

Why university libraries don't trust Facebook marketing?

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Abstract: *University students are using social media network Facebook every day, they spend hours communicating with friends there. Since 2007 Facebook have been open for every kind of organizations who have possibility to market their services and products through Pages, this also have given libraries a chance to be closer to their audiences. This paper explores how Estonian university libraries use their Facebook Pages to make themselves more visible and how librarians feel about the possibilities social media provides. Data was collected using qualitative content analysis and semi-structured interviews. Unfortunately only few 'Pages' use a little bit more than just posting some neutral messages to the Wall and uploading few older pictures which probably doesn't attract students' minds enough and that comes out from low numbers of Fans. Hopefully the results of this study helps librarians to see how much is left undone and there is so much potential left in Facebook.*

Keywords: *Estonian university libraries, marketing, social media, Facebook, Facebook university library Pages*

Introduction

Web based social media has been attracted people's attention about 20 years already. Few years after creating Facebook site, special „Pages“ for organizations and companies were launched in 2007 who could now promote and market themselves in Facebook (Riza Ayu & Abrizah, 2011). A lot of commercial enterprises as well as non-profit institutions started to use the possibilities offered by that social network site.

Libraries should be in the public eye all the time and it is important to be visible as possible without spending lots of money. Marketing in a need rather than a luxury; it is management process which identifies, anticipates and supplies customer requirements efficiently and profitably (McLam *et al*, 2007). As most of library's users are in the same time regular users of social media, it is important to libraries also to move into this environment to be closer to users.

Facebook is quite popular in Estonia – the most recent data (end of November 2012) shows that more than 38% of population owns profiles in Facebook (*Estonia Facebook statistics*). However this social network has not been common research subject among local library and information science students, researchers nor librarians. Some students have analyzed social media and Facebook marketing of businesses in their master projects (Aasrand, 2010; Tammeoks, 2010), but no-one has investigated library marketing in Facebook.

Purpose of this article is to explore the use of social network site Facebook as one possible marketing channel in Estonian university libraries. Paper consists of parts where background, methods, results and discussion are analyzed.

Background and context

Although Facebook is popular and step-by-step libraries are starting to use those possibilities that social network is offering, there are not many studies about libraries using Facebook. Still those few ones offer us some kind of overview what have been studied in this field.

Sokoloff (2009) was analyzing Facebook profiles of six different international libraries around the world (in South Africa, United Kingdom, Serbia, Australia and Canada). He found that different libraries have varying degrees of activity – some use plenty of applications and interesting ways to interact, others have few 'Wall' posts and a year old photo album. Sokoloff concluded his research with assessment that there are so much that libraries can win by learning to use social networking.

Jacobson (2011) focused on 12 United States libraries' Facebook pages' content. Results showed that many libraries use Facebook as marketing tool but librarians are bit more ambitious in their hopes for their presence in Facebook. It was seen from the results that librarians perceive their use of Facebook much more active than it is actually; libraries should update their page more than once a week and Facebook is better tool for 'active' libraries who organize lots of events and activities.

Some information studies literature explore solely academic libraries in Facebook. Calvi, Cassella and Nuijten (2010) were quantitatively analyzing 12 Great Britain's university libraries' use of Facebook pages. They concluded from findings that two kind of libraries can be identified: libraries with very active Facebook profile and who invest on their page a lot; libraries who do little because of low appreciation of the value Facebook page can add or because of resource

limitations.

On the other side of the world Riza Ayu and Abrizah (2011) conducted a research exploring the use and exploit of Facebook applications among Malaysian academic libraries. They consider most Malaysian academic libraries use this network site as marketing tool (informing users, outreach to students, create awareness), however the pages should be consistently updated and made more „human“ to attract users.

Hendrix *et al* (2009) focused on academic health science libraries in United States and found that libraries who are using Facebook mainly for marketing (push out announcements, post photos, provide chat reference etc) feel more positive about the future success of their presence.

It is suggested that besides pages there are several third-party applications created or opportunities to use outside parties for making library Facebook profile more attractive, libraries should use Facebook in maximum way (Ganster & Schumacher, 2009).

