

The university library as information broker to industry and commerce

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Abstract

The majority of libraries still provide the majority of their services for free. But fee-based information services attached to non-profit making institutions such as libraries is not a novel concept any longer. The information explosion has brought many changes to, amongst others, the university library and at present industry and commerce rely heavily on the expertise offered by the staff of these libraries.

This paper does not propose to address any ideological issues of "fee versus free" but would rather focus on the following:

- 1 the need for industry and commerce for utilizing the university library and its resources;

- 2 the university library as information broker with reference to information skills complemented with specialized subject knowledge and experience;
- 3 the organization of the wide range of services offered and the pricing of these services; and
- 4 a short, but detailed description of INFOBANK, a dynamic and successful regional fee-based information service to industry and commerce at the library of the University of Stellenbosch, South Africa.

A university library can therefore be even more effective in promoting access to information by making it available in the community, albeit for a price. Libraries interested in establishing such fee-based services should nevertheless be aware of the pitfalls associated with the creation and management of these services. Knowledge of the latter will undoubtedly help establish a programme that serves the needs of clients whilst contributing towards the overall image of the parent institution.

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This paper does not propose to address any ideological issues of "fee versus free" but would rather focus on the following:

- the need of industry and commerce for utilizing the university library and its resources (albeit according to a pre-determined price structure);
- the university library as information broker with reference to information skills complemented with specialized subject knowledge and experience; and
- the organization of the wide range of services offered and the pricing of these services.

I The need of industry and commerce for utilizing a university library and its resources

There has been a marked increase of awareness by end-users in industry and commerce of the importance of information as a tool for competitiveness in the marketplace. This indicates that an appetite for information has been whetted and that the requisite that a high level of service be offered, must be met. In response to this demand many academic libraries have decided to offer information services specifically marked for industry and commerce, in order to afford such potential users the opportunity of employing the wealth of information sources at the library's disposal.

II The university library as information broker

The university library is undoubtedly in the unique position of being able to act as a resourceful information broker. Collections are always interdisciplinary in nature but also specialized in order to support a wide range of educational and research activities. A high standard is generally maintained in establishing collections that boast coverage of a wide spectre of knowledge. Manual and computerized bibliographic aids abound and enhance the range of services offered by the university library. The services are as varied as the experience of the staff offering them. Some of the services involve information skills which can be categorized as the production, organization and retrieval of information (Pretorius,

1989, p. 32). Others are related to skills which have a high information content. Obviously these skills are complemented by subject expertise.

The possibilities for offering valued and extensive fee-based information services to clients in industry and commerce are virtually endless. Some of these services, seen within the context of the above-mentioned categories (Crawford, 1988, p.12) are the following:

(i) The production of information

Research

This comprises research from published sources. Traditional library skills are employed - corresponding to the research carried out by special libraries. It may entail manual or online searching, or a combination of both. The extent of the research to be carried out as well as the methods used and the aids utilized will be determined by the nature of the request. Simple requests can be satisfied by searching for relevant facts in indices and compiling a brief bibliography. In-depth searching will be executed online. The skill of the broker will, however, be displayed in the skilful combination of manual and computerized techniques and ultimately in the presentation of the results of the research. University librarians are skilled in presenting such results in a style which is useful and meaningful to the client.

Abstracting

A synopsis of an article or document saves the effort of reading an entire article and allows hurried and busy clients to select only highly relevant material. Such abstracts may accordingly be included in an online database or published information service.

Translating

Information brokers should not hesitate to use their language skills - there is an increased demand for translating services because many databases are international in coverage. Offering such facilities can only add value to the abstracting and research services explained previously.

Bibliographies

In response to clients' requests for "reading lists" on a given topic, lists are compiled by searching a whole range of information sources, notably online.

Current awareness

This involves monitoring a subject to keep a client aware of new information. Repackaging of the information should be provided should a client request this - but once again in a manner which will be useful to the client.

(ii) The organization of information

Consultancy

Some information brokers offer consultancy services and a common scenario is an evaluation of information needs. Impartial and objective information requirements are established and recommendations made for improving existing measures for securing information.

Document delivery

A document delivery service entails supplying clients with copies of packaged information. Apparently this service is very much in demand all over and should of necessity be preceded by verifying bibliographic details and establishing where the document can be obtained. It will at times be necessary to employ the interlibrary loan system, but photocopies of journal articles should suffice (Crawford, 1988, p. 13-14).

Before discussing the organization of services thus rendered, mention must be made of a number of factors that govern the nature and extent of the services:

- the information needs of a library's primary users' corps will affect the services that can ultimately be offered to industry and commerce;

- the number of secondary users who would like to make use of a library's resources: large numbers of clients might cause a decline in the variety of services offered in order to afford equal opportunities to all;
- existing restrictive measures that curb services to primary users might or might not be applied to fee-paying clients;
- a realistic price structure should prevail;
- the availability of sufficient staff and physical amenities are of paramount importance; and
- the existence of other libraries and information services in the same area should make the university library aware of the pitfalls of unnecessary duplication (Pretorius, 1989, p. 39-41).

