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THE UNIVERSITY AND ITS LIBRARY: TARTU UNIVERSITY EXPERIENCE

В статье освещаются наиболее важные начинания библиотеки по повышению эффективности сотрудничества с университетом.

Важнейшая цель и соответственно стратегическая задача библиотеки – предоставление пользователям информационных ресурсов. Еще в конце 90-х большинство пользователей библиотеки из числа ученых, исследователей и преподавателей университета сетовали, что для получения необходимой научной информации им приходится обращаться в соседние университетские библиотеки Хельсинки и Уппсала или к своим зарубежным коллегам. Сегодня же они признают, что для поиска информации пользуются в первую очередь интернетовской страницей своей университетской библиотеки.

Второе направление – формирование комфортной библиотечной среды. Библиотека стремится стать местом, где студентам было бы удобно и заниматься, и общаться. Не менее важным является также стремление библиотеки созидать и развивать культуру обслуживания.

Уверенность обоих партнеров – как университета, так и библиотеки - в необходимости и важности их совместной работы, а также усилия по развитию сотрудничества должны стать гарантом достижения удовлетворенности пользователей библиотеки.

We are going to talk about Tartu University Library and about the university as the most important co-operation partner of the university library.

Five years ago, when the authors of the present article started working at their present positions as the director and the director of public services, respectively, relations between the university and the library were dominated by mutual misunderstanding and mistrust. The lack of scientific information necessary for the researchers and lecturers brought about sharp criticism concerning research libraries. The late 1990s was a hard time for all research libraries. It was generally thought that the libraries were not competent enough to meet the needs of the academic community. Thus, it was quite difficult to convince the university members that the librarians have mastered the situation, they are familiar with the work organisation and services offered by many European and American university libraries, and they know the best opportunities open for modern university libraries.

It was trust that was absent – the university did not trust its library.

A well-known market researcher C. Grönroos points out two components that form the basis for a customer's satisfaction with the services offered.

* Technical quality (i.e. the service offered)

* Functional quality (i.e. how the service was offered).

But he also emphasises the importance of the reputation of the service provider in the perception of quality by the customer. The perceived quality does not depend only on what the customer experiences, but also on his/her expectations. Oral promises, the reputation of the service provider and the needs of the customer all have an effect on the customer expectations (Grönroos 1998). Trust forms a part of the reputation. The development of trust is a long-time process.

The library drew a conclusion that all three components of quality have to be considered in the further planning of library activities. The reputation of the library embodies both the technical and functional qualities, but special activities in developing the reputation are also necessary, and this aspect has to be taken into account in all services the library offers.

At present, the library faces two major tasks and development paths in its work with its users. In this article we want to share the experience of our more important activities in furthering the co-operation with the university.

The first development path and task – the making of information accessible to library users.

There is no need to repeat the fact that modern scientific information is disseminated mostly in the electronic format. A large amount of texts and study materials in the fields of the humanities and social sciences is, however, still available on paper, (and will remain so in the future). In the recent years, we have concentrated on the making of electronic scientific databases accessible to our users. The results have been achieved through international co-operation (eIFL Project, some joint agreements with the Baltic and Scandinavian countries), and co-operation with Estonian libraries (via ELNET Consortium), and the materials have simply been individually purchased just according to the needs of the university. We were able to guarantee the allotting of finances for the joint purchases of electronic materials for Estonian research libraries from the budget of the Estonian Ministry of Education and Research. The total number of journal and database titles acquired individually and in packages amounts to 11 000, which is a considerable number, but in fact, it resembles the seeming abundance of goods in supermarkets, where it is difficult to find the information suitable for specific needs. These specific needs have to be met by special purchases that may cost a lot of additional money. The most important task in such abundance is to guarantee that all the potential customers of scientific information would know what resources are accessible in reality, and that they would know how to use them. Work with different target groups

and their training is closely related with marketing and general development of reputation.

The most important and largest project in the library in the past year – the reorganisation of open collections into subject area reading-rooms for the humanities, social sciences, and natural sciences and medicine – was undertaken with the aim of making library materials better accessible. The electronic face of the library – its web page – will undergo major changes this year. We shall rebuild the web page in the form of subject area portals, in such a way we can increase the functionality and user-friendliness of search opportunities. We strive to make the library as accessible via the electronic media as it is accessible physically. The accessibility of library collections and services has to be guaranteed via both the computer network and on site. Less complicated services and news can be offered also through other communication channels.

Even at the end of the 1990s, the majority of our researchers, lecturers and postgraduate students – library users – said that when they needed to go to the library or get a necessary journal article, they had to go to Helsinki or Uppsala libraries, or ask a favour from their colleagues abroad. Now, it seems that an important breakthrough has been reached – they perform their first search in local collections or use the library web page, and only then turn to next sources.

