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Dressed for Success? Transformation of Libraries

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Background

What is a library today? The digital revolution has long been our reality. We need to prepare for new needs, in a time when Uppsala University Library is experiencing two parallel realities: the digital resources are living side by side with the printed material. The libraries are popular and widely used, both physically and digitally. Our starting point is that users must be able to access the two worlds at the same time, in a combined experience, through various marketing initiatives at the physical libraries. At the Uppsala University Library, we have carried out several projects to improve and highlight our services. These projects have helped to identify several new needs within our academic organisation. They have also clarified the creative aspects of our work and our goal-fulfilment. There is much development potential in the library “brand”. We have great opportunities to play a greater part as a place for creative meetings, development and knowledge acquisition. To reach this goal, we have initiated collaborations with key persons, such as teachers, researchers and other users. This has yielded spin-off effects in the form of various communications initiatives, benchmarking and a search for new and varied skills in our employees.

A number of smaller development projects have given us both positive and negative experiences. We have gone from a traditional library to being a natural meeting point and part of the academic, knowledge-building environment.

In this paper, we take a closer look at the question “What is a library?” We also ask ourselves how we can remain “dressed for the future”? Our discussion may provide some answers as to how a library developer can create a movement within their own organisation in which a small change leads to another, which leads to another and so on, thus creating a large change in the end.

What defines a library?

We have the feeling that many still think about the physical library when this question is brought up. A library is a room with physical books for knowledge acquisition as well as a meeting place. Many have a positive view of the library, and statistics have shown that the libraries are still popular.

Today, the user can have the whole library in their tablet computer or smartphone. A large part of the library collections are available in these devices through databases, search tools, journals, articles and books. Support can be reached through a chat function, subject guide, FAQs and other tools. We also have statistics indicating a high level of use for our online services. Despite this, we perceive that the users, in the discussion of what a library is, still view the library as a physical space with physical books. We have often heard comments in our meetings with researchers like: “I haven't used the library since the internet was launched.” This is obviously an aspect where we can do something to change the view of our activities.

We are convinced that the library building is important, and that it plays a central part in the academic world as a neutral space and natural meeting point. For this reason, we need to create activities that will allow us to remain this important part of the academic machinery. We have to preserve these often unique buildings and environments, and fill them with a sense of being “the place to be”. Many cafes and

pastry shops like to improve their atmosphere with the help of books, and decorate their walls with wallpaper imitating bookshelves. So how can we make the most of our unique environments? How can we make our collections, services and environments more visible, in the physical world as well as in the virtual one?

Strategies and implementation

Choosing strategies to reach a goal is always a challenge. The Uppsala University Library commissioned a smaller project group in 2010, in which five employees would spend five weeks gathering business intelligence from the world outside the library to find new trends. This project resulted in a report: *Framtiden kommer alltid* [the future always catches up]¹. An action plan was delivered to the library management, with both short-term and long-term perspectives. One of the ideas included in the report was the one that formed the basis for the work presented in this paper. It was about how to make the digital world more visible in the physical one. The goal of the project was to increase the use of our resources, and to make students, teachers and researchers aware that there are plenty of online resources that a user will not discover when simply searching on the shelves of the library. We are also hoping for some positive side effects, such as getting to know our users better, and to increase the competence of our colleagues and employees.

In 2010, 85 % of the Swedish population had internet access in their home, while only a few would use their mobile phone to search for information.² We carried out observations to map the students' behaviour inside the library. We discovered that they would ignore our catalogue and head straight for the shelf to see what was available for their subject. If they were unable to find the book they were looking for, they would go ask at the information desk, even when provided the possibility to search for themselves.

¹ <http://en.calameo.com/read/000466235eb7b0156d5d6>

After these observations, we asked a number of questions to students, researchers, teachers and colleagues about their use of books and libraries, how we can make resources more visible and about marketing. Our assumptions were confirmed by the methods used. We chose to use open space methodology to interact with our colleagues in a creative meeting. Otherwise we used meetings, workshops and participated in a questionnaire sent out by the Student Union to its members. The results were unanimous: few knew that the library even had e-books, how to find them or how to read an e-book in the first place. Several ideas related to how we could make the online resources more visible in the library. We immediately began to create action plans based on these ideas.

Time to make it happen!

We purchased large TV screens to communicate information and messages from the library at the information desk, as well as smaller screens to visualise our digital resources on the shelves. We had now figured out that the students rarely knew the title or the author of the book they were looking for. They had, however, often seen the cover, and we therefore wanted to emphasise the visual, using pictures of the covers and smaller elements of text. We also made use of QR codes as an easy link to the online resource from the shelf. We later evaluated these codes, and saw that they were not used to any greater extent, however, our analysis is that they still indicated that there was an electronic resource available. Both in terms of the specific book that we were marketing and the other books on the same shelf. The users became more inclined to find out whether there were other e-books available for the subject. We used posters to create inviting lists of new e-books in different subjects, which we spread around campus. We visited various departments to talk about our ideas, and this stage gave rise to a new cooperation as well as to a new series of events at the library. This gave us a chance to be the meeting point that we believe is needed in academia and that the library can provide. We invited researchers to give a short lecture in their subject at the library for students, other staff members at the university, other

² <https://www.iis.se/docs/SOI2013.pdf>

researchers as well as the general public. We call the series *En kvart över* (15 minutes to spare) and it is still a success at Uppsala University Library.

The QR codes soon led to new technology. Augmented Reality (AR) is a better technology that we are currently looking into, which could further connect the physical world with the digital. We envision how our historic Carolina Rediviva building could open up in a brand new way, and reveal its treasures to people on the street. We are able to simply show how we can be reached by chat and e-mail as well as what our opening hours are. Our search interface and website can be shown simply by holding up a mobile phone to the object. Not to mention the great cultural heritage and treasures in the rooms that are not accessible to the public.

Results

Did our investments have any effect on the use of library resources? Yes – we have seen a clear increase in the use of online resources after our measures. We cannot know if it was our initiatives or a general increase in e-book interest. The e-book statistics of the public libraries suddenly shot up at around the same time. We had positive results in several ways. The skills of our colleagues in terms of technology and visualisation have improved. We have created new collaborations with researchers. We have started a brand new lecture series. We have gained a better contact with our users. Several new, smaller spin-off projects have originated from our original project. These are a few of the components that lead to success. The general interest in e-books increased in the Swedish population during this period, 2011-2012, but we have also seen an increased use of our e-books.

Continued professional development

In 2013, the figures for internet use and smart phones are completely different. Now, 93 % of the Swedes have a smart phone and 78 % use them on a daily basis. So what about the library staff? Are they up-to-

speed with the current technological developments? In order to make this possible, the library management should provide the employees with opportunities to learn the new technology. Only if the librarians themselves know how to use tablets and smart phones can they show users how to find information on these devices. We conducted a few professional development workshops for librarians, which we called: “read an e-book, anyway you like”. The goal was to provide the librarians with an opportunity to use tablet computers to see how they work, and discuss them in a group.

The future

Yes, the future will always come, no matter what we do. It is time to welcome the digital opportunities and make sure that we are equipped to face the future. When we work as natural collaboration partner to academia, we should have the right tools. It is time to shake the outdated image that others hold of us, to show what skills we have and what opportunities the libraries can provide.

The view of libraries is closely linked to the competence and attitude of the librarians. In the future, it will be essential to attract the right individuals, and to provide them with the conditions and technique to develop a winning organization. Attractive employers will be in charge of the winning concepts of the future!