MARKETING CD-ROM SERVICES AT THE UST LIBRARY, KUMASI (GHANA)

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ABSTRACT

Compact Disc Read Only Memory (CD-ROM) technology seems "custom-made" for the developing world because of its high-density storage medium, durability, low manufacturing cost and portability. A single disc can hold still images, motion, video, audio and digital data. Information services and products need to be marketed to ensure that potential as well as actual users are reached. CD-ROM services ought to be marketed all the more because the technology has been introduced to the developing world only in the early 1990's. Two bibliographic databases- the Compendix Engineering Index and ISI's six Speciality Citation Indexes were used. The university community was introduced to the service in June 1993. As wide a publicity as possible was given to all the academic departments through notices and handbills. Promotion strategies used included student orientation sessions, presentations/talks at seminars, speaking to potential users, providing group and individual SDI, and specialized digests of citations and abstracts. The gains are many and are shared by both the provider of the service and the user.

Keywords: *CD-ROM services, information technology, information services*

INTRODUCTION

Introduced in the early 1980's CD-ROM (Compact Disc Read Only Memory) is simply another mass storage device utilised by personal computer for storing a wide variety of data in digitised format. It is now possible to obtain practically any type of subject matter on CD-ROM in the form of full text, i.e., complete issues of a magazine, or the daily copy of a newspaper; bibliographic indices which may include an abstract but always provide enough information for the user to locate the source document. CD-ROMs contain lists of data such as telephone numbers and multimedia which contain a mixture of the above data formats, as well as graphics, and perhaps video and sound.

Examples of these database types are respectively: Financial Times, CABCD, Telephone Directory and Compton's Multimedia Encyclopaedia.

MARKETING THE LIBRARY SERVICES

Like any other type of service institution, a library is a service for information users. This implies that the librarian is taking a proactive role, trying to determine what information the users need and supplying it. While all libraries will continue to have some archival role, it is the dissemination of information that will establish the credibility and reputation of the library and will be most useful to the user. Information marketing thus involves satisfying the needs of the customer or simply being customer-oriented. The obvious answer to the question "why market your library" is to increase the usage of the resources in the library. No matter how good you think your services are, they are of no use if nobody knows about them and uses them. In addition, the budget of the library may well be linked to the usage of the library. Therefore informing more people about your services creates greater demand which ultimately leads to an expanding library budget and expanding library.

A second reason for marketing library services is to fulfil user needs. There should be a symbiotic relationship between the library and the user. Fulfilling the users needs gives satisfaction to both the user and the librarian, and greatly enhances the status and credibility of the librarian. In the case of UST Library, premium is put on marketing CD-ROM service because (1) the technology is new, and (2) more importantly, the potential users of the library view the library as having very little to offer.

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Getting set for marketing involves knowing 3 things. First, your capabilities – (information resources, human resources (number of staff and training) and equipment (PC, photocopier, etc). Second, who your clients are and third, the types of services currently offered and those that can be added in future.

MARKETING CD-ROM SERVICE

This modern technology was introduced to the university community in June 1993, after the American Association for the Advancement of Science (AAAS) had donated six discs (1988-1992) of the Compendix Engineering Index to the Library. Earlier in January of the same year, the Assistant Librarian in charge took part in a 2 – day workshop on how to market CD-ROM services. Our CD-ROM workstation consists of a Mitac PC (IBM compatible), a CD-ROM player (Hitachi model CDR 1700S) and an Epson 1050 dot matrix printer. It is located on the ground floor of the Library's three-storey building. By sheer accident the workstation is within the Database Development Unit, a newly created section responsible for the application of modern information handling techniques to the Library's housekeeping functions. The workstation is thus not in a conspicuous place, a handicap which requires that users be adequately guided to the place.

The workstation opens each day except weekends and holidays from 7.30 am to 4.30 pm with one hour break between 12.30 pm and 1.30 pm. We charge fifty cedis per page of printout.

At present there are two bibliographic databases – the Compendix Engineering Index which covers all engineering subjects including Chemical, Civil, Electronic, Marine, Mechanical, Municipal, and Agricultural Engineering. Allied subjects covered by this index include Applied Physics Bioengineering, Materials Science, and Light and Optical Technology. The discs span 1988 to March 1993. In September 1993, the Institute of Scientific Information (ISI) sent us demonstration discs of their six Speciality, Citation Indexes on Biochemistry and Biophysics, Biotechnology, Biomedical Engineering, Chemistry, Materials Science, and Neuroscience. We knew at the outset who our

clients were – lecturers, researchers and students. So the new service was given as wide a publicity as possible through notices and handbills distributed to all the academic departments of the University. Copies were pasted on the notice board in the Main Administration block and some were left on the Post Room counter. In the Library, copies of the notices were pasted on the main glass door and some handbills left on the circulation desk for users who came to the Library. The University Relations Department was also sent a copy of the announcement for publication in the University's Newsletter.

