Library Visibility on the Web : A Case Study of the Indian University Libraries

Fayaz Ahmad Loan[1]

Abstract:

Purpose – The main purpose of the present study is to identify the role of the university and library websites in marketing the library collection, services and products to their clientele.

Design / methodology / approach – The study relies heavily on website exploration. A total of 18 university websites, in which interestingly 9 were professional and 9 academic, from the three Indian states- Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu Kashmir were explored from June 20- June 30, 2011. First, the university homepage was surveyed to check the visibility of library and its services like OPAC on the website. Then the second attempt was to identify the libraries with visible or hidden links on institutional home pages have their own websites. Then the library homepages were examined. The libraries which hadn't their own websites or were not accessible were omitted for further study.

Findings – It is revealed that the university websites have failed to publicize the library products and services as only half of the websites have visible library links and almost links to OPAC and electronic resources are fully ignored. The half of the libraries has their own websites and through these websites library & information managers aware users about their collection, electronic sources and services but require to provide online support services like 'ask a librarian' and 'digital reference services' to users.

Research limitations – The study is limited to the university libraries of the three northern most Indian states and therefore generalization is to be cautioned.

Practical implications – The library & information managers can learn many important lessons from the study regarding designing and modifying institutional and library websites besides marketing of library sources, services and products through the websites.

Originality / value – The study is original research evaluating the role of the university and library websites in marketing and utilising information products, sources and services of libraries.

Keywords University libraries, Library websites, Library visibility, Web marketing, Internet marketing

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

"Invisible treasure is as good as the visible garbage"

Marketing is a journey of product from darkness to light (unknown to known). It is a management technique of making invisible things visible. Marketing is basically a technique of business (profit) organisations, however, the non-profit organisations like library & information centres also apply this technique to make libraries, their products and services more visible. The motive of marketing in libraries is not to earn profit but to attract more users to utilise their valuable products and services mostly free of cost. The returns aren't measured in terms of money or profit but in terms of user satisfaction.

1. *Documentation Officer, Centre of Central Asian Studies, University of Kashmir, J&K*

Library & information managers (LIMs) since the long past have been made efforts to publicise their products and services. The library & information managers have well understood that library resources and services are of no use if not known by the academic community. In my opinion libraries apply two types of marketing techniques- internal marketing and external marketing. The internal marketing strategies are done within the four walls of libraries like displaying of book jackets and new arrivals whereas the external marketing technique means advertising library products and services outside the four walls of libraries. The external marketing is considered as the real marketing technique with basic aim to take the library products and services to the door steps and now under the finger tips of users. The traditional vehicles for marketing libraries included press and news releases, annual reports, posters, brochures, fact sheets, direct mails, and newsletters (Weingand, 1999). The other means of marketing include advertising through radio/television, articles, demonstrations, exhibitions, etc.

Marketing in the Web age

Internet has provided a challenge as well as opportunity to library & information managers. It has widened the channels of marketing for libraries to become more vibrant and visible on one hand and on the other has taken a huge market share of libraries. There are evidences of departure from total reliance on print based information to the use of electronic and digital techniques in information storage and access (Agalo, 1998). The modern information seekers visit the physical library less, rarely use library websites and mostly begin searches with a commercial search engine Kenneway (2007). The study by OCLC in 2005 reveals that a majority of people use search engines rather than library resources for seeking information. This study also reported that only 2 percent of university students begin their research by using a library website! Ward and Mervar (2003) stated that a library's web site is a powerful gateway that can provide information to patrons, but often users access Google or other sources for information even though library web sites provide more authentic, reliable and organised information and internet sources than the "general" internet. The phenomenon of users preferring to use search engines to find information on the internet rather than library resources is partly contributed by the fact that libraries have failed to market their services and attract users to the library (Fialkoff, 2006). The success of any library is dependent upon numerous factors; among these marketing the library is indispensable.

