
Low-cost marketing initiatives at Waterford Institute of Technology libraries



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During the period 2007–2008, Waterford Institute of Technology libraries embarked on a series of low-cost marketing initiatives aimed at enhancing services, heightening the profile of the library and improving our communications with users. These initiatives were a range of simple low-cost schemes that were modest in approach, required little or no direct cost and had a positive impact on our operational environment. In our experience, it is possible for a small to mid-sized institution with little or no marketing expertise or without any great budget (and let's face it, who has at the moment?) to improve library services, to promote Web 2.0, to increase library visibility and to start to build a library brand.

THE 'FAB' CAMPAIGN – FINES AMNESTY ON BOOKS

WIT libraries carried out an inventory of its stock collections in summer 2008. In advance of the inventory and as part-preparation, we commenced a 'fines amnesty on books' campaign. Run over two days, fines on all standard loan items returned were waived, irrespective of overdue date. The campaign was advertised using tradi-

Fines Amnesty on Books Campaign

All Fines will be Waived on
all Overdue Library Books
Returned on

14th & 15th May 2008

(Excluding Shortloans)

tional marketing methods such as word of mouth at customer desks, circulating fliers and posters with the library brand placed throughout the college, as well as web technologies like e-mail, blog posts, RSS and the library website. FAB generated both direct and indirect benefits for the library. In excess of 175 overdue items were returned during the campaign which, using a mean cost of €35 per item, equated to around €6,000 in returned stock, and 97 patrons had fines waived during the amnesty, equating to around €1,500. A simple direct cost/benefit analysis shows a net gain of approximately €4,500, as well as additional overdue stock items retrieved in advance of the stocktake. Indirectly, there was a very strong 'feel-good' factor generated amongst our users and the library received enhanced promotion and goodwill through the marketing campaign.

BOOK AID INTERNATIONAL

In recent years, WIT libraries have, in conjunction with the WIT pastoral service and local business, facilitated the donation of academic textbooks to the developing world through Book Aid International. Each year, the library accumulates large numbers of high-quality textbooks from staff, students and other donors on behalf of the institute and arranges to have them donated and shipped to the relevant development agency. We estimate that over 5,000 textbooks have been dispatched as far afield as Tanzania. The cost of shipping is borne by local industry. In 2009, WIT will facilitate the donation of quality used textbooks to Read International. Obviously a socially construc-

tive thing to do, it also gives the library a positive exposure with the wider community.

Web 2.0

WIT libraries are no different to many libraries in attempting to embrace and promote Web 2.0 technologies to provide better services to our users. Web 2.0 technologies can be extremely cost-effective in marketing libraries and providing a platform on which to raise profile.

Blogs

We launched our library news web blog (<http://witlibrary.wordpress.com>) in early 2007 using the WordPress platform. This free library news blog has been utilised to advertise new services, databases, events, announcements and all our latest developments and news. The blog is inter-linked with the library website to provide regular updates and can automatically generate RSS feeds for new entries. Users may also sign up to the library news feed.

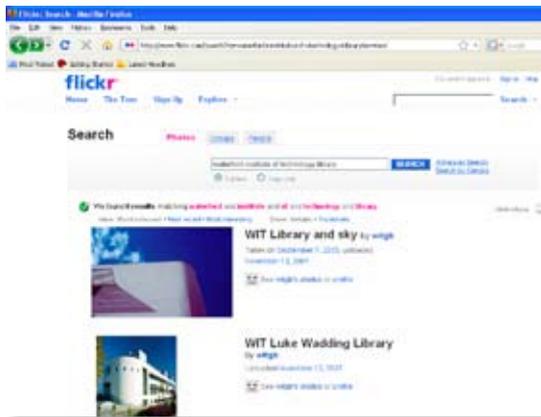


Instant messaging

We also launched a free instant-messaging reference service for our users in spring 2008, enabling real-time chat and reference interaction from anywhere. Our IM service is based on Meebo but there are many such free services which also facilitate interaction with other IM services. Although levels of adoption for this service have not been huge, we regard it as a very useful niche service.