The second development path – the developing of work and study environment.

Nowadays, when the students do not spend as much time together in the lecture halls as they used to do earlier, the library aspires to be the place, where they can work and study together, but also, where they can socialise and spend time together. Although our library already long ago drew a complete renovation plan, the university has not found means to execute it. We have had to improve the work environment only with our own means. A good and comfortable work and study environment is required to offer:

* Opportunities for individual work in a quiet environment. In our library we have seen that quiet and separate work places among the shelves and behind the corners are always taken.

* Places for group work. Our users have been very clever in finding such places, areas and opportunities in our library. Whenever possible, we have supplied these places with tables, chairs, computers, etc.

* Places for using laptop computers. Wireless Internet can be used practically all over the library. But since not all students have laptops, and since it is more comfortable to work with texts near the bookshelves, where one can easily pick up necessary materials, we decided to start a new service of loaning laptops in our library. We received a gift of laptops from the IBM, and about ten machines are in constant use all the time. This service proved to be one of the best received new ideas for a long time, much praised by the students.

* Computer workplaces. The shortage of computer workplaces was one of the greatest problems at our library up to the beginning of this academic year. To solve this problem, the library was granted the use of 45 computers, which are set up at the library during the academic year, and are used at the university admissions department in summer. As a result, we can offer about 100 computer work places to our users. People still have to queue up for the computers, but the queues are rather short and the situation is not critical any more.

* The creation of subject area reading-rooms and increasing the amount of books on open shelving. Traditionally, our library had separate collections of textbooks and scientific literature and provided the respective reading-rooms. Considering the building and the spatial conditions in the library, the acquisition opportunities, the needs of the students, and also the optimisation of staff workload, continuing in the old way was ineffectual. As a result of the reorganisation, now, we have the subject area reading-rooms. The concentration of all materials from one and the same subject field into one and the same location makes the materials much easier to access.

We already mentioned that we were not able to carry out the complete renovation plan. But in addition to new services, which even the partial reorganisation enabled us to start, we decided to refresh the rather tired and worn-out interior of the library by a bolder use of colour codes than can usually be found in a library. The first surprise (mostly expressed by the staff) was followed by positive feedback. We were much helped in changing the visual image of our library by a young and enthusiastic designer, employed by the library, who has very successfully united the traditions of our 200-year-old library and the expectations of the present-day students concerning their work environment.

During a couple of recent years, the library has been a pioneer in the university in the field of electronic publication of research works. All preparations and preliminary agreements were concluded by the end of the year 2003, and since the beginning of 2004, all the masters' and doctoral theses, defended at the University of Tartu, have been accessible via our library web page. From this success we could proceed to develop the service of electronic publishing.

The long-standing wish of our students has been that during the exam period, the library would be open for a longer time (usually, the library closes at 21.00). Since the architectural lay-out of the library does not allow the separation of a smaller area with different opening hours from the rest of the library, an option was to experiment with the project of the so-called night library. The project was much supported and aided by the Students' Representation of the University of Tartu. Their members knew very well the students' needs; they gave us some financial support and helped with temporary staff. The first night library opened in January 2003 and later, it has regularly been working during each examination session. We tried out several variants, e.g. the periods of late hours for one week, two and four weeks, and the opening hours up to 24.00, 02.00 and even the period of 24 hours. By now we have reached the most effective solution – the night library is active for two weeks, on the first four weekdays, and it is open until 24.00. The project is very popular among the students and they consider it as a part of

the library routine. At present, no other Estonian university library offers such night library with prolonged opening hours for the exam time.

Together with the above-mentioned activities (services), the library has to create and develop the quality and effectiveness of its services. In this work, it is essential that both the library staff and users were service-oriented. Orientation to services guarantees a high functional quality and supports a good technical quality (Tooman 2003: 89). Everyday library work has also proved the necessity of considering the quality model by Grönroos.

In the case of university libraries we can talk about long-time customers and about the importance of maintaining good relations with them. A precondition for keeping the customers – library users – is the creation of trust and developing good co-operation relations. The library has to be a trustworthy partner for the university.

According to J. Griffin, the main conditions for creating trust are:

* Honesty – to promise only the things that can be delivered, evaluating the resources and opportunities of the service provider.

* Empathy – to listen to the customers' problems and try to solve them as thoroughly as possible.

* Information – to offer information that the customers would need to make decisions. (*Vihalem 2003: 116-117*).

When both partners – the university and the library – believe in the necessity and importance of co-operation and make every effort to continue their relationship, the satisfaction of the users of the university library is most probably guaranteed as well.

References

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