning for marketing of specific resources would be better rather than individual subject specialists trying to do something. If we did it as a library marketed branded thing, it would make us more accessible to students and our resources more accessible (P20).

However, two other participants from the same university did not see the formulation of an e-resources' marketing strategy as a necessity since they believed that their users are aware of the e-resources provided by their library and they are happy to use them:

I don't think that we have a problem with the marketing of our e-resources [...] As far as I am concerned our e-resources are very well used, very well publicised and marketed for journals and databases (P31).

I think that it is less of an issue because people are very aware that they (e-resources) are there and they are happy to look for any information on the internet, on a computer screen they are happy to use new resources (P32).

Library 1 is the only library that has an aim to develop a marketing strategy in the near future. They have appointed a marketing officer:

We have a new marketing officer for the library. So, one of her jobs is going to be working at marketing plans for each part of the library. That would involve how we've told people about these things (e-resources). I will leave that up to her and she will give me my plan. So, eventually we'll have a marketing strategy. In the past we simply made things available and let people get on with them (P4).

Promotion tools

The key promotion tools mentioned were library websites, information literacy sessions, OPACs, induction sessions, in person instruction, and e-mails. This is evident from Table II which summarises the number of interviewees who mentioned each promotion tool. As is evident from this table, some tools are mentioned by respondents in all of the selected libraries, but others, such as a marketing campaign are only mentioned by respondents in one library. Further comments relating to the use of specific promotion tools are offered below.

Most frequently mentioned promotion tools. The most frequently mentioned tools were library websites, OPACs, and user education (including information literacy sessions, induction sessions, and in-person instruction.).

The library website was mentioned the most, by 21 librarians. Of these, 17 referred to the library webpage devoted to e-resources, and others talked variously about the library news webpage, the library website for promotion and marketing materials, the subject guide for literature review with a specific session on e-books and, the subject page designed for students in a specific subject area. Three participants also referred to the reading lists provided online on the library website.

The use of the OPAC as a promotional tool was suggested by 20 participants; of these one referred also to the reading lists provided via the OPAC and three to the e-resources search option offered by the OPAC, in order to narrow down the search results.

Table II.
Tools mentioned in
relation to e-book
promotion in academic
libraries

Number of interviewees	Tools for promotion
21	Library website
21	Information literacy sessions
20	OPAC
18	Induction sessions
16	In person instruction
14	E-mails
9	Posters
8	Course committee meetings
8	Events
8	Online help
7	VLE
3	Newsletters
3	Flyers
2	Announcement boards
2	Library reps
3	Word of mouth
2	Blog
1	Bulletins
1	Display screens
1	Marketing campaign

A total of 21 interviewees mentioned the delivery of information literacy sessions as a method for promotion to students, 18 mentioned induction sessions, and 16 in person instruction. Two respondents referred to the provision of in person instruction regarding e-books at the library enquiry desk.

Promotion tools mentioned by a group of respondents. Some tools were mentioned by several respondents, but were overlooked by many others. These included: e-mail, posters, online help, events, VLEs, and course committee meetings.

Most of the interviewees stated that they use e-mails for the promotion of e-books; nine used e-mails to contact staff and four to contact both staff and students. One respondent said that “a lot of the students just e-mail me” concerning e-book issues.

Online help was also cited by some participants including: online tutorials by vendors (two respondents), online help pages by vendors (two respondents), online tutorials for information literacy skills (two respondents), and online training for distance learners (one respondent).

Events were also employed as a method for marketing and promoting e-book collections. The following were mentioned: events, formal launches, marketing campaigns, and group demonstrations to academics by suppliers’ reps.

Posters were mentioned by nine respondents. VLEs are also seen as a promotional tool. Reading lists were added on the VLE, according to four respondents, and also general information about e-books (two respondents). Seven respondents highlighted that information about e-books is disseminated in course committee meetings to staff and students.

Least frequently mentioned promotion tools. Finally, there were a number of tools that were only mentioned by one, two or three people. These include newsletters, flyers, announcement boards, library reps, word-of-mouth, blogs, bulletins, display screens, and marketing campaigns.

On word-of mouth, one librarian commented that:

We market them informally by telling faculty and students (word of mouth) that there is an e-book available and we would tell them that we have on our website e-books and that there is an e-book option (P7).

On web blogs, one commented:

the e-resources manager has a blog so he also promotes them through that particularly for packages rather than every single title that comes in (P32).