Flickr

We have also recently set up our own Flickr photography account. This is also a free and relatively easy service for anyone with an interest in photography. Flickr can be used constructively to promote the library 'image' and has the potential to give a library increased exposure and to become part of a social online photo-sharing community. There is a vast amount of library-related photography accessible on Flickr.



Web 2.0 guides

WIT has created a number of in-house guides (see <http://library.wit.ie/GettingStarted/Library-Guides>) to assist and inform our users of the potential benefits of web 2.0 social tools. Having long developed and designed our own library help and self-help guides, we have attempted to go beyond the more traditional 'How to search the catalogue' guide and developed a series of Web 2.0 help guides. These include the 'WIT guide to social bookmarking', '... to Google Scholar', '... to Flickr', '... to Wikipedia'. Covering just two pages, these are written and designed in-house, are publically available and contain a concise introduction to the subject with full WIT library branding and contact details.



None of these initiatives required any financial investment or any major expertise whilst enabling the library to position itself in a space which many students now regularly inhabit.

WEBSITE

In late 2007, faced with an evolving client base, new challenges around usability and incorporating more interactive, user-friendly Web 2.0 tools and technologies into our services, WIT libraries made a conscious decision to re-assess its website, <http://library.wit.ie>. Over the course of an eight-week period, WIT libraries re-designed and re-launched the library website. Although the project required many library staff hours and much effort, existing staff expertise and technological infrastructure meant that there were no additional direct monetary costs to the library budget. The new website integrated Web 2.0 qualities such as alternate images, a news blog, RSS feeds, multiple contact options, instant messaging and live chat, social bookmarking and sharing options, snap-shot images and Browsealoud audio options for increased accessibility. Using conventional language rather than library terminology, and moving from deep navigation to quick links and tabs, these changes have resulted in putting the website and catalogue at the centre of our library services. The website overhaul has been very well received, as was confirmed in WIT libraries' summer postgraduate survey of 2008. The website is constantly evolving, and this dynamism has enabled us to market library services more effectively and proactively.

HERITAGE COUNCIL GRANT AND NATIONAL HERITAGE WEEK

In 2008, the library was successfully awarded grant funding from the Irish Heritage Council under the 2008 museum and archives grant scheme. We were awarded €5,000 to partially fund a cataloguing and inventory project for a significant theological, ecclesiastical and law collection, namely the Christ Church Cathedral collection, of which we were recently made custodians. The completed project resulted in the creation of over 800 electronic records and a searchable online index through the existing library catalogue.

During National Heritage Week (August 2008), the library hosted a number of very successful public events. These included the staging of an open week and an exhibition in the special collections room of the library and a series of public lectures from local heritage/history experts. These events were advertised through our own marketing channels but also through the institute's website and local radio and media. We found many retired staff members particularly responsive to the events but also found that awareness

of the collection was very much heightened, and consequently the library and its services. Grant and funding awards provide a great opportunity to raise the profile of a library. Prior to this, we had little experience of grant applications and less of heritage-related or special/archive collections. The grant has permitted us to improve our own expertise and to publicise and increase awareness of our special-collection resources.

INSTITUTIONAL REPOSITORY

The library plays a central role in the maintenance and operation of the institutional repository, <http://repository.wit.ie>, launched in 2007. In addition to the obvious accessibility and citation benefits for researchers, the library's profile is directly enhanced via Google Scholar, through the positioning of the library brand and through the role of the library in the academic/repository cycle. The repository is powered using the University of Southampton's free software EPrints 3.

Q-NESS CAMPAIGN

The 'Q-ness quiet study campaign' was unveiled – in an attempt to promote quiet study areas within the library for students – at a particularly opportune time: before the 2008 Christmas exams. 'Q-ness' is a play on the Gaelic word for silence, *ciúnas*. Fliers, posters and blog posts were used to market the campaign. Based primarily on proactive and increased staff presence and strong visual aids, and requiring little financial outlay, the Q-ness campaign was well received by staff and students. During a critical period for library users, Q-ness enhanced the quiet study zones and encouraged more diverse usage of the different learning and group zones within the library.

