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Minimal Resources with Maximum Impact: Low-Cost and Sustainable Means for Library Promotions

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MINIMAL RESOURCES WITH MAXIMUM IMPACT:
LOW-COST AND SUSTAINABLE MEANS
FOR LIBRARY PROMOTION

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ABSTRACT. *While it is a generally shared fact around the globe that funding for library promotion (and in most cases, libraries in general) be rendered as a pressing concern, the fact remains that this challenge is truer in developing countries such as the Philippines. Librarians in charge of promoting the library can either choose to fight--defend their "rights" for a slice of the budget pie, or take flight--just do away with library promotion altogether. However, results of a low-cost and sustainable marketing strategy employed by the Rizal Library of the Ateneo de Manila University in the Philippines prove that there is a third and better option. The marriage of new media tools (such as social networking sites), relationship marketing, and guerilla marketing proved to be an effective means to promote the library and its services. The strategy was deployed in 2011, and continues to prove its effectiveness to date. Statistics on use and following have been steadily increasing, and the library has never been more popular with its client base than ever before. This paper presents a case study of how very few financial resources were able to make waves of impact and even created a loyal following of users for the Rizal Library.*

KEYWORDS   marketing, promotion, academic libraries, cost reduction, Philippines

1. INTRODUCTION

The Rizal Library of the Ateneo de Manila University has been under various administrations over the past decades, with different thrusts between and even within administrations. At the onset of the new millennium, it has strived to develop the personal and professional competencies of its staff to level their skills with the evolving needs of its clients. This was conducted by conducting seminars and workshops in-house, inviting library and information science professionals as well as experts from other fields to serve as speakers. The funding for staff development was also strengthened, thus librarians and staff were able to attend conferences and seminars within and outside the country to broaden their views on librarianship, expand their networks, and "up their game".

As the development of facilities and information resources came next, 370,000 print volumes of books, 18 new databases, 45,000 e-books, and more than 20,000 e-journals were added to the collection. This was merely the beginning—as more and more are added to these numbers (particularly in the e-collection) by the day. Two new buildings were also constructed, the New Rizal Library which caters mostly to readers services and houses the general collection, and the

Matteo Ricci Study Hall, a paperless library which cultivates collaborative and integrative learning through group discussion areas, as in the concept of "information commons" (Beagle, 2012; Lippincott, 2012; Whitchurch, 2010), "learning spaces" (Turner, Welch & Reynolds, 2013; Heitsch & Holley, 2011), and "learning commons" (Turner, 2014; Heitsch & Holley, 2011). The old Rizal Library building was converted into a hub for *Filipiniana* and Special collections.

To verify the value of these developments, Dizon (2009) conducted a user satisfaction survey, which reflected an overall satisfaction (60% satisfied, 30% very satisfied) for most users. However, results of the study also show very high unawareness of and unfamiliarity with a number of services, particularly inter-library loan (67%), Ask-a-Librarian via Instant Messaging service (58%), document delivery service (57%), graduate students & faculty study area (53%), services rendered by the Special Collections (49% for the Ateneo Library of Women's Writings and 32% for the American Historical Collection), multimedia services (31%), and off-campus access to e-resources (27%), among others. This prompted the administration to integrate marketing and promotion into its thrusts, thereby hiring a full-time Assistant to the Director (ATD) for Special Programs and Events in 2010 to conduct these activities.

While it has been evident that funds were available for staff, facilities, and resources development, funding for marketing and promotion apart from labor costs of the full-time ATD assigned to conduct these activities were not uncomplicated to come by. However, while it has been a common opinion for librarians that marketing does not get a big share of the budget pie (Gupta, 2006; Ross, 2014) and that budgets are generally tight (Fisher, Pride & Miller, 2006; Collins, 2012; Johns, 2011; James-Gilboe, 2010), literature still puts weight on letting our users know who we are and what we do through marketing and promotion (Gupta, Koontz & Massisimo, 2013; Mathews, 2009; Flaten, 2006). To make ends meet, efforts to carry out activities with the highest impact while consuming the lowest quantity of resources through social media and guerilla marketing were conducted by the Rizal Library. Father of Guerilla Marketing Jay Conrad Levinson defines it as "achieving conventional goals, such as profits and joy, with unconventional methods, such as investing energy instead of money" (Kaden quoting Levinson, 2006). As Miller (2013) further describes it:

> Low-budget, unconventional, and interactive, guerilla marketing is a method of promotion that offers an alternative to traditional advertising by instead fostering localized, word-of-mouth buzz. Guerilla marketing projects target a more specific audience than traditional media campaigns, often appealing to younger consumers who are thought to be more receptive to experimental advertising. Guerilla marketers often use online and real-world public space to stage their promotions, attracting the attention of passersby with unusual, sometimes shocking displays.