Even though it is possible to use Facebook for free, some libraries have had very good results from paid Facebook advertising campaign which effectively doubled the rate at which new fans were being added to the library Facebook page (Chan, 2011).

Current paper about Estonian university libraries is based on studies analysing Facebook pages in different regions mentioned above. Those researches have quite same results: new data to Facebook should be uploaded regularly, that social network site should be used in maximum way and Facebook can offer very effective marketing possibility to libraries.

Methods

Purpose of the research is to find out what opinions Estonian university librarians have towards possibilities that Facebook offers; how and why they have used those opportunities; why librarians are still not very active in Facebook; why some libraries are not using Facebook for marketing themselves.

There are seven higher education institutions which have university status given by Estonian Ministry of Education and Research: University of Tartu, Tallinn University of Technology, Estonian University of Life Science, Tallinn University, Estonian Academy of Arts, Estonian Academy of Music and Theatre, Estonian Business School (private). In the current research all libraries of those universities were analyzed in spite of do they own a Facebook profile or not.

The real Facebook pages of libraries were analyzed and opinions of library representatives were studied during the research. Two types of research methods were used in two different stages to collect data: at first qualitative content analysis were conducted and after semi-structured interviews were carried out.

Qualitative content analysis were conducted twice (June and October 2012). First phase was timed into the end of academic year; data posted between January and mid-June 2012 was examined at this stage. During the second stage the new semester was already on the half-way; in October it was explored which content was created during mid-June to mid-October. All together about 10 months-period was analyzed to find out what kind of content have been generated.

Interviews were carried out face to face in all university libraries in the beginning of November 2012. Respondents were library staff whose work is to administrate Facebook profiles (librarian, head of service department, head of information department, public relations officer, marketing manager). In the absence of the profile the library manager was interviewed.

Results

Qualitative content analyzes

During the first analysis main data from libraries' Facebook profiles was examined. Information collected by qualitative content analysis included basic information from section 'About', the number of people who like the page; also the use of specific applications such as photos, videos, notes, events etc. Important part of the research was to collect information of the wall posts – how many posts have been posted, which topics are covered, how much feedback is given. Only posts released between January and mid-June 2012 was analyzed in the first survey.

Only four libraries from seven use Facebook to make their institution more visible to public. Three of the profiles were created in 2010, one in 2011. Quite dissapointing was to see how few people are in friend-relationship with the libraries. Comparing the number of friends with amount of people who are readers in the library then on one case only 0,97% of the readers are also library's friends in Facebook; the highest percent was 3,37 which is also very low. So is it really possible to make yourself more visible to one percent of the readers? Can we even talk about visibility or marketing or we should just start talking about existing in social media?

There were not many photo albums on the libraries' profiles: one library had seven albums, others had four. Topics of

the photos were basically events, exhibitions, books, library building. Most of the photos were uploaded more than year ago, newer pictures are added mostly to 'timeline' photo album. Only two libraries use video application – one has two videos from year 2010, second has three videos from the same year (table 1). In first videos there are small introduction to library and one service, others introduce anthem of the university and cafe located in library.

Other applications are not used at all. One library have been using 'notes' and 'events' application, but last update of them was about year ago. Other libraries haven't used any extra possibilities. Three libraries have used the option to like other organizations 'pages'.

Table 1: Facebook Page Maintenance (January to mid-June 2012)

Library number	Profile created	Friends	% from readers	Posts	Likes per post	Posts by others	Photo albums	Videos	Liking others
1	Feb 2011	64	0,97	15	21	0	4	0	0
2	May 2010	406	1,42	20	44	0	4	0	12
3	May 2010	965	1,86	30	103	0	4	2	14
4	Mar 2010	1793	3,37	27	111	6	7	3	26

In average there are four posts per month by libraries, depending on month and events going on. Mostly it is announced about changes on opening times and events taking place in library or in university. Feedback from users in Facebook is quite different: one library got up to 111 likes to 27 posts, while other one got just 21 likes to 15 posts. Same situation is also with 'shares' and 'comments' when library profile with many posts got more feedback through sharing and commenting than library with less posts. Also on most active profile there were more posts by others. It shows how active operating on Facebook page brings more users to pass by and leave feedback to the work which is done.

