

## Chapter 25

# Introducing Discovery Systems to Academic User Communities: A Case Study with Recommendations

Mary Mintz  
*American University, USA*

### ABSTRACT

*This chapter provides information about why marketing a new discovery system is important both for libraries and for users. It also presents a case study of the American University Library experience in marketing a new discovery system, including an innovative technique for viral marketing. Results of the marketing program probably contributed to overall use of the discovery system, but did not guarantee system success as reflected in user responses to the system. Recommendations based on lessons learned from the American University Library experience and from marketing best practices that can be applied to planning, branding, publicity venues, language, and assessment are presented to assist other libraries.*

### INTRODUCTION

Implementing a discovery system for an academic library is a process largely invisible to users. The end result of the process, however, should be highly visible. If the discovery tool itself is not “discoverable,” a significant library investment is diminished and more importantly, users miss

a potential opportunity to enhance their research. According to a recent study (University College London, CIBER Group, 2008):

*Younger scholars especially have only a very limited knowledge of the many library sponsored services that are on offer to them. The problem is one of both raising awareness of this expensive*

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*and valuable content and making the interfaces much more standard and easier to use. (p. 30)*

As one commentator sums up this challenge common to many academic libraries: “More often than not . . . students use what they can find and professors use what they are accustomed to. Libraries pay thousands of dollars a year for digital resources they carefully select. . . .” He also asks, “How is it that faculty and student use of quality digital resources remains so chancy?” (Menchaca, 2008, p. 111).

Proactive promotion of a discovery system can leave less to chance. Academic libraries, concerned about expensive yet underutilized electronic resources/services and about remaining relevant in the Google age, should accompany implementation with promotion. Generating awareness and use is not simply directed at realizing the potential of a library/university investment, but primarily at improving research for students and faculty who may benefit from the availability of a powerful discovery tool. By promoting a discovery system, a library may be able to reverse a national trend at the local level. According to a recent study (De Rosa et al., 2011), for college and university students, “search engines continue to dominate, topping the list of electronic sources most used to find online content (93%), followed closely by Wikipedia (88%). . . . Results show a decline in use of library Web sites, e-journals and online databases since 2005.” (p. 52).

Evidence that the trend can be reversed, however, is noted in the same study which found that “While the number of college students using the library Web site declined (61% to 57%), those who do so are using it more frequently—22% use it at least weekly, up from 15% in 2005,” (De Rosa et al., 2011, p. 52). This finding strongly suggests that informed users are repeat users. Thus, the process of introducing users to a beneficial new discovery tool is an important area that requires focus and coordination among library person-

nel associated with implementation, individual instruction at service points, group instruction in classrooms, and outreach or marketing. A strategic planning process for outreach, marketing, or publicity can be almost as essential as selection and implementation. In fact, the introduction of a new discovery tool represents an opportunity for a library to brand (or re-brand) an important user service and to establish a significant new information technology presence in its user community.

## **BACKGROUND**

In this paper the terms, *marketing*, *outreach*, *promotion*, and *publicity* are interchangeable and self-explanatory as they often are in libraries and library literature. These terms refer to communication directed at current and potential users with the goal of promoting awareness of library services or resources. A “discovery system” in this context is a service that provides users with the capability of simultaneous searches across multiple electronic resources through one access point with the goal of “revitaliz[ing] the stodgy online catalogs of the past to deliver to library patrons an experience of the collections and services of the library more in tune with the expectations set by the mainstream Web” (Breeding, 2011, p. 21).

Recently, interest in marketing for academic libraries has increased. The Association of College and Research Libraries (ACRL) established its first Best Practices in Marketing Academic and Research Libraries @Your Library award in 2005. In 2009, a poll administered by ACRL’s University Libraries section revealed that “Academic Outreach” would be the most desirable new committee for that organization (Leeder, 2009), and it was subsequently established. An expanded interest in marketing is reflected in the large number of books published during the past decade, most of them applicable to all types of libraries. Among those publications, Matthews

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