The Web technology is a key in supporting effective marketing, and can be used by libraries to increase visibility, to raise levels of information literacy and to deliver a personalized service that anticipates the current and future needs of users. It offers a range of tools for marketing including websites, e-mail, RSS, SMS, blogs, wikis, webcasts and social networking sites. They can be used alongside traditional channels to help organizations build awareness, usage, satisfaction and loyalty. However, the electronic marketing is likely to dominate in future as it is becoming the predominant channel to access information. Bluestreak (2006) reveals that many of the new tools are already widely used. He collected data from 1,000 people and reported that 100% use e-mail, 88% use text messages and SMS, 71% use message boards and forums, 63% use blogs, 36% use podcasts and 28% subscribe to RSS feeds. This makes them all relevant as marketing channels. Libraries and information managers should realize that e-marketing of information products and services is an integral part of administration.

Web marketing opportunities are growing due to its varied features as it can provide information anytime (24X7) about anything to anyone from anywhere. As libraries shift more services to the Internet, the library website becomes increasingly important — as a product (service) in its own right and as a major tool in marketing other products of the library. The development of library web sites started in the 1990s. As soon as Mosaic, the world's first web browser, was released in 1993 academic health science libraries began developing web sites (Brower, 2004). Today, libraries are very fast making their presence on the web. The library website continues to evolve as a gateway for providing web-based

library services to the students and faculty members. Libraries can use the websites to provide services, to market services, or as part of the marketing process. Using the websites to publicise library tools is an effective strategy in spreading the awareness about resources in modern networked society where everyone is connected with the technology in one way or the other. The new generation who has opened their eyes in full bloom of Internet revolution are especially the main dominators of the technological spheres. The new and innovative methods of publicity through websites are necessary to reach out to these new breed of online users. There is thus increasing demand for the web-enabled services to be provided by the libraries. Hence most of the academic libraries in India and elsewhere have designed and developed websites to present their resources and services. Web-based Public Access Catalogue (Web PAC) is the most widely provided information service on library websites. It is hardly the case that a library has a web page without Web OPAC. It helps users to browse/search the library catalogue remotely, even from homes.

Literature Review

As the number of library web sites grew, the researchers commenced to study their design, usability and contents in order to overcome their weaknesses and make them more vibrant. In 1997 Rozic-Hristovski, Tododrovski, & Hristovski (1999) developed a guide to design library website in which various library services and resources can be included. Nielsen (1993) and Rubin (1994) pioneered the testing of websites to determine whether these met users' needs. Usability tests revealed that the way material is arranged, labelled and presented on the website. Nielsen (1993) developed a heuristic evaluation method for quick, cheap and easy evaluation of a user interface design and provided a list of recommended heuristics for usable interface design.

Owen (2003) strongly emphasizes that accessibility should not be ignored in visual design of a library website. Schaffner (2007) emphasized the need for good library web interface and online public access catalogues (OPAC) on the library website.

Shukla & Tripathi (2010) searched 20 central universities and 19 institutes of national importance websites of India and found that a few of the central universities and national institutes don't have separate library websites. Chandrashekara & Kumar (2005) explored 132 university websites in India and reports that library link is available on only 54 (40.90%) homepages only. Chisenga (1998) conducted a usability test for university libraries home pages in Sub-Sahara Africa and concluded that libraries are mainly providing general information about themselves and its services on their home page. Qutab & Mahmood (2009) explored websites of 52 academic libraries, one public library and one national library and eight special libraries and found that library information is given on most of the websites but only 42 per cent of the libraries offered an OPAC and a few of these were limited to campus-wide access requesting user name and password on the web interface. Konnur & Rajani (2010) surveyed the top academic library websites in Bangalore and found that 90 percent of the study websites has an option to request reference assistance via e-mail and 80 percent study libraries had incorporated access to the library catalogue through the library website. George (2005) evaluated the usability studies conducted for the redesign of websites of Carneige Mellon University Library and found key weaknesses with respect to navigation, screen design and labelling.

This study is a step towards assessing what efforts have been made by university library managers over the web to promote and publicize their resources and services in three Indian states namely Himachal Pradesh, Punjab and Jammu Kashmir.

Research design

Research objectives

The main purpose of the present study is to identify the marketing initiatives taken by academic libraries

to promote library collection, services and products to their clientele through university and library websites. The study focused on following objectives:

- How visible are libraries to their users on institutional websites?
- What information is provided regarding libraries on institutional websites?
- How many libraries have their own websites to market their products and services?
- Which services are available to publicise library products and services on library websites?

