

FOUR IT BASED STRATEGIES TO ATTRACT LIBRARY USERS TO THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARIES IN SRI LANKA

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Abstract

At present most of the Government University libraries under the University Grants Commission are prepared to shift for the next paradigm but still they face the challenge of attracting library users. At present, most of these libraries use Modern Information Technology based services and equipment. However, together with the paradigm shift, they can use IT as a strategic tool to attract users. As such, in this research paper, four (04) new IT based strategies that can attract library users are discussed. The said four IT based strategies are as follows.

1. Introduction of a Mobile Application
2. Introduction of RFID Tags together with Self Issuing and Self Returning Facility
3. Installation of Travellators within the library
4. Installation of Interactive Screens

Key words

Paradigm Shift, Attract, Sri Lanka, University Libraries, Library Users

Background

At present most of the Government University Libraries under the University Grants Commission in Sri Lanka is in a period of maximum use of Information Technology for their library activities. Currently, they use modern Library Management Systems, CCTV Systems, Security Gates with Tattle Tapes, IT Equipped common Learning Areas, Library Web Sites and many more IT based infrastructures to increase the efficiency of their day to day library activities as well as to provide high end customer oriented services. Together with the paradigm shift of the Sri Lankan University Libraries, they are now trying to attract more and more library users. As such, University Libraries are now starting to implement different types of strategies to attract new library users as well as to retain the existing users. Library is the heart of the University (Leupp, 1924). Therefore, higher authorities of universities well support the University Libraries to implement new initiatives. Usually, they provide financial support as well as the necessary administrative support for new library activities without reluctance. As such, this is the appropriate time to implement modern and new IT related

initiatives in Libraries as a strategy to attract users to libraries. Hence, in this research paper, four IT based initiatives that can be used as strategies to attract library users are discussed in length.

Main Objective

To find out the new IT based strategies that have been introduced currently and planned to introduce within next five years from 2018 to 2023 (that are not implemented by the Sri Lankan university libraries presently) by libraries of top ranking university around the world and to suggest implementing those strategies in Sri Lankan University libraries to attract and retain Library users.

Research Design and Methodology

Studied the library web sites of the top ranking 20 universities according to the Webometric ranking for year 2018 and examined the IT based facilities available currently in those libraries together with their strategic plans for the next five years and analyzed the new IT based initiatives they use in their libraries to enhance the facilities provided to library users. Then compared the findings with 16 University Libraries in Sri Lanka that are coming under the University Grant Commission.

Findings

By analyzing facilities available in the above most significant 20 libraries it is very clear that all the above libraries mainly use Information Technology to provide an efficient and attractive service to their library users. Almost all the above libraries offer a special priority in their strategic plans to enhance the IT based services and facilities within next five years. According to the analysis carried out by the researcher through their websites and strategic plans, the following four IT based strategies can be introduced to attract library users to the Sri Lankan University Libraries.

- * Introducing a Mobile Application
- * Introduction of RFID Tags together with Self Issuing and Self Returning Facility
- * Installation of Travellators within the library
- * Installation of Interactive Screens

Apart from Travellators other three factors are already implemented in all of the above libraries. Travellators are included in their strategic plans for next five years as a facility intended to provide especially for physically weak and disabled users.

1 Mobile Application

A mobile app is a computer program designed to run on a mobile device such as a phone/tablet or watch. Mobile applications often stand in contrast to desktop applications which run on desktop

computers, and **web applications** which run in mobile web browsers rather than directly on the mobile device.



Figure 1: Mobile App,
https://www.libertyathletic.net/club/scripts/library/view_document.asp?NS=PUBLIC&DN=MOBILEAPP

At present young generation mostly work with their mobile devices and it is very difficult to find an undergraduate who does not use a mobile device. They use mobile Phones and Tabs more than computers. More than 90% of age 18 to 24 years goes online with smart phones (Most young people online with smartphone, 2014). As such, libraries can develop and introduce a mobile app to provide most of the services that are now provided through the Library web site. The most popular services that can be provided through the mobile app are as follows.

- i. Library Recourse Searching Facility
- ii. Reservation of Library books and Articles
- iii. Providing Forum for discussions
- iv. Payment of Fines through mobile account
- v. Reading Books and Journals, Etc.

