

REVIEW OF RESEARCH



ISSN: 2249-894X

IMPACT FACTOR : 5.2331(UIF)

VOLUME - 7 | ISSUE - 5 | FEBRUARY - 2018



COMPETITION IN THE LIBRARY

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ABSTRACT

The future of Librarianship can be simply summed up: competition. Librarians must learn to focus on self-promotion and review resources allocation in an increasingly competitive field. To perform this, they should keep the basic principles of librarianship and merge them with the changing face of knowledge, information, and society. The basic skills needed for future librarians are already in place. Organisation, accessibility, and preservation form a solid base of core components for libraries, but increased technology has thrown a wild card into the mix. Technology has not changed what libraries do; it merely changes the way in which we do it. It has allowed such ventures as online cataloging, enhanced resources sharing, and greater ease in obtaining materials. However, it has also created a greater avenue for information & greater demand for speed and accuracy. Librarians must find new ways to incorporate their skills and knowledge and apply them to an evolving field. If libraries want to continue to thrive, they must learn to be more competitive.

KEYWORDS : Competition, librarianship.

INTRODUCTION :

Librarians must understand the importance of a library's greatest commodity: information. While librarians have traditionally held a prominent place in the informational food chain, the explosion of information in recent years has made the efforts to harness it an insurmountable task. Still noted for their organization and access to information, librarians face an increase in interest and competition from the business sector. Many librarians debate the relative worth of a bookstore, a search engine, or an online business compared to librarians expertise, but the reality is that these competitors are indeed drawing patrons from the library and serving some of their needs. While they may never prove to be a replacement for a library, they are proving adept at performing some of the same functions and needs for their customers. And if a regular library patron can find a nice, comfortable area to study at the local café while enjoying his bagel and latte, he may not be a regular library patron forever.

For libraries effectively compete they need to either perform a service better, give up on a particular function that they can't perform better, or work with the competition. One area that libraries are effectively addressing is their function as a study area. Traditionally the heart and soul of a university campus, the library finds competition from other areas, from dorm rooms to bookstores. Since patrons have greater freedoms in choice of study and leisure reading areas, they are increasingly requesting amenities such as eating spaces, comfortable seating, and extended hours in libraries. Many libraries both public and



academic, are listening to their patrons and redesigning library space with trendy couches and cyber cafes. While some libraries can choose to compete for students by providing better study opportunities, they can also opt out of competition, providing minimal study areas. Libraries with heavy concentrations of commuting students and distance education students may find it better to divert resources to off-campus users rather than maintain study areas that no one wants to use. Belief in the traditional, core values of librarianship does not mean clinging to one model, rather it means understanding your user population and being adaptable to meet their needs.

The loss of traditional function for libraries may be a hard pill for some to swallow, but asking libraries to work together with their competition also creates strong emotions. This is particularly strange given the harmonious relationships that libraries have been forging between themselves. Libraries have increasingly been forming partnerships with other libraries, inspite of being direct competitors. Consortial agreements not only give libraries more negotiating power with publishers and vendors but research sharing also allows many libraries to better manage limited funds. While libraries are competitors between themselves they also form natural allies, typically sharing traditional goals and principles. However, if libraries want to truly expand and remain competitive, they should seek out partnerships in other areas. Outsourcing of traditional functions, such as cataloging, is one type of partnership that libraries have participated in, to the chagrin of many in the profession, but there are other avenues. This may mean working with bookstores by sending patrons over to use newly published materials, persuading software stores to start hiring persons an MLS, or even sending patrons over to the local video store and subsidizing the cost of a DVD rental. Far-fetched, possibly, but if libraries incur the costs of obtaining materials via interlibrary loan, what are the differences in renting materials from local businesses to loan out to their patrons? The logistics may be difficult but no more difficult than the work of many in national library organizations or local committees. Libraries and librarians can either learn to adapt and seek out creative solutions to changes in society or find themselves going the way of the dinosaurs.

While librarians may understand the added value they can provide to patrons, they must work harder than before to prove it. With increased demands on time, many patrons want things quick and easy. This is not a new phenomenon, but with the relative ease of finding information available via the internet, they are increasingly settling on what is most convenient. Blanket solutions may not be effective for every Library, and deciding on which areas of service to cut back on or enhance depends on local issues. The truth is the rapid changes in society's wants and needs are having a significant impact on how and when patrons want their information. With these changes librarianship must change to meet those needs or others will, and are, moving in to fill the gaps. Pleading to an empty library that you can provide the best resources, rather than merely sufficient resources freely available on the internet is not likely to have much of an effect. With increased alternatives for information librarians must learn to gain a competitive edge and promote the added values that they provide to information.

NOTES

Internet sources



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