Social Media and Library Marketing: Experiences of KN Raj Library

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ABSTRACT

Marketing is essential for attracting potential customers and retaining existing customers. Libraries and information centres are also increasingly entering into the foray of library marketing and public relations using all available means. The various Web 2.0 and social media tools are very convenient for the libraries to market their resources and services. The paper explains various popular social media tools and argues for their extensive use in libraries for marketing and publicity. How these social media tools can be effectively put to use in libraries for marketing its resources and services are explained by illustrating services in the KN Raj Library of Centre for Development Studies, Thiruvananthapuram.

Keywords: KN Raj Library, library and information centre, library marketing, social media, Web 2.0

1. INTRODUCTION

Libraries are treasure houses of knowledge, information and data. In any society, the libraries play an important part in the growth and development of the population as a whole. All libraries, irrespective of whether they are public, academic, or special, are community libraries which service a specific community. Library professionals in these libraries have always striven hard to create awareness about their institutions, resources, and services among the users and potential users through all possible means of communication.

The researchers and library users are extensively using the internet resources on regular basis. The web-based resources and services have altered the information seeking behaviour of people. A typical information user in today's digital world can access information resources and services through a variety of channels.[1] Libraries are also adapting to these changing environments. They are developing and using various special tools and are devising alternate ways to reach and remind the users about their presence.

According to Kotler[2], Marketing "is the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives". Marketing relates to promotion, advertisement, personal selling, public relations, and so on. The activities of an organisation pertaining to relations with various markets and public are marketing. As posed by Hill[3], marketing drives social responsibilities associated with various stake holders, and the role of marketing is much broader than many

people anticipate. But most of the libraries do not market themselves effectively. Shontz[4], et al believe that many librarians may lack knowledge about marketing, may not think marketing is important, or may actually have negative attitudes about marketing. Also, some librarians have apprehension about whether marketing is an appropriate activity for them. This is because traditionally marketing is viewed as activity for profit making businesses. When a library professional reads further about marketing management, it dawns on him/her that like in any other field, in libraries also, marketing has the capacity to get underneath wants and needs of generations of people across places, cultures and product categories. It helps to understand consumers from their point of view. It is also clear that to be effective in assessing their users' needs and trying to fulfill them; librarians need to adopt the total marketing function.[5]

1.1 Social Media

In 2005, O'Reilly[6] proposed the Web 2.0 concept. This was a revolutionary development going way beyond the limits of the dot com (.com) technology. Social media is defined as a group of internet-based applications that build on Web 2.0. It facilitates generation and sharing of user-generated content. Social media uses modern ICT systems to provide avenues through which people can share, and manage content generated by themselves. The term 'social media' is used broadly to denote all types of social networking and communication tools and applications that help us to remain in touch with each other (Fig. 1).

According to Mayfield[7], social media is a group of new kinds of online media which share the characteristics

Source: The Blog Herald (http://www.blogherald.com)

Figure 1. Social media image.

such as (a) participation, (b) openness, (c) conversation, (d) community, and (e) connectedness. He further identified basic kinds of social media as (i) social Networks, (ii) blogs, (iii) wikis, (iv) podcasts, (v) forums, (vi) content communities, and (vii) microblogging.

Social media, therefore, broadly denotes the different types of online tools and services such as blogs, wikis, social networking sites, photo and video sharing communities and other applications provided by new generation ICT systems. They provide several ways for the effective use by libraries to market their resources and services. Social media is about participating, sharing and creating content, and all the features are of great value.[8]

2. KN RAJ LIBRARY

The Centre for Development Studies (CDS), Thiruvananthapuram was established in 1971[9]. Its library is considered one of the foremost research and reference libraries in the country in social sciences. It has over the last 40 years acquired a large and vibrant collection of books, periodicals, other research institutes' publications (national and international) and government publications in social sciences. Its digital repository has been populated with more than 10,000 items. In fond remembrance of its founder, late Professor KN Raj, the CDS Library was renamed as KN Raj Library[10] with effect from 9th July 2010. It has acquired an enormous number of titles in print and digital form. Its vision is to provide and share these resources with as many interested persons as possible. To attain this objective, KN Raj Library promotes and publicises about its resources and services through the different social media tools and the response that it has received in the past five years has been tremendous.