The activities conducted as a marketing strategy based on the combination of these tools and concepts, together with their results, shall be presented in this paper.

2. PROMOTION ACTIVITIES AND RESULTS

Prior to embarking on a marketing strategy, market segmentation was carried out, dividing the entire client base into three: (1) faculty members, (2) graduate students, and (3) undergraduate students, the latter being the largest segment of the three. Initially, efforts to reach faculty members have been made, in hopes that in influencing them, they in turn will stimulate awareness in their students as well. Activities such as database trainings, periodic electronic announcements, distribution of handouts during school fora and other meetings, making use of the University website for information dissemination, and requesting for a collection development plan for each department were carried out. This resulted in increase in usage for faculty—from almost no database searches in fiscal year 2008-2009 to 66,327 times in 2009-2010, and 74,568 in 2010-2011 (David & Sagun, 2011).

While usage for graduate students and undergraduate students have also shown increase, the disparity between figures before and after implementation was not as large as desired. In 2009-2010, 310,899 searches were conducted by graduate students, and in 2009-2010, 353,510 times. No data was available for fiscal year 2008-2009. For undergraduate students, a significant jump has been observed from 2008-2009 to 2009-2010, with 541,371 and 1,324,025 searches, respectively. A slight increase has also been observed for fiscal year 2010-2011, with 1,474,147 searches conducted (David & Sagun, 2011). The increase was enough to be able to say that the "influence the influencers" strategy, to some degree, was a success. However, there is still room for improvement. In addition to that, other strategies to reach out students were also employed concurrently, such as conducting e-mail blasts to announce the availability of off-campus database access, use of social networking accounts to make announcements, conduct of orientation seminars and tours in cooperation with the faculty, and distribution of handouts at the circulation desk and other points of service.

Relationship Marketing Efforts

To fill the gap between current and desired outcomes, a different approach has been carried out in 2011. The creation of an organization of "library champions" comprised of students (named "BookBench") served as a springboard for new library promotion activities to be conducted. The shift in strategy—from influencing the influencers to reaching the largest market segment of the Library involved the users themselves in conceptualizing and implementing library marketing and promotion. These were conducted upon the supervision and guidance of the Assistant to the Director for Special Programs & Events. Among the initial activities of BookBench include: (1) the conduct of a training program for students called Library 101 to improve library awareness among fellow students, (2) contests directed at students, such as e-book review writing contests to promote use of e-resources, (3) sponsorship of free film viewings inside the library to promote the multimedia collection dubbed as "Friday Night Lib!", and (4) maintaining a book corner of materials that they think their fellow students will find interesting, guided by a theme per month (fantasy, graphic novels, Asian literature, etc.). The small quantity of materials used and prizes given away were from the supplies of the Rizal Library and some items from donors and database providers.

Upon its establishment in 2011, BookBench officially had 10 members. After three years, the numbers have racked up to over 150 students, with both undergraduate and graduate students represented.

Revival of Social Media Accounts

In 2010, the Rizal Library created its own Facebook and Twitter accounts. However, these accounts were not much utilized. With 2,000 likes and 900 followers for Facebook and Twitter respectively, the accounts still has great room for improvement as the University population amounts to 10,000. Prior to implementation of the marketing strategy, social media was used to post traditional announcements, with a formal status update informing the community of changes in schedule, public holidays, among others. In 2011, a revival of these accounts was implemented to increase followership, and thus improve utilization. Periodic posting of updates, quotes from books, asking engaging questions to help initiate interaction, and holding contests from time to time were conducted by the Library. Personification of the Rizal Library through social media was conducted as well—with the Library conversing with students as a person would. Students have then begun fondly calling the Library "Rizzie" and referring to it as their "darlings", some going as far as professing their undying love for the institution. Followership doubled at this time, and was taken as a sign that the market was ready for the second step—rebranding.

Rebranding Librarianish

While it has been established that awareness has been low for many of the Rizal Library's services offered, experience of librarians at the Reference desk reveals that, in addition to low awareness, users also find the terms intimidating and difficult to understand. Thus, an effort to translate "librarianish" – jargon that librarians and information professionals use to refer to our services – to the language that our users speak has been made. Readers advisory services has been a pillar of Reference and Information Services, however, less than a handful (average of 5) avail of such service in a fiscal year. Rebranding the service to "Loan a Librarian" and using a popular Internet meme increased usage to 52 sign ups in a span of two weeks after implementation and promotion, reporting a growth of 2500%. An increase from 1,417 off-campus database password requests to 1,972 (39%) after using an Internet meme to communicate the service has also been observed.