Working with academics for the promotion of e-books

Academics can also play a critical role in promoting e-books to their students but not all of them participate in that process. A total of 13 interviewees mentioned that academics recommend e-book titles to their students whilst eight interviewees stated that academic staff add links of e-books on the VLE reading lists. For instance:

I would say that most of them (academics) do (recommend e-books to the students) [...] In my department a lot of the academics are involved in teaching our courses overseas in places like Malaysia or Hong Kong. So, e-books obviously are perfect for those courses. They are quite proactive I think regarding e-books (P23).

If we spent some money on a particular resource we would ask the staff to promote it as well. Some of them do (P26).

One participant pointed out that some academics demonstrate e-book titles in their classes and two others that academics add information about e-books on the VLE such as units on how to use e-books and other e-resources:

Some specific e-books are used at certain points on the course and they are actually get demonstrated by the person who is teaching them the module rather than by me. Students do get introduced to some very specific titles where they are going to be doing exercises based on one particular title which could be a reference work (P8).

we developed Blackboard courses with academic staff in Life Sciences. So, there were a number of Blackboard units which all of the undergraduates had to do which would tell them about e-resources in the library and how to use e-journals, databases and e-books (P1).

On the other hand, some subject librarians acknowledged that they were not aware whether academics recommend e-book titles to the students or not, and whether links to e-books are added by the academic staff.

Future plans for promotional tools for e-books and e-resources

In addition to the tools already in use as summarised above, there is evidence of staff being involved in investigating new promotional media and working on implementing new ways to increase the e-book uptake. These include: development of an information literacy project, use of online chat, promotion of e-books in course committee meetings, provision of a paper guide for e-books, marketing at the shelf level with the use of CD cases, improvement of information literacy sessions, development of lists with all the new e-books acquired, and drop-in sessions on e-books. Whilst several of these tools are already in use in some libraries, these suggestions for improvement, whilst not always being novel, do indicate a commitment to innovation and development in the

promotion of e-books. The quotes below refer to those new means of promotion as they were described by the interviewees:

We don't have online chat but that is interesting because we are looking at using points to do online chat with our users. So, that might come but it is really aimed at supplementing help desk services. It aims at helping people to use information, answer queries and give advice (P13).

I will be able to do that when I buy more e-book titles of our short loan collection and promote those in course committee meetings (P14).

We intend to have paper guides, which are called Crib sheets, but one hasn't been written yet for e-books (P2).

[...] we came up with the idea of putting a CD case on the shelf to have the information on that to say that it is available electronically. So, what we are trying to do is to market it at the self level because students often don't use the library catalogue to look in a way that we would want them to (P23).

Next year we are going to cut the inductions down to 10 minutes and really promote this user education session. That's going to come in maybe three weeks into the course when the students are settled down and they've got the first assignment [...] we get them searching things in the catalogue, we get them going into the databases, going into the e-book collections and searching (P23).

I want to highlight the ones we've managed to acquire during the last 12 months and maybe put a list together just so people to be aware of what it is becoming available (P26).

Make drop-in sessions available through out the year [...] we could cover things like e-books or e-journals. So, staff or students can just come in and they could have a demonstration and then they can have time to look at things themselves (P32).

Issues and challenges in promoting e-books

A variety of issues and challenges concerning the promotion of e-books were raised by the interviewees. Table III summarizes the issues and challenges raised the most during the interviews. Issues and challenges are discussed further below under the following five themes: librarians, e-book availability, OPACs, user education and users, and academics.

Issues and challenges	Number of interviewees
Lack of time	8
Raising of expectations	8
Lack of e-book stock in the library	6
Accessibility and use issues	4
Budget constraints	3
OPAC	3
E-books are quite new	2
Getting people interested	2
Lack of availability in the market	2
Little time provided for user education	2

Table III.
Issues and challenges in promoting e-books

Librarians. A number of challenges were mentioned that centred around the librarian's role. As is evident from Table III, lack of time is considered to be the largest issue in terms of e-book promotion. Other issues and challenges were generally mentioned only by one or two people but this list indicates the potentially wide list of concerns:

- budget constraints;
- the constant struggle to get the reading lists from the academics;
- encouraging library staff to buy e-book titles;
- lack of a coherent marketing strategy;
- lack of understanding about teaching and learning issues on the part of librarians;
- lack of a VLE area for e-books;
- librarians' assumptions about how much people actually know what e-books are and how they can be used are not always well grounded;
- striking the balance between the delivery of print and e-books;
- creating a culture of promotion;
- no evaluation of e-book events; and
- concerns that the promotion of e-books can undermine perceptions of the value of print books.

