Corporate libraries, once treasured by R&D-heavy organizations, now face greater scrutiny by management to demonstrate their value. Today's librarians are being asked to report on financials, engage in creative marketing, and network across departments to justify their existence in the organization.

With the availability of online resources, a more independent employee base, and drastic reductions in budget, the library needs to evolve from its traditional role of research support to a more multifaceted, data-driven service center. In addition to providing expert literature research, the library must help companies reduce cost and integrate library services into the employees' workflow across business units. Consider the following tactics to help demonstrate the value your library/information center brings to the organization.

Rely on Usage Statistics

Libraries routinely collect usage statistics for electronic subscriptions, document delivery transactions, print collections, reference and literature request interactions, and the library call center to help make collection decisions and to meet patron needs. You can use the same data to demonstrate value to your organization and to those who determine your budget.

Use cost-per-use analysis to quantify the value of electronic resources such as databases or journals. For example, if the cost of your subscription contract for the journal collection from Publisher X is $200,000 per year and the COUNTER (Counting Online Usage of NeTworked Electronic Resources) usage reports that the publisher provides 20,000 article downloads for the year, divide the cost by the number of downloads and see what the average cost-per-download is. In this case, it would be $10 per article.

You can also conduct a cost-avoidance analysis. Here, you're looking at the average transactional cost of the service as an alternative to purchasing a subscription. To do so, you need to find what the average cost of an individual article or a chapter is. Next, multiply the usage statistics, in this case the 20,000 downloaded articles or chapters, by the average cost of an article purchased through a pay-per-view account or a document delivery service. For example, the cost of a pay-per-view order for this publisher might be $45 per article. Multiplying 20,000 article downloads by $45 comes to $900,000, a cost your organization would have incurred had you not had a subscription contract with the publisher. The difference between the potential costs of the pay-per-view downloads and the subscription contract cost equals the cost avoidance.

Position the Library as a Research Expert

Marketing and R&D staff members have traditionally depended on libraries' expertise and resources to find relevant information quickly. Library reference staff is well-versed in searches across platforms and can find the information that researchers need more quickly than they can themselves. Internal marketing of your team's capabilities is crucial. Your library has to sell its services, making your expertise known to all departments every day throughout the year.

To raise awareness of the library's services, suggest that your team regularly attend other department meetings. Assign a library staff member as a dedicated resource to a particular business unit or R&D team. Since having a dedicated....
marketing person in the library is financially unrealistic, everyone on your team needs to be comfortable with doing a certain amount of marketing as part of his or her responsibilities.

Here are some ideas to help build awareness of your library:

■ Establish a dedicated Library Day to build awareness of your library’s services within the organization. Create stands or booths for different areas of the library, demonstrate services, or host a series of brown-bag information sessions on information services and resources. Consider working in partnership with vendors on these demos and information sessions.

■ Advertise library services on the company intranet and business unit websites.

■ Develop training and marketing materials geared to specific business roles such as financial stakeholders or budget decision makers.

Forge Partnerships Across Business Units

The library must partner with different areas of the organization to sustain and expand integration in their daily business flow. Similar to a marketing campaign, the strategic partnerships must be continuous and should be based on the clearly stated values of both sides.

Create partnerships with decision makers throughout the organization, including library service advocates and those in the finance, IT, ethics, compliance, and legal departments. The library needs to be flexible, responsive to customer needs, a co-pioneer with the organization’s IT team in testing new technologies, and attuned to business requirements.

Maintaining its more traditional role, your library should continue to keep staff informed about developments in publishing practices such as open access (OA) and to partner with compliance and legal networks to keep users up-to-date on copyright guidelines.

Evolution Is Critical

To demonstrate the value your library brings to your organization, your department must act like a business itself. Show the ROI for subscribed and purchased content. Maintain a strong internal brand. Integrate your services into the employees’ daily workflow, and develop and maintain working relationships with different areas of the organization.