Methodology

The study relies heavily on website exploration. A total of 18 university websites, in which interestingly 9 were professional and 9 academic, from the three Indian states- Punjab, Himachal Pradesh and Jammu Kashmir were explored from June 20- June 30, 2011 (Table 1). First, the university home page was surveyed to check the visibility of library and its services like OPAC on the website. Then the second attempt was to identify the libraries with visible or hidden links on institutional home pages have their own websites or not. Then the library homepages were examined. The libraries which hadn't their own websites or were not accessible were omitted for further study. The study used three main categories to analyze the university and library homepages viz-

- Visibility – links to library, OPAC and electronic resources immediately visible on the institutional homepage.
- Information – Information about library, its collection, services, etc.
- Networking – Direct (visible) link from institutional home page to library web site. Visible links on library website to OPAC, electronic resources, digital repository and online support service to connect (network) users, information and staff.

No.	University	URL
1.	Dr. Y.S.Parmar University of Horticulture & Forestry, (Himachal Pradesh)	www.yspuniversity.ac.in
2.	Himachal Pradesh Agriculture University, Palampur (Himachal Pradesh)	www.hillagric.ernet.in
3.	Himachal Pradesh University, Shimla (Himachal Pradesh)	http://hpuniv.nic.in
4.	Baba Ghulam Shah Badshah University, Rajouri (J&K)	www.bgsbuniversity.org
5.	Islamic University of Science & Technology University, Pulwama (J&K)	www.islamicuniversity.edu.in
6.	Jammu University, Jammu (J&K)	http://www.jammuuniversity.in
7.	Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Science & Technology, Jammu (J&K)	www.skuast.org
8.	Sher-e-Kashmir University of Agricultural Science & Technology, Srinagar (J&K)	www.skuastkashmir.ac.in
9.	Shri Mata Vaishno Devi University, Jammu (J&K)	http://smvdu.net.in
10.	University of Kashmir, Srinagar (J&K)	http://www.kashmiruniversity.net
11.	Baba Farid University of Health Sciences, Sadiq Road, Faridkot (Punjab)	http://bfuhs.ac.in

12.	Guru Angad Dev Veterinary & Animal Sciences University, Ludhiana (Punjab)	www.gadvasu.in
13.	Guru Nanak Dev University, Amritsar (Punjab)	www.gndu.ac.in
14.	Punjab Agricultural University, Ludhiana (Punjab)	www.pau.edu
15.	Punjab Technical University, Jalandhar (Punjab)	www.ptu.ac.in
16.	Punjabi University, Patiala (Punjab)	www.punjabiuniversity.ac.in
17.	Punjab University Chandigarh (Punjab)	www.puchd.ac.in
18.	Rajiv Gandhi National University of Law, Patiala (Punjab)	www.rgnul.ac.in

Note: All universities are recognised by the University Grants Commission (UGC) India

Results

Visibility

The 18 university websites were assessed. First, the university homepages were surveyed to check if there were visible (direct) or hidden (indirect) links to its library, online public access catalogue (OPAC), electronic resources or not. Visible links were defined as links that were immediately visible on the homepage whereas any mouse-over, pop-up or pull-down, or remaining pages links were considered hidden links. The results revealed that nine (50%) university websites have visible library links from the institutions main webpage, eight (44.44%) have hidden links either on the following pages or visible only upon mouse over and one (5.55%) university has no library link at all. The links leading to OPAC are more discouraging as only two (11.11%) universities have visible links to OPAC, two (11.11%) have hidden links found under the library link and remaining fourteen (77.78%) have no links. The more devastating fact is that only two (11.11%) universities have given a visible link to their e-resources, three (16.67%) have put these resources under veils and thirteen (72.22%) haven't given any space to these on the websites (Table 1).

Table 1: Library Links on the University Websites/Homepages

Links	Visible	Hidden	No Link
Library	9	8	1
OPAC	2	2	14
E-Resources	2	3	13

Information

Library information is a channel of public relations, as it involves publicity, image enhancement and awareness. Library information includes description about library its collection, services, staff and users. Among the seventeen libraries having visible or hidden links on university homepages, sixteen (94.12%) provide information about library, fourteen (82.35%) about collection, twelve (70.59%) about opening hours, eleven (64.71%) about services, eight (47.06%) about staff, four (23.53%) about OPAC and three (17.65%) about users (Table 2).