E-book availability. An important issue that the participants raised refers to the lack of e-book availability in the market (2) and in the library (6) as well.

If the books which are heavily used by all students were available electronically, I would do a lot more (P20).

One of the issues partially is still the availability [...] So, when you are marketing something you have always to be careful because most journals are now available electronically, but e-books can look great but not all the titles are available as e-books (P7).

The main thing is that there isn't enough stock. You are trying to push something that isn't generally available for the students to use (P5).

OPAC. The need for MARC records on the OPAC for individual titles was addressed by three librarians. The respondent P6 stressed that:

We've learned that some titles are not used a lot unless they are available on the catalogue, so MARC records are absolutely essential.

User education and users. Several librarians expressed their concerns about "raising users' expectations". One stated that:

One thing is that [e-book promotion] raises people's expectations especially when the people find that they cannot print them out.

Another difficulty is getting people interested (P18 and P30).

and the fact that:

[...] e-books are quite new (P7, P29).

A few participants referred to accessibility and use issues for the users such as the fact that there are:

[...] different means of accessing [...] different platforms and models (P7).

and that:

[...] people are disappointed because they cannot print them out (P19).

Also:

[...] people can be put off by e-books because of accessibility issues (P16).

Little time provided for user education concerned the two respondents:

It is partly getting time with some user groups. There are some user groups that we are getting very little time with (P6).

Academics. With respect to issues and challenges for the promotion of e-books, a small number of the participants raised some aspects related to academics. These following were each mentioned by one person:

- academic staff do not recommend e-book titles to students;
- it would be helpful if academics selected e-book titles and add them on their reading list;
- difficulty in convincing academics that librarians can offer help and training in the use of e-books; and
- the uptake of e-books is greater amongst students than amongst staff.

One respondent referred to concerns expressed by academics regarding the potential impact of digital resources on learning:

I think the biggest challenge is perhaps that there is a growing concern amongst academics about the whole issue of instrumental learning, plagiarism and to a certain extent there is a developing concern about issues of reading online and changing behaviours in an online environment (P9).

Discussion

The four key themes that emerge from the findings of this study are:

- (1) taking a strategic approach to promotion and marketing;
- (2) managing tensions between promotion and supply;
- (3) innovation in promotional tools; and
- (4) influencing word-of-mouth.

Taking a strategic approach to promotion and marketing

Our findings suggested that many of the respondents in this study appreciated the need to communicate their service developments to customers/users. They appreciate that people will not use services if they do not know that they exist! Further, when asked to talk about promotion tools many mentioned a number of such tools. There is therefore evidence of marketing activity. The key tools mentioned, however, were not specifically marketing tools – they were part of service delivery and points of customer contact. On

one hand, there is a positive message here; there is a possibility that respondents have embedded marketing into service delivery and understand the relationship between the two. On the other hand, further research on marketing and customer orientations of staff would be necessary in order to establish more definitively whether this is the case, especially in the light of Singh's (2009) findings that a strong market orientation is associated with higher levels of customer satisfaction.

When asked about their future plans for marketing of e-books, there was some evidence of innovation, and the adoption of good practice from elsewhere. Again, this demonstrates a reflective approach to marketing.

Overall, then, there is evidence of marketing actions, and some evidence of innovation and reflection on those actions. However, what is plainly absent is an organised and strategic approach to promotion and marketing. This finding is consistent with that of Information Automation (2009, p. 52), who found that: "promotion of e-books is rarely undertaken as part of (a) long term planned approach". As every marketing textbook explains, action without strategy often leads to uncoordinated and sometime conflicting actions, and inefficient use of resources. More specifically, this is a recurrent theme in the limited research on marketing in academic libraries. Wenhong (2006) found many marketing activities but no strategy, leading at the operational level to lack of planning, duplication and omissions. MaccDonald *et al.* (2008) suggest that an organised cohesive marketing strategy can have a positive effect on the promotion of library services. Finally, Neuhaus and Snowden (2003) suggest that alignment between marketing strategy and plans and the library strategic plan is essential, to effective prioritisation, consistency of message and effective communication.

