Marketing of Electronic Information Resources: A Case of The J.D. Rockefeller Research Library, Egerton University

Nerisa Kamar
Research Librarian,
Egerton University – Kenya
Email: koriesn@yahoo.com

Keywords: Electronic Information Resources; Electronic Information Service; Marketing of Electronic Information Resource Service; Kenya; Egerton University; J.D. Rockefeller Research Library

Abstract
This paper gives a brief overview of electronic information resources and services offered by The J.D. Rockefeller Research Library at Egerton University and the marketing of these resources.

The paper examines the various reasons for marketing electronic information resources, with emphasis on the various, and illustrates marketing strategies used by J.D Rockefeller Research library towards effective utilization of the available resources in supporting research, teaching and learning. These strategies include use of posters, notices, brochures, telephone calls, Current Awareness Services (CAS), workshops and seminars, and decentralization of services, among others. It concludes with a discussion of cost effective use of these strategies in research and teaching.

Introduction
Egerton University is one of the six public universities in Kenya. The J.D Rockefeller Research Library is one of the six branch libraries of Egerton University. It specializes in e-resources, both in Compact Disc- Read Only Memory (CD-ROM) and online databases formats, and also has a few print materials. The library resource usage tends to be biased towards e-resources than the CD-ROM based databases.

The J.D. Rockefeller Research Library houses information resource materials in electronic or machine-readable format, exclusively for the purpose of use by researchers and postgraduate students. The University Kansas Information Service (2005), defines electronic information resources to include any hardware/software intended for the storage, transmission and use of information as well as the digital content files that may be stored, transmitted, or used with hardware/software. These are inclusive of e-mail, voice systems, local databases, externally accessed databases, CD-ROM, Digital Versatile Disc (DVD),
video, recorded magnetic media, digital movie, photographic files or other digitized information.

The J.D. Rockefeller Research Library collects, processes and disseminates research-worth information with a primary focus on electronic means of delivery. The library serves postgraduate students, academic staff, and researchers (both internal and external).

The major e-resources available include the CD-ROM based The Essential Electronic Agricultural Library (TEEAL), currently at 2004 edition, with a total of 445 CD-ROMs. Currently, the TEEAL CD-ROMs collection is funded by Rockefeller Foundation, with Egerton University providing the information communication infrastructure. There is a Local Area Network (LAN) version of TEEAL that is under test. The other CD-ROM based database is the Food Agricultural Organization (FAO) CD-ROM water Digital Series, with 29 CD-ROMs on water, irrigation and agriculture.

The online databases available at the library include Access to Global Online Research in Agriculture (AGORA) with full text articles in over 450 journals. And as well as the “sister” database Health Inter Network Access to Research Initiative (HINARI) and Online Access to Research in Environment (OARE). Apart from these major online databases, the library has access to other online databases through the Program of Enhancement of Information Resources (PEIR), fronted by the International Network for the Availability of Scientific Publications (INASP).

**REASONS FOR MARKETING E-RESOURCES**

Marketing is the identification and satisfaction of user needs and wants (Jian, 1999). It is aimed at informing the users (actual and potential) of the multiplicity of services that a library can provide. It should also inform users of any new information service that has been introduced in the library. Jain (1999) emphasizes that marketing is a stance and an attitude that focuses on meeting the needs of users.

Due to the information explosion and improved information communication infrastructure, access to global information has been enhanced. As a result, there is a need for libraries to identify the e-resources that meet the information needs of their clients so as to avoid information overload, and save on time for both the clients and the staff.

The reasons for marketing e-resources are:

- To ensure access to timely, accurate and reliable information resources.
- To counteract the speed at which information becomes obsolete.
- To create awareness of the availability of resources.
- To compete for financial resources with other branch libraries for financial resources from the parent institution amidst tight budgets and financial constraints.
- To promote an updated image of the library’s new services and products and the role of staff in the provision of these services and products.
- To meet the rising expectations of information users needs through the provision, recognition of, attention to, and appreciation of library clients.
- To benefit the library’s image by increasing library funds, increasing usage of services, educating users (actual and potential), changing outdated perceptions, and enhancing the reputation of the library and its staff. Can also lead to an increase in library funding.
MARKETING OF E-RESOURCES IN THE J.D. ROCKEFELLER RESEARCH LIBRARY

Academic libraries support the teaching and research needs of the institutions they serve. It is the libraries' responsibility to ensure that the use of its information sources, resources and services are maximized to benefit its users; hence, the necessity for marketing of these available resources.

The J.D. Rockefeller Research Library markets its e-resources through:

User Education

User education is defined as various programmes of instruction, education and exploration provided by libraries to users to enable them to make more effective, efficient and independent use of information resources and services to which these libraries provide access (Jian, 1999). User education is also known as takes the form of library orientation tours, bibliographic instructions sessions, and basic training in information retrieval skills, library instructions and, all of which contribute to information literacy. The ultimate aim of user education is to create and maintain awareness of services and products among the clients.

At the beginning of each academic year, the library introduces new students to the J.D. Rockefeller Research Library complex facilities. This is done through orientation on information seeking skills on a broad range of library resources in order for them to develop their own library skills. The library orientation and training emphasizes on finding information electronically from available e-databases and CD-ROMs.