3. SOCIAL MEDIA TOOLS

3.1 Blogs

Weblogs or Blogs as they are popularly known, are spaces for sharing ideas, views and thoughts. It also provides facility for discussion and feedback (also known as comments) on matters presented. It also facilitates linking to other blogs and websites. Blogs can be subscribed to using RSS feeds. www.blogger.com, www.weebly.com,

www.wordpress.com, and www.yola.com are some of the most popular tools for creating blogs.

The blog-based information services in KN Raj Library was launched in August 2010 and officially announced as open to all users in February 2011. The service was named as 'KN Raj Library Information Updates'. It was available in urls cds.ac.in/lib and lib.cds.ac.in. The Wordpress.org blog template found suitable was used by installing the same in the CDS server. In 2012, this service was shifted to Wordpress.com site taking into account the increased usage, and the facility to link and share with other social media tools. The service was renamed as 'KN Raj Library Content Alerts'. At present the services is available in the url https://knrajlibrary. wordpress.com (Fig. 2).
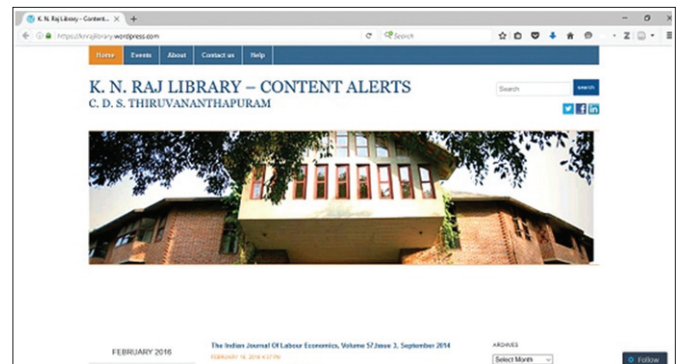

Figure 2. Content Alerts.

3.2 Facebook

The massively popular and most widely used social networking site, Facebook[11], is free social networking site launched in 2004 by Mark Zuckerberg. It allows building online communities for sharing information.Libraries can create pages and groups of interested community members and use it as an effective channel for sharing information. The libraries participation in Facebook groups and discussion will help to build powerful communication between the users and library.[12] The likes, shares and comments from the facebook users will automatically publicise the library page among their friends thereby giving more visibility to the library. It is also a best and effective platform for providing ready reference service. The Facebook page of KN Raj Library (Fig. 3) was launched in December 2012 and is accessible at
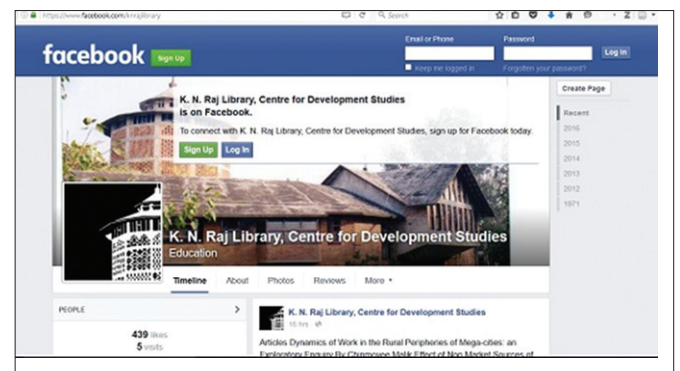

Figure 3. KN Raj Library on Facebook.

https://www.facebook.com/knrajlibrary. All the posts in the "Contents Alerts" blog is automatically shared with the facebook page also. Apart from this, information about special events conducted in the library, photo albums of events, news items about the centre and other important information pertaining to the library users are also posted in this page. This facebook page is available for all general public. Quick reference service is also provided to the users through this page, at their request.

3.3 Twitter

Twitter[13] is an online social networking service. Registered users can send and read short 140-character messages called "tweets". Libraries can create accounts in Twitter and use it for tweeting excerpts about posts in blogs and web-sites. It is also a very useful medium for quick and brief information sharing.