Managing tensions between promotion and supply

Neuhaus and Snowden (2003) mention concerns amongst their respondents in three areas:

- (1) making time to undertake marketing;
- (2) dealing with the consequences of increased work load as a result of the success of a marketing strategy; and related to this,
- (3) raising expectations and being unable to deliver against those expectations.

All of these concerns were echoed by our respondents.

It is important to recognise and respond to these concerns. There are three possible strands in such a response:

- (1) Acknowledge that such tensions are an inherent aspect of public sector service delivery, where there is typically a lag in increased use or importance of a service and increase in the resources available to deliver that service, and develop strategies for managing this situation.
- (2) Organise a coherent programme of promotion, which is aligned with the resources allocation plan and strategic direction of the library.
- (3) Undertake internal marketing, in order to inculcate a customer orientation and a service ethos throughout an organization (Barnes *et al.*, 2004; Piercy, 1998). Internal marketing could play an important role in engaging library staff with the development of new services, and empower them towards more effective

In the context of e-books, librarians justifiably have some concerns about not raising expectations about access to e-books, because publishers have a significant role in determining the availability of, and licensing arrangements associated with, e-books. As with other e-resources, librarians are intermediaries in the information or document supply chain, and this does present challenges. But, then most retailers are also dependent on their supply chain for the timely delivery of quality products at the right price; they manage this situation by managing their supply chain in a variety of different ways. Whilst libraries have been doing this both individually and in consortia for many years, there is perhaps scope for developing more discussion of practice and theoretical models to promote understanding of the issues associated with managing links between supply chain issues (such as licensing) and user-side issues such as marketing and service delivery.

Innovation in promotional tools

When invited to talk about the tools that were used to promote e-books, respondents focussed on tools or communication approaches that are well established in academic libraries for promotion of library resources and services and for “educating” potential users. The key promotion tools mentioned were library websites, information literacy sessions, OPACs, induction session, in-person instruction, and e-mails. This is consistent with Information Automation’s (2009) findings, which emphasise the role of web sites and training in the promotion of e-books.

Key amongst the digital communication channels mentioned are web sites and e-mail. As discussed earlier, much of the recent research into marketing in academic libraries has focussed on web sites, and there is an acknowledgement that websites are important for promoting library services (e.g. Gardner *et al.*, 2008). However, Kaur (2009), amongst others, found that library web sites are not being fully utilised as a marketing tool. It might be beneficial to undertake further investigation of the use of library web sites and their place in a broader marketing communications strategy.

A particular weakness in Malaysian libraries related to engagement with users through Digital Reference Services, chat and web forums (Kaur, 2009). Similarly, in this study, reference to digital communication channels other than web sites or e-mail was remarkably sparse. Some respondents mentioned and discussed the role of VLEs in promoting e-books, and a couple mentioned announcement boards and blogs, but there was no mention of Web 2.0 tools. There is an increasing interest in the potential of Web 2.0 tools in academic libraries for engaging with learners (e.g. Liu, 2008; Maness, 2006).

Overall, it is important that academic libraries manage their digital presence with attention to both service delivery and quality, and marketing communication and reputation. In this process, they need to continue to innovate and to take advantage of the opportunities offered by new technologies.

Influencing word-of-mouth

Throughout the interviews conducted in this research there are various occasional and oblique allusions to word-of-mouth. According to Silverman (2001, p. 25), word-of-mouth marketing is:

[...] communication about products and services between people who are perceived to be independent of the company providing the product or service, in a medium perceived to be independent of the company [...] These communications can be conversations, or just one-way testimonials [...]

In these interviews, word-of-mouth was mentioned explicitly as a promotion tool, by only three respondents, but evidence of awareness of the importance of word-of-mouth lies in comments regarding the role of academics in promoting e-books to their students. Similarly, Information Automation (2009) suggests that through championing of e-books through linking from VLE modules, reading lists, and verbal recommendations, academics play a critical and complementary role in promoting e-textbooks. Other studies (e.g. Urquhart and Rowley, 2007) also indicate that academics have a pivotal role in influencing student information behaviour. However, our respondents indicated that whilst they acknowledged the critical role that academics could play in promoting e-books, the level of engagement was variable.