III The organization and management of fee-based services in the university library

A very important consideration concerning these services constitute the decision whether fee-based services to clients in industry and commerce should be integrated fully or partially with services rendered to the university library's primary users' group. A number of possibilities exist, each exhibiting certain advantages and disadvantages.

(i) A separate and independant department for external clients

Such a department will be characterized by an individual budget, staff, a small core collection, separate service area and unique services rendered (Swanepoel, 1987, p.29). This model thereby excludes the possibility of primary users being affected adversely and hindered in their own quests for information - an important advantage. It furthermore ensures a special relationship between staff and clients, especially as staff members will necessarily be familiar with the information needs and similar problems associated with industry and commerce. Unfortunately an organizational model as described cannot function wholly independantly from the parent organization (university library) and departments such as cataloguing, interlibrary loans and reference sources will have to be utilized - and it will be answerable to the library's top management.

(ii) Fully integrated services to external clients

Integrated services imply that outside users make use of exactly the same services and staff expertise offered to the primary user population (Swanepoel, 1987, p.31). No duplication will therefore occur concerning services rendered, the material and facilities associated with information retrieval. In actual practice, though, this will mean that staff members will carry an additional work load and have the added responsibility of directing their loyalties

correctly - who comes first, their primary users or fee-paying clients?

(iii) A separate department operating in close association with other staff members, departments and service areas

Organizing fee-based services in this manner will obviously involve the university library to a greater extent than the model explained in the first case (Swanepoel, 1987, p.33). A major advantage is the fact that though autonomous, the information service will nevertheless be as fortunate as to rely on the aid and support of other departments, especially acquisitions, interlibrary loans, financial administration and secretarial services. Furthermore none of the usual library functions will be impeded as could occur in a fully integrated service. The only real disadvantage can possibly be ascribed to a demand for separate physical amenities.

(iv) An integrated model using separate staff

Lastly, the information service can be structured in a way that will entail outside users utilizing the same services and service areas as the primary users, the difference being that supporting staff will be responsible for maintaining the administrative side of the service (book-keeping and accounts) (Swanepoel, 1987, p.34). Once again the university library will be supplying the wealth of information and expert services at its disposal without impeding information of tasks; there will be no need of time-consuming duties that can be taken care of by secretarial staff.

As mentioned in the previous section, a number of factors will influence the decision to be made as regards the most effective organizational model. The number of potential clients, and the extent of their information needs and the availability of sufficient resources will have to be analysed thoroughly in order to create a viable and dynamic fee-based information service to industry and commerce.

Finally, the topic of fees (pricing) is integral to this revolutionized concept of library service, namely asking the client to pay for information. However, establishing and managing a fee-based information service within the parameters of an academic library funded by a parent organization (the university), can become a grave concern unless approached wisely. Fortunately many excellent articles have been written to guide the wary and uninitiated, the golden rule being not to charge a token fee which seems to indicate that the services are worth something but not a whole lot. As a practical example of establishing "values" for fee-based services to industry and commerce in a university library, the charges of INFOBANK, J.S.Gericke Library, University of Stellenbosch, South Africa are set out below:

INFOBANK CHARGES

MEMBERSHIP

Category 1: \$325 per year

Included are an entrance card for the Gericke Library

5 hours staff time

lending privileges; 5 books for 4 weeks

contents pages of 5 journal titles

ADDITIONAL CHARGES

-	Lending privileges - per book	\$16,00 pa
-	Staff time per hour	\$20,00
-	Book/Journal article requested on National Interlending Scheme	\$7,00
-	Article requested per fax	\$10,00
-	Journal article from overseas	\$16,00
-	Patent from overseas	\$26,00
-	Book requested from overseas	\$33,00
-	Information search on international databases plus references printed periodically, eg. monthly	\$25,00 \$1,00 each
-	Information search on local databases, eg. SABINET	\$8,00
-	Photocopies per page	\$0,12
-	Copies of contents pages per journal title per year	\$8,00

- Fax to a destination in South Africa \$1,00
per page
- Periodical list with cover \$26,00
- Periodical list without cover \$20,00
- Bookings for the
 - lecture hall, Gericke Library \$49,00
 - De Necker seminar room, Gericke Library \$16,00
 (A booking is a morning, afternoon or evening,
or a part thereof)
- Connect time when linked to the US Library
database via a modem, per hour \$23,00

Fortunately professional librarians are changing their attitudes about the profession of librarianship and their perception of the clientele they serve. But most encouraging of all is the significant fact that fee-based information services play a stimulating role in helping librarians reconsider their relationship with clients and rethink the value of their work and the services provided.

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