New Dimensions in the Management of the User Centric Services in the Area of Library and Information Centers

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Abstracts

Libraries in the modern or digital era are treated as gateway to the information. The main role of the library and library professionals is to acquire the required and qualitative information resources, which suits the needs of the users. There is a need to provide users based or user centric service to the users to satisfy their requirements. The face of the information services is changing due to the application of the information technology in the library. The paper discuss about the user-based services in detail. The skills required for managing the new dimensions in the libraries are also elaborated.

Keywords: *Library services, user based library services, user centric library services, technology based library services, user expectations from libraries.*

Introduction

Library and Information Centers are playing a vital role by providing the information required by the users for their research and developmental activities. The libraries offer various types of services to the user community and spread the knowledge. The main task is of disseminating the information from the collection as well as made it available from the other institutional resources. The traditional services provided by the libraries like ILL, CAS, SDI, bibliographic listing, reading room, book borrowing were mainly based on the library collection, but due to application of Information Technology the trends in the library and information centers are also shifting towards modernization. The methods and practices used are also changing and the value added services have are emerging as key elements in the new library environment..

Globally, libraries are facing the challenges due to the introduction of the IT in the profession and the escalation in the number of publications; whereas the user demands are getting very pinpointed and specific. The electronic Publishing has further changed the mode of services expected from the traditional libraries. The traditional mode of library services was based on the print media, whereas the present mode lays emphasis on digital information resources, web and Internet resources for providing the services.

Role of the library in terms of services

The libraries, information centers and the knowledge centers are acting as the service providers and there is an incessant demand from the users is to provide the nascent, updated and analyzed information speedily. The users visit the library for various purposes but their main objective is to get the information available in their area of work. The libraries basically acquire, process, organize, manage, and disseminate the information to the users whenever required. But the user requirements and service expectations form the libraries are growing and advancing. It is therefore essential to provide the user-based services to the library clientele. For providing the user based services or the user-centric services library professionals are required to understand the user needs and requirements and based on these issues formulate the services for the benefit of the users.

What Users Expects from the Libraries

Bawden[1] has pointed out the expectations of users from the libraries, knowledge centers, digital library etc. and their services based on the following aspects

1) Comprehensiveness

2) Accessibility

3) Immediate gratification

4) Follow ability of data

5) Ease of use

6) Multiple formats and media

Apart from these following expectations are also indicated in support of users.

- Current information dissemination

- Access to universal information resources

- Prompt, accurate and speedy information on the topic of interest

- Seamless access to the information (either free or fee based) in an economical method

- Value added information services

- Regular and updated information

- Database search facility

- Critical review and state of art information

These expectations of users can be achieved with the help of conventional services but not to the maximum extent of user satisfaction. Hence the introduction of IT based activities in libraries has helped to satisfy the users.

Methods to satisfy the user expectations

In the era of information explosion and information overload, it is not possible to procure all the published information at one place. However to fulfill the maximum user needs the library professionals have to periodically review the selection and collection policies of library.

In such cases it is essential to understand the organizational goals, user needs, and based on these factors the library collection must be developed. There is a need to provide the information services, which are user required and preferred for this purpose, library personnel have to find out the user needs and requirements, formulate collection development policies, attempt to the resource sharing programs, provide user based services, get feedback from the users to provide improved services, provide individualized services along with group services. Thus there is a need to satisfy the users' expectations.

Need of the user centric services

User Centric or User based library services is the need of the current environment due to the information explosion, rising cost of the information resources, increasing expectations of the users form the libraries, increasing research and development activities, use of digital resources and need for specialized pinpointed information etc. The cost effective and economical aspects in the services are the need of the present environment. The information overload is the basic problem in managing the proper information delivery to the users. Hence it is now necessary to develop the users based library services to make the maximum use of the resources available to the users.

How to provide user centric services

To provide the user centric services library professionals have to brace up for the various challenges and adapt the appropriate solutions. In an

effort to provide proper user based services the library professionals have to look in to the following aspects

1) Finding the needs and expectations of the users (Information Seeking Behavior)

2) To build the proper and useful library collection which serves the need of the users

3) Provide the information services which fulfill the needs of the users

4) Use technology support to gather, collect and analyze the information and add the value to it

5) To use new tools of information resources like Internet

6) Searching the online databases to get the appropriate information required by the users from the various online resources

7) Understand the future needs of the users

These aspects will help the library users to get the required information from the libraries

How to provide need based services to user

In the traditional libraries emphasis was on the services provided based on the print media available in the library. But owing to application of the information technology there are additional services available to users along with the upgradation of the existing and traditional services.

The services provided from the libraries can be grouped in to the following broad groups

a) Traditional Services: These cover users services and technical services. The user services basically include reference and referral services, accession list or monthly list of additions, display of current arrivals in the library, display of the publishers catalogue and newsletters, price list in the library, CAS, SDI services, ILL, translations, review of literature, journal article indexing, book display and exhibitions, and user education training. In technical services manual or online catalogue, special indexes, thesaurus building, literature search, subject and computer training were the main components,

b) IT based services: Jeevan[2] has pointed out different library services which are provided by using technology like web based, Internet based, CD –Rom based, Network based, and Consortium based Information services, and these are purely based on the digital documents or information resources like databases, e-books, e-journals etc. The access to these services is offered by using the technology which in turn assists in providing pinpointed services to the users. The digital libraries and virtual libraries are the examples of the usage of the modern technology.

In this following services can be grouped.