Word-of-mouth communication is often neglected, even by marketing professionals; they mistakenly assume that it is difficult to manage and often under-value its impact. But word-of-mouth amounts to what is perceived as unbiased, and tailored recommendation, and therefore, often very convincing. Organizations who understand how to influence and capitalise on word-of-mouth are able to take advantage of the links between users to protect and promote their services and reputation, and to understand their various stakeholders. Sweeney *et al.* (2008) suggest that word-of-mouth is particularly valuable within professional services environments, where credence qualities play a critical role in consumers' choices. Alire (2007) describes a word-of-mouth marketing programme managed by the University of New Mexico. Key in this process were: agreement on a brand message and, managing the process of getting key people to spread the message using word-of-mouth marketing.

The increasing interest in online or digital word-of-mouth and recommendation is also of considerable relevance to academic libraries. Dellarocas (2003) suggests that digital word-of-mouth has important implications for brand building, customer acquisition and retention, product development, and quality assurance whilst Trusov *et al.* (2009) found that word-of-mouth referrals on a social networking site had greater impact than traditional marketing activity.

Although rarely discussed as such, and certainly not explicitly managed, it seems that word-of-mouth may be an embedded aspect of the marketing communication activities of academic libraries. There is considerable scope for developing more explicit strategies in this area, to enhance communication with both academics and students, using both digital and non-digital word-of-mouth.

Conclusions and recommendations

This article has explored the approach to marketing and promotion of e-book services adopted by academic libraries. The most significant finding to emerge from this research is the dichotomy between strategy and practice. None of the libraries adopted a strategic approach to marketing or promotion of e-books, yet, on the other hand, most interviewees were able to point to a range of tools used to promote e-books, and some had plans for improvements in their promotion activities. The most frequently cited of these tools were integral to library practice, and included the library web site, information literacy sessions, induction sessions, and OPACs. Some respondents

reported on the use of VLEs, blogs, word-of-mouth, flyers, and a range of other tools. It was seen to be important to work with academics in the promotion of e-books. Discussion of future plans and challenges indicate an awareness of some of the difficulties, coupled with a willingness to engage in incremental innovations.

The Discussion section contextualises the findings of this study, in relation to other research on marketing in academic libraries, and on this basis there are grounds to suspect that the approach adopted to the marketing of e-books is typical of the approach adopted to the marketing of services in academic libraries. This would suggest that academic libraries have a *laissez-faire* approach to marketing grounded in a philosophy that the promotion of collection is secondary to the provision of information access (Information Automation, 2009). In a digital information age in which the ease of acquiring information on the web has created proactive information consumers, with experiences shaped by search engines and commercial web sites, this could be a recipe for disaster.

Whilst there are many actions that could contribute to improvements in this situation, we propose that practitioners should accord priority to:

- Developing a marketing strategy and a supporting marketing communications strategy in order to coordinate marketing actions, and to ensure that all staff have shared views on key aspects such as audience, message, channels objectives.
- Recognizing and proactively managing the inherent tensions between promotion and marketing and the capacity to respond to increased demand, moderating promotion accordingly, and keeping staff engaged through effective internal marketing.
- Continuing to innovate in relation to the range of promotion tools in use, and reflecting on the integration of service delivery and marketing communication through the digital channel. Particular attention should be paid to the use of promotional tools that facilitate two-way communication with users, and an appreciation of the different roles of different tools for different user groups should be developed.
- Taking a strategic approach to influencing word-of-mouth, both digital and face-to-face, as a means of engaging and communicating with academics and students, and integrating word-of-mouth into a wider marketing communications strategy.

As e-books become an increasingly significant information resource for learners, it will be important that further research is conducted to inform practice in this area. There is scope for more research into the promotion and marketing of e-books, as well as into a range of other aspects of e-book management, such as their impact on the delivery of the library service, access and availability, metadata and its management, negotiations with publishers and licensing, and the embedding of e-books in teaching and learning processes.

Given the paucity of research into marketing in academic libraries, there is plenty of scope for further research, which would both inform practice and contribute to understanding of and knowledge on marketing in libraries. Currently there is a strong, and welcome emphasis on understanding evolving information behaviour of the digital information consumer. This, however, needs to be complemented by research on

strategies and approaches associated with responding to, communicating with, or influencing such behaviour. Studying information behaviour in the absence of knowledge of marketing strategies, is tantamount to developing an understanding of consumer behaviour in commercial settings, but declining to take an interest either as practitioners or researchers in marketing strategy or actions.

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