Table 2: Library Information on the University Websites

Information	Yes	No
Library	16	1
Collection	14	3
Services	11	6

Opening Hours	12	5
OPAC	4	13
Staff	8	9
Users	3	14

Marketing

When it was observed that the university websites fail to market the libraries resources and services, the query was started to know whether libraries have their own websites and do the university websites lead to the library websites. The data reveals that half (50%) of the libraries have their own websites and half (50%) don't have their own websites at all. Among nine libraries which have their own websites, eight (44.44%) have visible links from university websites whereas one (5.55%) has a hidden link. Moreover, one library website was user ID and password protected and wasn't explored. OPAC service was available on seven (87.50%), online support service on one (12.50%), collection information on eight (100%), electronic resources on seven (87.50%) and digital repository on one (12.50%) out of eight library websites (Table 3).

Table 3: Links on Library Websites

Links	Yes	No
Library website	9	9
OPAC	7	1
Online Support Service	1	7
Collection	8	0
E-Resources	7	1
Digital Repository	1	7

Discussion

The present study reveals that in the Internet age where the geographical barriers no longer exist, barriers between libraries and users are still visible as only 50 percent of libraries have visible links and 44.44 percent have hidden links on the university homepages. The hidden links were found under headings like campus, research, departments and infrastructure. Besides time consuming, it makes a surfer very difficult to find the library link on the institutional homepage. The need is to have a visible library link on institutional website for ease of users. It is very important to give due priority to libraries as it is heart of the institution. The more demoralizing fact is that almost 77.78 percent OPACs and 72.22 percent electronic resources have no links on their institutional websites at all. This depicts that the institutional websites don't serve as gateways to libraries and their collection be it print or electronic. The need is to have separate library websites connected with institutional websites through visible links for marketing libraries vis-à-vis exploiting their sources and services for optimum utilisation. The library & information managers have to successfully gain support from the parent institution to improve visibility of the libraries, library image and its use. For this purpose, they need to be more vibrant in their efforts to make libraries not only visible but also usable.

The universities have shown generosity in providing information about libraries. The study reveals that the information is available behind most of the library links about library, its collection and services but unfortunately the OPAC has been ignored. OPAC is the gateway of library and the only online information retrieval tool of libraries. The library & information managers must realize that users have many other avenues to search for information, so they must proactively promote libraries and let users know what

is available in their libraries and how libraries are evolving to electronic services to fulfil the users' demand by taking the resources and information under their fingertips. The library & information managers must understand that gone are the days when library was considered as a sole treasure of information and users were personally coming to libraries to search the relevant information and libraries were judged by their collections rather than by their services. Libraries are losing their role as the primary information provider as users turn to search engines as their starting point to do research. Students perceive the web as their information universe and Google as the most effective finding tool to explore it (Mi, 2006). Now in the age of Google and Yahoo, they have to fight for their survival and existence of libraries and have to go where the users are. They can't wait for them to come but they have to take their resources to the remote users.

In the present information age - where information is considered power, almost every academic, public and special library has its own website in developed world but in the developing world, the university libraries still miss the opportunity to present themselves. It is very discouraging to know that only 50 percent of the libraries have their own websites and one among them is password protected. In the open access world, where the pressing need to raise awareness about collaboration and sharing, it is very unfortunate that few libraries close the doors and one isn't permitted to see what is inside the libraries. These libraries must realise that self-sufficiency is a myth not a reality, which is no longer the trend in the electronic age. Libraries should work together and provide users with seamless resources beyond the boundaries of one single library.

Majority of the libraries with their own websites provide links to their collection including electronic resources and OPAC. This is an important aspect as it makes it easier for users to know about libraries resources, access resources and increases the use of the library web site as a gateway to information. However, most of the libraries miss to provide links to their digital repositories as it was observed that most of the institutions don't have digital repositories. The need is to take steps to create digital repositories of institutional publications to support the libraries mission. Another disappointing was lack of online support as the present study has revealed a very low percentage of libraries are engaged in such efforts. The users of the present generation don't need reference services in the libraries; they use libraries from a remote site and don't bother to visit libraries physically. Therefore, online communication is the key strategy to fulfil their needs. Channels of communication must be open and convenient to help build a relationship with users. So opening an online communication channel with users via digital reference service, or ask a librarian link or online chat can slowly but surely attract the users back to the library.