Twitter page of KN Raj Library (https://twitter.com/knrajlibrary) was launched in September 2013. This service is named as 'Updates from KN Raj Library'. Through sharing option in "Contents Alerts" blog, all posts in the blog are automatically shared in the twitter page also. Many library users re-tweet from the @KNRajLibrary the items that they find interesting. (Fig. 4)

Figure 4. @KNRajLibrary.

3.4 LinkedIn

Registered users in LinkedIn[14] can create and manage their profile which will help to engage with their professional network. Libraries can use this medium to share knowledge, insights and opportunities and effectively network with the library users for their benefit.

The KN Raj Library started an account in LinkedIn in 2014 and can be accessed at the url http://in.linkedin.com/in/knrajlibrary. All posts from the "Content Alerts" are automatically shared with the LinkedIn account also for wider viewership. Primarily meant for business and career based networking, LinkedIn is very useful for the networking of students with the alumni and general public. This enables the library page to act as a platform between different categories of users, at the same time informs them about the latest developments in their area of research interest. (Fig. 5)

3.5 ScoopIT

ScoopIt[15] was launched as a free internet curation tool. This is the best solution currently available for
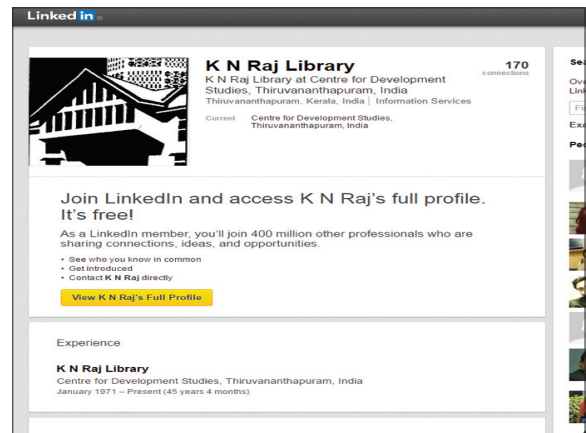

Figure 5. KN Raj Library on LinkedIn.

creating online magazines, bulletins, newsletters, pamphlets and other current awareness publications. Libraries can use ScoopIt to create online magazines and newsletters for the benefit of the user community. This is the best medium for creating image based information service, that is more colorful and appealing to the library user. ScoopIt has provision for the users to rescoop these posts, in their ScoopIt account as well as in other social media of their choice. Thus, contents, get scooped and rescooped multiple times, increasing its visibility, and in turn, the libraries image.

The KN Raj Library started using ScoopIt from October 2013. This service is available at the url http://www.scoop.it/t/infoknrl. This social media is primarily to publicise non-scholarly information emanating from different sources, which will be of interest to the library users. News paper clippings, job / career advertisements, scholarships information, seminar / workshop announcements, new innovations and advancement, and so on that are of immense use to the user community are brought to their attention via ScoopIT (Fig. 6).
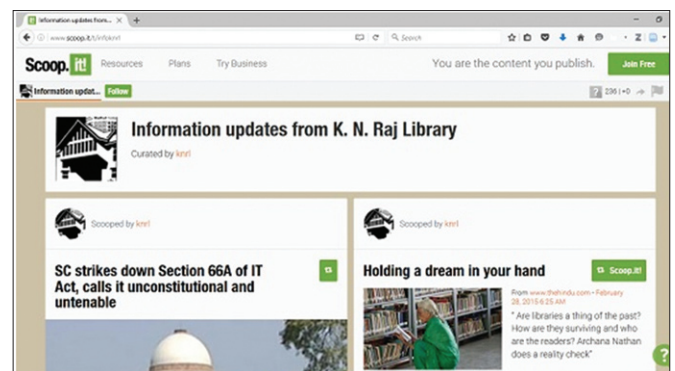

Figure 6. InfoKNRL.

3.6 Other Tools

Apart from the Blog, Facebook, Twitter, Linkedin and ScoopIt, the following tools are also becoming popular among librarians:

3.6.1 Flickr

Flickr[16] is perhaps the best online photo management and sharing application. Flickr can be used to upload,

maintain and share photo albums of events and programmes conducted by the libraries. Institutions organize different events throughout the year. All the photographs taken during these occasions usually get lost or unmanageable. Flickr provides an effective solution to organise these photos and images properly and gives them maximum visibility on the internet.