The usage of the library among the undergraduates will be increased due to the mobile app attracting more undergraduates to the Library. The cost for introducing a mobile app to provide above facilities is around Rs. 250,000. Libraries can outsource the development and maintenance of a mobile app quickly and easily.

2 RFID Tags together with Self Issuing and Self Return Facility

A Radio Frequency Identification Tag (RFID tag) is an electronic tag that exchanges data with a RFID reader through radio waves. Most RFID tags are made up of at least two main parts. The first is an antenna, which receives/sends radio frequency (RF) waves. The second is an integrated circuit

(IC), which is used for processing and storing data, as well as modulating and demodulating the radio waves received/sent by the antenna. (Radio Frequency Identification Tag, 2018)

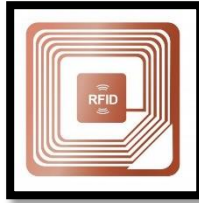


Figure 2: RFID Tags, <https://www.makeuseof.com/tag/technology-explained-how-do-rfid-tags->

RFID tag will cost around Rs. 90. With the introduction of RFID tags to the library, so many benefits can be acquired by connecting with the prevailing Library Management system. Further, it can be used for security purposes by replacing tattle tapes. Also it can be used to speed up the process of stock verification. By introducing new IT equipment like Self-issuing Machines (Kiosk) and Self-returning Machines (Drop Boxes) together with RFID tags, the most important result that can be taken place is the increase of attraction of library users to the library. Self-issuing machine helps the users to self-checkout the library materials available at the library by themselves without obtaining the assistance of library staff. This will be a new experience to the user and it will minimize the time that the users have to spend in front of the circulation counters. Also it will allow users to get issued more than one book at a time. Also library can publish their new events and notices on the Kiosk screen. Self-issuing machine will cost around Rs.2.2 million.



Figure 3: self-check. <http://bibliotheca.ru/ru/our-products-ru/self-service->

Drop Box helps the library users to return their books at any time (24*7*365) without visiting the circulation counter. This will make the users activities more convenient. After returning the book this

machine automatically issues a printed receipt indicating the information of returned books and the time and date of the return had taken place. A Drop Box will cost about Rs. 1.7 million.



Figure 4: Drop Box. <http://cdsol.com.my/cdsol/index.php/bibliotheca->

The above facilities will become a new experience to the library users. Thus, they will be attracted to the library more and more. As such, this is an amazing IT based strategy to increase the user attraction to the Library.

3 Travellator

Travellators are known as “moving walkways” or “moving sidewalks.” Essentially a travellator / moving walkway is a convenient transport mechanism that slowly and safely moves people relatively short distances either along level ground or inclined surface, such as the path between two floors of a building. (Escalators and Travelators, 2015)

In Sri Lanka most of the university libraries are located in large buildings comprise with multi floors. Therefore, it is a time consuming and boring activity to go here and there to find and check the books inside a large building. In addition, physically weak and disabled users can walk inside the library easily if libraries can install Travellators inside the libraries. Also, they can travel between floors and sections without difficulty using Travellators. Further, it is a new experience to library users. By offering this type of new experience to Library users, their attraction to the library can be increased. It is a nice an amazing experience to walk through the big library buildings using Travellators. A normal size Travellator will cost around Rs. 2,500,000 (Travelator, 2018).



Figure 5: <https://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-national/tp-tamilnadu/travelator-at-airport-by-month-end/article22914320.ece>

4 Interactive Screen

Interactivity is taking the market by storm. As users get familiar with mobile devices and tablets they need the same experience on desktop and public venue displays. Libraries can introduce the interactive screens inside libraries and let users to read E-Books and E-Journals, surf Information online, Search library recourses, etc. Using huge interactive screens will become a new experience to Sri Lankan university undergraduate. Thus, providing this new experience is a good strategy to attract library users to libraries. Normal size (55 inch) interactive screen will cost around Rs.700,000 and there are different types of interactive screens now days in the market. So librarians can purchase different types of interactive screens for the libraries according to the purpose. E.g. To read newspapers and Journal articles – Table Top Interactive Screen, to surf the library web site – Standing Interactive Screen.

Conclusion

Sri Lankan University Librarians can use above IT based 4 factors as a strategy to attract users to libraries together with the Paradigm Shift of the Libraries. As such, it is highly recommended to study and consider these IT Based Four Factors and introduce them in different scales according to the sizes and the financial capabilities of libraries.

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