Future Plans

The technology changes the shapes day in and day out. In order to remain relevant and respond adequately to the changing needs of the library user, the library & information managers need to constantly look for new ways to acquire, deliver and make their information and services accessible. With the use of Web 2.0 tools, such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites and RSS feeds, libraries can offer a more customer-driven, socially rich, qualitative and real time services in the virtual world. Therefore, library & information managers have to incorporate all these facilities in the library websites and such sites can be termed as library website 2.0. The library & information managers in developed world has already started to use the Web 2.0 services, however, in developing and third world countries, it is a future plan of action.

References

Agalo, J. (1998). Emerging developments of audio-visual and multimedia use in national and academic libraries in Kenya, paper presented at the 64th IFLA General Conference, Amsterdam, 16-21 August, 1998, available at: www.ifla.org/v/ ifla64/105-117e.htm (accessed 2 July, 2011).

Bluestreak (2006). *Emerging digital channels: consumer adoption, attitudes and behavior. available at: http://www.bluestreak.com/happenings/Press%20Releases/2006-1031.html (accessed July 2, 2011)*

Brower, S.M. (2004). *Academic health sciences library website navigation: an analysis of forty-one websites and their navigation tools, Journal of the Medical Library Association, 92(4), pp. 412-20.*

Chandrashekara, M. and Kumar, M. N. (2005). *Homepages of Indian universities websites: A study, 3rd Convention PLANNER, Silchar -2005, Assam University Ahmadabad 10-11 November, 2005, pp. 333-346.*

Chisenga, J (1998). *A study of university libraries' home pages in Sub-Saharan Africa. Libri, 48(1), 49-57.*

Fialkoff, F. (2006). *What's so bad about books?, Library Journal New York-, 131(1), 8-9. Available at: www.libraryjournal.com/article/CA6298439.html.*

George, C. A. (2005). *Usability testing and design of a library website: An iterative approach. OCLC Systems & Services, 21 (3), 167-180.*

Kenneway, M. (2007). *Marketing the library: using technology to increase visibility, impact and reader engagement. Serials, 20, 2, 92-97.*

Konnur, P. V., Rajani, S. and Madhusudhan, M. (2010). *Academic library websites in Banglore city, India: An evaluative study, Library Philosophy and Practice, (2010). Available at: http://digitalcommons.unl.edu/libphilprac/408 (accessed July 2, 2011)*

Mi, J. and Nesta, F. (2006). *Marketing library services to the net generation, Library Management, 27(6/7), pp. 411-22. Available at: www.emeraldinsight.com/0143-5124.htm (accessed July 2, 2011)*

Nielsen, J. (1993). *Usability engineering, Boston: Academic Press. p. 358*

Owen, J. (2003). *Making your website accessible, Library & Information Update, January (2003). Available at http://web.archive.org/web/20040911055913/www.cilip.org.uk/publications/updatemagazine/archive2003/january/update0301c.htm (accessed July 2. 2011)*

Qutab, S., and Mahmood, K. (2009). *Library web sites in Pakistan: An analysis of content. Program: Electronic Library and Information Systems, 43(4), 430-445. Available at: www.emeraldinsight.com/0033-0337.htm (accessed July 2, 2011)*

Rozic-Hristovski, A., Todorovski, L., and Hristovski, D. (1999). *Developing a medical library website at the University of Ljubljana, Slovenia. Program: Electronic Library & Information Systems, 33(4), 313-325.*

Rubin, J. (1994). *Handbook of usability testing: How to plan, design, and conduct effective tests. New York: Wiley. p. 330*

Schaffner, J. (2007). *Good design for library websites and online public access catalogs. Available at: http://web.simmons.edu/*

Shukla, A. and Tripathi, A. (2010). *Establishing content awareness evaluation criteria for library websites: a case study of Indian academic websites, Annals of Library and Information Studies, 57(4), pp. 403-416*

Ward, J. and Mervar, D. (2003). *Beyond the web: Promoting the value of a library's web site, Florida Libraries, 46(2), pp. 15-17.*

Weingand, D. E. (1999). *Marketing/planning library and information services, (2nd ed.), Englewood, Colo: Libraries Unlimited. p. 139.*