Use of memes in an effort to translate librarianish has also gained some attention through social media, garnering up to 406 likes and 285 shares for the off-campus password request announcement, and 545 likes and 147 shares for readers advisory service when posted on the Rizal Library Facebook and Twitter accounts. The use of Internet memes has since been established as the preferred mode of information dissemination. In addition to that, while the Rizal Library has had openings for student assistants for the past couple of years, there were virtually very few (if any) applicants for the posts. Efforts in making announcements in relation

to changes in library hours and events were also deemed inconsequential, as students being uninformed and misinformed reflect a very low reach for said announcements. Post-translation into Internet memes, the student assistantship program has received 91 applications for the semester of implementation, with a reach of 251 likes and 75 shares on Facebook, while announcements have garnered more attention and reach, reaching up to 317 likes and 71 shares (term break opening meme), and 119 likes and 105 shares (Roofdeck study hall availability meme). A farther-reaching effect for its posts has thus been achieved, with its audience taking part in information dissemination through "sharing" the posts themselves.

Relevant Low-Cost Programs & Events

Various guerilla marketing ploys were conducted in addition to the aforementioned activities. To name a few:

Across the Stars: Rizal Lib x BookBench A-Fair Booth

A booth was set up at the Ateneo de Manila University College Fair, where a free photo to be taken at the photobooth was offered in exchange of getting your off-campus password for access to e-resources. Taking after popular culture, the theme used was Star Wars, with borrowed props and makeshift costumes for Jedi and Sith Lords, popular characters in the movie franchise. This one-day activity garnered almost 200 sign-ups in the span of a few hours. To save on costs, no printed photographs were provided. Instead, they were uploaded on the Library's Facebook page, thus garnering more traffic for the social media account.

K-Bear the Knowledge Bear

A life-size bear was lent by a BookBench member to the Library to serve as a visiting librarian, or as students fondly call it, lib-bear-ian. "K-bear" or "Knowledge Bear" soared into popularity as students took pictures of it and shared the images across social media platforms. K-bear was used to reiterate the availability of off-campus password online resources sign-ups, to encourage students to do research, and even for a call for volunteers for a disaster management effort conducted by the University. The fame of K-bear has ascended to greater heights as the official University website has created its own feature on the character, prompting K-bear to maintain its own Twitter account.

Fine Print: The Official Rizal Library Magazine

Based on student and staff feedback, there is very little attention given to the previous brochures given away by the Rizal Library, primarily due to the text-heavy format of the materials. A magazine was thus conceptualized and created, educating users on different library products and services using feature articles and a number of photographs. For instance, the dress code has been communicated using a fashion segment, a walk-through of the building was integrated in a love story which served as the centerfold and cover story of the magazine, the Special

Collections have been marketed in guise of an arts and culture segment, among many others. To save on costs, only freshmen were given printed copies (as inserts in their freshman welcome kit), while the information for upperclassmen was disseminated through an online version of the magazine using Issuu.com, a website that hosts publications for free, and the use of social media.

Letters to Rizal Lib

Following the popularity of the movie "Letters to Juliet", the Rizal Library conducted a feedback-generating campaign dubbed as "Letters to Rizal Lib". A makeshift *Wall on Verona* was placed outside the library, with post-its and markers made available for students to write their feedback on and stick it into the gaps of the makeshift wall, as in the movie. This activity was able to garner almost 200 post-its, with positive and negative feedback ranging from facilities management to suggestions for materials to be acquired by the Library.

3. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

Success indicators of the marketing and promotion strategy implemented by the Rizal Library include the following:

(1) Coming from 541,371 in 2008-2009, the Rizal Library usage statistics based on off-campus online database searches has reached 6,900,997 in 2013-2014.
(2) Social media following has also increased from 2,000 to over 8,000 for Facebook and from 900 to almost 7,000 for Twitter from 2010 to 2014, and the Library has never been more popular with its loyal following of undergraduate and graduate students as well as faculty.
(3) Reach has been farther than ever, with clients participating in information dissemination themselves.
(4) Feedback has been generated and provided by clients with very little effort and costs required.
(5) Library exposure has soared to greater heights through University involvement.
(6) The establishment and sustainability of the library organization "BookBench".

While it is logical to assume that more can be achieved having been given greater funds, the results of this study prove that a low budget for marketing and promotion is not a hindrance in conducting these activities and being able to achieve, if not exceed, desired results.

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