SIGNAGE

This was a low-cost, relatively modest operational initiative designed to improve the working and aesthetic environment for the user within the library. In addition, we attempted to build the library 'brand' by removing all existing signage and replacing it with a consistent design in more strategic and effective locations, combining visual and text-based messages. In our experience, the old signage had become stale and inconsistent and it lacked impact. Notices, posters, bookmarks, library guides, handouts, bay-ends and signs now all have a consistent library brand/design, completed by our own staff in-house. All contain consistent and key library information relating to web address, contact e-mail and phone numbers.

The library hopes to develop this concept further in summer 2009, with a nod to Leeds Metropolitan University,¹ by zoning the different learning areas in the library by colour and alpha code.

ENGAGING WITH USERS

Open-day stand

In conjunction with the marketing and schools liaison office, the library got directly involved with the annual open day for students and parents of second-level students who had chosen WIT as their first option for third-level education. The library had a stand on the main concourse amongst all the other departments. Library staff took the opportunity to raise awareness about the library and its role on campus. Offering enticements and give-aways – pens, notepads, magnets, chocolates, gadgets (with thanks to some of our commercial suppliers) – the library proved one of the most popular stands on the night. There was a lot of interaction with the public and potential students and this proved to be a very effective and worthwhile platform for raising perceptions about the library. Handouts were limited to short basic facts and figures about the library, effective and easy to digest.

Surveys

We have carried out two wide-ranging surveys over the past few years: one surveying over 1,250 students and staff using traditional questionnaires and the second a specific cohort of 170 post-graduates using SurveyMonkey. Although they are labour-intensive, surveys are an extremely constructive way of marketing the library and its services and of engaging with users to make changes. Both surveys generated internal reports and were published in library literature.

Postgraduate meet and greet

The library hosted an open reception for new postgraduates in autumn 2008. The purpose of this meet-and-greet session was to engage directly with the postgraduate cohort and to familiarise them with some of our staff and library services that are directly relevant to them. The hosting of the reception was one of the outcomes from a previous postgraduate survey (mentioned above). The event cost of €150.00 was negligible and involved fairly low-level targeted advertising such as e-mail, word of mouth, direct invitations, posters, flyers and the library blog. More than 30 postgraduates attended, and library staff met and chatted with students availing themselves of the free tea and coffee and pastries. A short series of quick-fire presentations on library services

and a Q-&-A session followed. Such an event was relatively novel for the library but, considering its success, we hope that this will be the first of many such events across other academic departments and student groups. It is intended to host an open night for our international students later this year.

STAFF PUBLICATIONS, PRESENTATIONS, IN-HOUSE PUBLICATIONS

Another valuable and underestimated way of marketing the library is through staff publications, networking and involvement in external projects. These can include library staff, both professional and para-professional, publishing or co-publishing articles, presenting at conference/seminars or working on external projects outside of the library. Not only can this ensure that the library has input into projects that may not be directly library-related but it can increase the skill sets of those involved, benefit the projects and raise the profile of the library. Examples of such projects might include workplace partnership, workshops, policy groups, cross-departmental learning and teaching projects and so on. Many staff here at WIT libraries are proactively involved in writing articles for various scholarly journals and have a strong track record of publications. Staff have also delivered presentations at seminars and national conferences and been involved in the professional association's national committees and strategic review groups. Aside from the obvious continuous professional and personal-development benefits for staff themselves, the library's profile can be promoted through its employees' activities. A similarly overlooked area in which libraries can directly and effectively market their services in an informal style is through the wider institutional in-house publications. Such publications are always happy to receive contributions. College rags, e-zines, staff updates and newsletters and other ad hoc publications have a wide internal captive audience and afford a free and timely method of promoting library awareness and communicating information at key times during the year. In the past year, WIT libraries have publicized our services through the main student publication, Grapevine; through the academic research unit publication Research matters; and through the staff newsletter, WITness. This can be a very cost-effective and beneficial marketing route.

REFERENCE

- 1 H. Finlay and K. Fisher, 'How to keep the noise down without using the "Shush" word!', *SCONUL Focus*, 37, Spring 2006, available at <http://www.sconul.ac.uk/publications/newsletter/37/14.pdf>