Demonstrating the Value of Your Library/Information Center

Practical Steps to Take Your Library Services to the Next Level

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Corporate libraries, once treasured by R&D-heavy organizations, now face greater scrutiny by management to demonstrate their value. Today's librarians find themselves in the unfamiliar waters of financial reporting, creative marketing, and networking across departments to justify their existence in the corporate world.

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 multi-faceted, data-driven service center. In addition to providing expert literature research, the information center must help companies reduce cost and integrate library services into the employees' workflow across business units.

**To more effectively demonstrate the value of your library/information center to your organization, consider the following tactics:**

**LEVERAGE USAGE STATISTICS**

Libraries collect usage statistics for electronic subscriptions, document delivery transactions, print collections, reference/literature request interactions, and the library call center to inform collection decisions and meet client needs.

You can use the same usage 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 usage reports that the publisher provides show 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. If you are reviewing statistics in the middle of the year, and have only six months' worth of statistics to review, multiply the number of article downloads by two to project the full year of usage. Next, take that number and divide the cost to see the cost-per-download. You can use this same method to analyze usage of your database and ebook collections; the only difference is the unit parameter—cost-per-access or cost-per-collection, if the publishers use statistics different from COUNTER.
You can also conduct a **cost avoidance analysis**. Here, you are looking at the average transactional cost of the service as an alternative to purchasing a subscription. To do so, you need to know what the average cost of an article or a chapter is when ordered using a pay-per-view account or from a document delivery vendor. Next, multiply the usage statistics, i.e. the number of downloaded articles or chapters, by the average cost of an article purchased through a pay-per-view account or a document delivery service. Typically, the numbers favor the library collection and the continuation of subscriptions, as the cost of subscription is much lower than pay-per-view or document delivery order costs for the same volume.

For example, you have a subscription contract with a journal publisher for $200,000 per year with a usage of 20,000 article downloads per year. At the same time, the cost of a pay-per-view order for this publisher is $45 per article. 20,000 article downloads multiplied by the article cost of $45, comes to $900,000, a cost your organization would incur had you not had a subscription contract with the publisher. Even if the purchase volume were just 50% of the article downloads (10,000), the cost to the organization of purchasing 10,000 articles at a $45 pay-per-view article fee would still be more than twice as much ($450,000) as the subscription contract. The difference between the potential cost of the pay-per-view downloads and the subscription contract cost equals the cost avoidance.

**POSITION THE LIBRARY AS RESEARCH EXPERT**

Marketing departments and R&D staff alike have traditionally depended on the library’s expertise and resources to find relevant information quickly. Library reference staff are well-versed in literature searches across platforms and can often find the information researchers need more quickly than they can themselves.

Internal marketing of your team’s capabilities is crucial. Your library has to “sell” its services, and make your expertise known to all the potential customers. This effort needs to be sustained throughout the year across departments.

To raise awareness of the library’s services with employees, suggest that your team regularly attend other department meetings. You can also consider assigning a library staff member as a dedicated resource to a particular business unit or R&D team. Having a dedicated marketing person in the library is ideal, but financially unrealistic. Therefore, everyone on your library team should be comfortable with a certain degree of marketing as part of their responsibilities. They need to sell the value of the library to their colleagues.
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Here are some ideas to help build awareness of your library:

• Establish a dedicated “Library Day” to build awareness of your library’s services with the organization. Create a conference setting—stands or booths for different library areas, demos of library services, or a series of brown bag informational sessions on library services and resources. You can even consider partnering 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 unit needs, including:
  – Outreach geared only to financial stakeholders and budget decision makers.
  – Daily advertising messages included as part of library’s correspondence.
  – Provision of training on library services in different time zones, etc.

FORGE PARTNERSHIPS ACROSS BUSINESS UNITS

The library must partner with different sides of the organization to sustain library integration in the daily business flow. Similar to a marketing campaign, the strategic partnerships must be ongoing and with clear values for both sides involved. You should create partnerships with decision makers in departments across the organization including:

• Library patron advocates (e.g., researchers, product managers)
• Finance
• IT
• Ethics, compliance and legal

Your library needs to be flexible, responsive to customer needs, a pioneer with the organization’s IT team to test new technologies, and attuned to business requirements.

Maintaining its traditional role, your library should continue to educate staff on developments in publishing practices (e.g., Open Access), and partner with compliance and legal networks to educate users 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 return on investment for subscribed and purchased content. Maintain a strong internal brand. Integrate your library services in the employees’ daily workflow. And develop and maintain working relationships with different areas of the organization.

About the Author

Marija Markovic completed her M.S.LIS and M.A. at the University of Illinois. For over a decade, she has worked in the corporate library setting as a copyright compliance expert, contract negotiator and collection development lead. Recently, Marija started a consulting company focused on demystifying copyright for corporate libraries and other organizations.