- *Electronic Resource based services*: covering CD

Rom database searching, EDDS, linking of documents, e-reference desk services

- *Internet based services:* Internet is also treated as the biggest source of information. All sorts of information resources are available on the internet. They are also useful for providing the various services to users like e-mail, chat, Listserves, remote log on, free journals services, virtual reference desk, subject portals and gateways, electronic publishing services, business and trade information, TOC services, blogging, Bulletin board, push and pull based services, OPACs, house keeping operations, full text downloads etc. By using the Internet it is possible to integrate different services using web browsers and e-mail facilities.

- *Intranet based services:* Intranet acts similar to the Internet, but it is based on the institutional level or on local network. On the intranet the services like Communication (e-mail), CD Rom data bases search, OPAC based services, EDDS, resource sharing, circulation based services, SDI and CAS services including alert, creation of internal databases, development of institutional home pages, online training, FTP facilities, etc are being provided. The intranet services are more useful, usable, affordable and economical and thus help in resource sharing.

- *Online databases search services:* This is the most important service provided by the library professionals to the users as per their specific needs. Though the online services are costly, but these provides pinpointed information and serve the user needs properly. The information brokers like STN/ CAS, Dialog make these services available. These agencies hold all the databases with them. Based on the need, users have to select the databases. Multiple database search facility is also made available. This service is primarily a user need service which helps in providing accurate information to the users.

- *Digital Library based services:* Digital library (DL) are called so because all the resources there are in the digital form. The services provided by DL are the extension of the traditional library services and in addition more powerful services are provided through DL. Poll[3] has rightly pointed out that DL based services are not entirely new but they are replacing the traditional services and methods. In addition to this a few more services based on digital collection are provided. The services like virtual reference desk, personalized services, integration of libraries and the resources of the various organizations, OAI, TOC, SDI, CAS, Alert, E Publishing, remote access, bibliographic database services, institutional repositories, hyper linking, e-reference desk etc

- *Web based Services :* Lili[4] has pointed out that

Web technology is being used more in day to day library functions and is also useful for the dissemination of the information products on the net. The web-based services are grouped in to publishers, database developers, Institutional Web, libraries on the net and users who search information independently. The services like Web based reference services (LOC project), Web based digital services, Web 2,0 based services (Lib 2.0) etc.(Wikis, blogs, RSS, IM, Social networking etc)

- *Consortium based services:* These are the advanced level services provided to achieve resource sharing among the like group of libraries. The UGC Infonet, CSIR, INDEST, FORSA etc. are playing a major role in cooperative acquisition of the digital information resources. The services like Information retrieval, EDDS, downloads, review of literature, are major benefits.

The information centers provided all the above services, but in addition to it, they were involved in Information product generation, translation services, newspaper clippings, Union catalogue development, indexing and abstracting, review of the literature etc. Article indexing was also a major task of the libraries. The advancement in the profession enhanced the services and the libraries initiated Alert services, Current Content type of services, as well as Online searching of the databases initiated in the special libraries. The libraries, information centers and knowledge centers are primarily devoted to the services to the users.

c) Expertise and value added information services: Apart from the above the users are also interested in services like critical information review, critical compilation of information and data, state of art report, trend reports, alert and digest services, replies to specific and pinpointed queries, literature search (Retrospective and current), etc. For providing such services professionals from library must get association with the subject expert or he must gain the skills.

Vinitha[5] and Aldrich[6] have described the impact of the technology on the library services indicating the need to accept the challenges and develop the skills to provide better information services to the users by a vigorous use of the available technology.

What to do for proving user base Services

Patil[7] in his study pointed out that in order to provide the qualitative services the collection development of the libraries must also become qualitative. The proper need based collection in the library may assist in making the desired services available to the users. He also pointed out that if library wants to provide the user based or user-centric services the following points should be taken note of:

−   Understand the user needs and organizations goal

– Update the professional skills of the library staff

– Provide the user adequate training to make them aware of the library system and services provided

– Networking of libraries to provide better resources to users

– Development of institutional repositories

– Evaluate the information resources and make their use for the knowledge building

– Review the collection development regularly

– Interact with the users and understand their needs

The aspects like understanding the user needs and requirement, analyze and review the information resources, acquisition of the potential information resources, will help in providing qualitative and user required services.

There are various factors which favour bringing in changes in the services, e.g. Digital libraries, knowledge management, Intranet and Internet as well as Web technology, e-publishing, integrated access to databases, etc are to be used in providing the services

Role of library professionals and skills required

The role of the library professionals is changing from generation to generation and adaptation of new technologies for the better services to the user community. The role of the librarian is to provide the user based library services and for this purpose a variety of skills are to be gained like technological skills, personality development, communication skills, positive attitude, gaining knowledge and adapting new skills, training and refreshing the knowledge. The technological benefits must be utilized and resource sharing must be achieved.

Walimbe[8] in her study mentioned that it is also necessary to develop the best practices in the profession like providing exact information needed by the users, guide the users in locating the desired information, make the library management user friendly, easy access to the information resources, weeding of the documents, applications of the new technologies for providing better services, approach the users rather users to wait to go to library, and finally ability to accept the challenges and marketing the services.

Conclusion

The role of the library system is to provide effective and efficient library and information services to the users, based on their needs. Information Technology assists the library professionals to serve better to users by providing user needed services to perform various research activities. The basic role of the library professionals is to match the information seekers with the information resources and get the desired information for the users. To provide the users centric services library professionals have to face many challenges. However there is a need to provide the proper information services to fulfill the need of the users.

The technology can be used to provide more effective user centric services including induction to users, training with multimedia applications; it also provides teaching and learning support to users, self-ordering documents, electronic publication, remote log in, FAQ services etc.

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