All these happened two weeks to the 14th of June, the day the service actually started. With the exception of one or two people, the entire professional staff of the Library, including the University Librarian, was taken through demonstration sessions at the workstation. Promotion strategies so far used include orientation sessions in the library, presentation/talks at conferences/seminars, speaking to potential users, promoting group SDI service, and producing specialized digests of citations and abstracts from the electronic databases. At the beginning of each academic year, the Library runs orientation courses for fresh students. These students are scheduled to visit the Library for the purpose of creating awareness about the existence of the Library. During such visits they call at the workstation and the opportunity is seized to introduce our service through a short demonstration. Students, usually accompanied by a lecturer, are given a brief talk on the potential of the CD-ROM specially for a developing country like Ghana. They are allowed to ask questions and then suggest topics for a search. A printout of the records retrieved are given out without charge. At one such session by a group of Pharmacy students the lecturer was extremely delighted to get information on his search topic "Coumarins". He promised to call back without fail. A professor in Anatomy (from the UST School of Medical Sciences) on a guided tour wanted to know what we have on our CD-ROM databases. When he asked for a search for "Brain" on the Engineering database we retrieved over 300 records. After going through a few screens he picked on about five which were printed out for him. With much delight he

remarked that his visit had been "worth more than sitting over a bottle of beer" and promised calling again.

The Department of Chemistry organized a seminar on Infrared Spectroscopy (IRS) at which a short talk was presented on the capabilities of the CD-ROM. It took about 15 minutes and printouts on IRS were distributed to the seminar participants. A few questions were allowed. The fact that the seminar coordinator readily agreed to include the talk on their agenda was itself a morale booster. Potential users are also spoken to during normal daily meetings because it provides an opportunity to answer questions, discuss services, and receive on-the-spot feedback. Most of the potential users talked to are surprised that the news has not got to them despite the wide publicity by way of announcement to all the academic departments. With an academic staff strength of about one thousand, it would be almost impossible given the present resources to provide individual SDI profiles. The way around this is to provide group SDI services. A special form has been designed and sent to all the academic departments asking for a maximum of three topics of current research. The response has not been encouraging as only about ten out of the fifty or so departments have completed and returned the forms after a period of three months. To compensate this poor response the latest issue of the Annual Report of the Vice-Chancellor which contains the current research works by the various departments was used. It is anticipated that a database of the current research of each Department will be built and used for the group SDI services for the departments.

Occasionally title printouts have been sent to academic staff based on articles they have published in the University Journal. Additionally, a few lectures have had printouts sent to them based on their personal profiles. The production of specialised digests of citations and abstracts from the electronic databases has also been introduced, the two outstanding ones being "Current Titles in Lipid Research" produced from the Chemistry Citation Index and sent to the Department of Biochemistry and "Abstracts in Medicinal Chemistry" also from the Chemistry Citation

Index which was sent to the Department of Pharmaceutical Chemistry. Titles on developing countries have been sent to all the academic departments soon after receiving the latest update of the Engineering Index. Here too the response has not been very encouraging as only one out of the 50 departments requested printouts based on this title list.

These proactive initiatives have paid off well as borne out by our daily statistics and the number of requests. First, users are required to complete a search form that asks for their department, status, and topic for the search. These forms act as input for our statistics. In the five months since the CD-ROM service was introduced the number of requests has been rising. Within the first quarter (June-October 1993) the total number of requests was 17 (seventeen). In the second quarter starting November 1993, there were 16 requests in November alone with two coming from the University of Cape Coast – a lecturer and his graduate student. The lecturer whose speciality is Inorganic Chemistry got introduced to our services when he was on a visit. His request came one month later and the printout that included his own articles, was the heaviest so far in the life of the service. Analysis of the simple records kept for the searchers indicate that the talk given at the Chemistry Department seminar on Infrared Spectroscopy paid off well. This is because a large proportion of search requests, 11 out of 30 (for November/December 7th) came from that Department. None of the lecturers at the seminar had visited the workstation though, but it is believed they might have directed their students there.

The second group of high users of our service comes from the Faculty of Pharmacy. They constitute 15 out of the 30 requests. Apparently they got the message through the production of that specialised service "Abstracts on Medicinal Chemistry". The product has also sent two groups of students accompanied by their lecturers on tour to the workstation. At the moment hardly any day goes by without a request for a search. Because our workstation is not a dedicated one but is used also for database creation and word processing we have had to batch CD-ROM search requests and ask the users to call the next day for their results. Apart

from easing the pressure of work it allows a search to be conducted using all the databases that might appear useful. Thirdly the user does not have to wait too long for search results which she/he has to preview before requesting a print out.

SUSTAINING THE SERVICE

It is one thing attracting a user to a service and another sustaining the user's interest for him/her to continue patronising the service. Consequently we intend to get a dedicated workstation to be able to meet the anticipated growth in the number of users of our CD-ROM services. In order to enhance the end products of our services training in DTP (Desktop Publishing) will be sought to make and package our printouts in more attractive formats. Lastly to cater for potential users of agriculture and allied disciplines support is being sought from the CTA (The Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Co-operation) to provide us with equipment, training, and databases. The problem of document delivery is also not forgotten but for now we are relying on local inter-library loans.

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