Brochures of E-resources (Online and CD-ROM)

A brochure is a flyer or pamphlet used to advertise or inform. Due to limited personal access to the unavailable Internet connectivity at Egerton University, the library management has decided to circulate all relevant user names and passwords of various databases to clients, so as to give it wide maximize easy usage and access. This is done through preparation and distribution of an annual update of E-brochures containing with user database Uniform Resource Locator’s (URLs), user names and passwords. The e-brochures are updated annually to reflect any new databases.

Notices on Annual TEEAL Updates

The TEEAL CD-ROM database (1993-2004) is updated annually. The TEEAL updates information contents are two years retrospective. The update TEEAL is comprised of an index also referred to as an abstract and multiple compact disks with page images of articles with a running serial number, currently standing at 445 CD-ROMs. The collection has grown to include 445 CD-ROMs.

To market and decentralize the TEEAL product/service, the library puts up a notice whenever there is a TEEAL updated. The library consequently then installs and updates the index also known as an abstracts on departmental and personal computers for both staff and postgraduate students at no monitory cost to the user. This year, the library installed and updated the 2004 TEEAL on a total of 74 computers with TEEAL 2004 update.

Public Relations

Public relations are the processes of creating and maintaining a good positive image with clients so as to effectively create awareness of the available library e-resources and other services/products. It is the library’s way of communicating with the actual and potential users on the library’s products and services with the aim of influencing attitudes on e-information resources.

At The J.D Rockefeller Library, public relations include release of notices to departmental notice
boards and other strategic notice boards within the university on the TEEAL annual update, and newly accessed acquired e-databases, the most recent being AGORA, HINARI and OARE and the provision of the institutional user names and passwords that facilitate access to these databases.

Within the library, staff gives one-to-one assistance to actual and potential users on how to navigate the e-databases other e-resources in order to meet their specific information needs within the shortest time possible. All these efforts are aimed at developing effective search skills that will enable quick location of relevant information and avoid client frustration at being overwhelmed by getting hundreds of irrelevant search results.

**Library Guides (Definition)**

A wide range of guides is available at the J.D Rockefeller Research Library for both print and e-resources. They include guides to library services, guides to online journals and databases, guides for teaching database search skills, and catalogue guides. The library guides are in print format and are updated at the start of an academic year, and distributed to new students during fresh man orientation programmes. They are also updated and distributed when a new product/service is introduced to the library. In this scenario, the guides are put at departmental and library notice boards.

**Personal Search Guidance for Users in the Library**

Although the look and the feel of databases is varied from one to another, the key search features are common. Most of the databases provide basic and advanced search options. The TEEAL database, for example, has two search strategies: the basic search, which is a quick and easy way to get results, as it considers topics and divides it into components/concepts, such as author, publisher, year of publication, affiliate institution and journal title; and the advanced search that is similar to basic search but does not divide search field into components/concepts. There is need therefore to guide a user through these search strategies.

Staff at the library also provides guides to online access to a number of databases in different disciplines. This is done for individuals or class groups. These are guides to databases bibliographic details and abstracts as well as linkage to full text.

Faculty members and academic departments at Egerton University are recognizing the need to integrate e-resource search and retrieval skills in their programs at the beginning of the postgraduate academic program year (first year) and (at the beginning of) the last academic year for undergraduate programs (fourth year). In July 2006, the library conducted an e-resource class for Bachelor of Science of Nutrition and Food Science students on access and use of the TEEAL, AGORA and HINARI databases. In September 2006, a similar course was mounted for Master of Science (MSc) in Animal Science students. Both courses had 100% attendance as per the class nominal roll.

**Seminars and Workshops**

Seminars and workshops are designed to discuss issues and to provide opportunities for practical hands-on experience so that clients can develop skills and techniques to navigate e-information databases.

In May 2006, the library, through the funding from the Rockefeller Foundation, and support from the Information Training and Outreach Center for Africa (ITOCA), Food Agricultural Organization (FAO), Commonwealth Agricultural Bureau International (CABI), World Health Organization (WHO), and TEEAL, and Mann Library, Cornell, U.S.A hosted a 3 days hand-on “training of trainers” workshop for information providers and users drawn from agricultural and health institutions. The workshop was on both CD-ROM (TEEAL) resources and the major online databases, AGORA and HINARI.
The library runs quarterly workshops on access to e-information for staff and postgraduate students. These workshops are aimed at imparting search and navigation skills to the user groups so as to increase user independence and usage of the available resources. Participants are drawn from different departments selected by their respective heads of departments. At the end of the workshop, participants are asked to fill an evaluation form. Feedbacks from these forms are used by the library to gauge its services.

**CONCLUSION**

Though the library works towards successful marketing and eventual effective and efficient utilization of e-resources, there are several drawbacks. They include information communication technology challenges, inadequate professional staff to handle the large number of users, and inadequate time allocated for user education. The challenge therefore is with the librarians, who have to work together to come up with the appropriate marketing strategies to ensure effective and efficient usage of e-resources.

**REFERENCES**