3.6.2 Pinterest

Pinterest[17] allows its members to collect and organize web-based resources. It allows users to capture items found on the internet to a 'pinboard'. The boards are accessible to users with login. This tool is extremely useful for sharing information to visual learners. Libraries can very quickly and easily keep the pinboard updated with latest resources and information.

3.6.3 Wikipedia

Wikis[18] are open webpages available online. It has surpassed the traditional print encyclopedia in coverage and usage. They are created by community efforts. Information can be created in text, audio, video and animation formats in wiki. This media can be used to create and maintain description about the library and the parent institution, for historical purposes. Short biography of leading and prominent persons who established the institution can also be created for public awareness. The visibility that wikipedia creates in Internet is enormous and the wiki contents are highly beneficial for the user community.

3.6.4 WhatsApp

For smartphone users WhatsApp[19] is a very useful application that helps in sending messages instantly. This tool uses the Internet to send text messages, images, video, user location and audio media messages. For faster and easier networking; it allows creation of groups. The librarian can create various groups based on different criteria, and share with the users the important information, new additions, photos of events and so on. The smart phone proliferation across all nations is increasing at a tremendous rate. The avenue of marketing library resources and services through WhatsApp is enormous. Lots of librarians are effectively using this tool for information dissemination. However, due to its innate privacy, general public is not aware about the existence of such groups.

3.6.5 You Tube

You Tube[20] is the most popular place to host, share and watch original videos. It currently hosts more than 50 lakhs videos. You Tube can be used to host the important events conducted by the institutions. Moreover, library, can Your Tube to gather and host videos about resources and instructions to use them. Video of 'Know your Library' can also be hosted in You Tube for greater visibility and convenience.

4. SUGGESTIONS

Libraries can launch social media based services to inform their members about the following:

• Library new additions, timings, holidays, announcements/ notices

• Information about membership and services.

• Information about Book discussions, reviews, new publications

• Create and maintain links to prominent online resources

• Information about new developments

• Share images / videos about library, events, library staff etc.

• Share information about institution's publications, reports etc.

• Network with users and provide information via messaging services.

It is evident that libraries are using several Social Media tools. However, more effective intervention among the user community is possible through the use of following tools:

• Website/Blog of every library should be able to provide all basic information about the history, events, activities, contact details. The URLs of all the other social media platforms should be provided in the website. This should be primary location for all the information needs. Simple tools such as Drupal, Jhoomla, Wordpress etc, are now available for web-site development.

• Blog should be the primary platform for posting the messages. It should be connected to Facebook, LinkedIn and Twitter so that every post in the blog will be shared directly in these applications.

• Videos of important events and activities should be recorded and hosted in YouTube and its url with a brief description should be posted in the Blog.

• Photographs should be hosted in Flickr as albums and its URL with brief description should be posted in the Blog.

• A general description of every institution, and important personalities connected with it should be hosted in Wikipedia in English, and the regional language. This is very important for historical purposes.

• Twitter and WhatsApp should be information alert tools pointing to blogs and websites. This will reduce the data handled in them.

• The event digests should be compiled in ScoopIt and provided to all the members.

5. CONCLUSIONS

Information technology has developed very rapidly in the new millennium. In area of Internet, computers

and communication this has induced tremendous changes. Librarians manage their day-to-day activity in a sophisticated cutting edge environment. Two decades back a website was a great asset for a library.[21] Similarly today, modern social media tools are great assets, because it provides access to the library and information centre throughout the day and all days a week. They allow the contents to be edited, modified and always kept updated. A library can thoroughly improve its image and visibility with the help of online marketing. This will result in attracting more users to utilise its materials and services.

Information is getting generated and disseminated through multiple channels, and these pose new hurdles for individuals in assessing and comprehending it. The society is facing grave danger from the uncertain quality and exponential growth of information.[22] Without competent library professionals and awareness provided by them through social media about proper availability of information, creating and developing a more informed and efficient society will not be possible.

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