From the second content analysis comes out that nothing much have been changed. Profile pictures as well as cover photos are the same, there have been made just slight changes under 'profile info', numbers of friends also haven't increased significantly (from 5,4 to 6,5 and from 4,8 to 7,75). The average number of posts on Estonian two biggest university libraries' (University of Tartu, Tallinn University) Facebook profiles have risen, probably due to renovation works which were put through in those libraries. Still most popular topic posted is changes in opening hours, less is written about exhibitions and and new databases.

From the mid-June to mid-October 2012 only one library has uploaded new photo albums, others have posted just single photos to the 'Wall'. Also no new videos, notes, events, recommendations. That one more active library's administrator has included some new pages to 'likes', no changes on other profiles.

Altogether all four libraries are quite passive in Facebook. Most used possibility is adding photos but this is also quite scarce. Not many posts or photos are added during one month, library workers are posting only about events or most important information not to start conversation with users. Feedback from readers is low, there is not active communication going on on Facebook pages.

There are no very attractive new photos or videos, posted text is also rather dull. Postings are always neutral containing information about opening hours, exhibitions, sparsely book presentation, database or services. Facebook page in this form doesn't offer anything new or different compared to web site. This raised many questions to which only profile administrators are able to answer.

Interviews

Basic purpose of interviews was to find out library management's attitude towards Facebook and why Facebook marketing is or is not used; also how important it is to libraries to use social media; why Facebook profile administrators are not so active and why they are not using Facebook's possibilities in maximum way.

For the start all the respondents understand the expression 'library marketing' very differently. Some say it is advertising or selling your services, others think that it is image building, everyday work in library or information management. Here are some examples:

„It is uncertain expression as library already has clients. It's finding out the needs of the client and then offer our service based on that.“ (Interviewee 4, November 1, 2012)

„... it is some kind of new perspective which I have considered as natural library work.“ (Interviewee 7, November 6, 2012)

„Everyday work.“ (Interviewee 1, October 29, 2012)

„Image building. Organizing events which add a positive image to the library.“ (Interviewee 5, November 5, 2012)

All the libraries use their web site for informing the public, in addition also mailing lists, people (professors and subject information workers), trainings, events and printed materials. Those marketing channels are mostly traditional and developed through time, none of the libraries have them mentioned in any strategic documents. Main marketing channel is web site, librarians trust it and consider this as users' basic information source.

Almost all the respondents find that libraries should make themselves more visible through social media. Preferred site is Facebook, because so many users are there – specially young people. None of the libraries who have profile regret creating Facebook page. Administrators are aware of lack of active communication on pages, still they don't find any reason to close those pages. No libraries had specific aim for marketing – Facebook profiles were created to become more youthful or just because other libraries already had a page.

Not having a Facebook page is mainly connected with lack of need or resources. Smaller university libraries don't feel the necessity to have library's page as there already exists university's Facebook profile where all the information is shared to the students. If users show their wish to get information straight from library profile then probably the page would be opened.

Despite of neutral and dull posts, photos and videos librarians state that the students are a priority in Facebook and most of the posts are entered of them. On the other hand interviewees notice that library is academic unit of university which requires to communicate with users in certain way – librarians feel that university as well as library have to be rather formal in their statements. Facebook profile reduplicates the content on library's web site. Most of the librarians who's institution has a Facebook page have an opinion that information they share has to be formal, concrete, elaborated and strictly businesslike also in social media.

„We are part of the university and we do everything like they do. ... I don't want it [Facebook page] to become a place of gibberish.“ (Interviewee 1, October 29, 2012)

„Not all academic institutions should try to be popular and youthful.“ (Interviewee 5, November 5, 2012)

During the interviews it was noticed that libraries don't regard Facebook as serious nor important channel. There have not enforced any user satisfaction surveys, no goals and expectations are set, Facebook is not mentioned in any strategic document (except annual reports). At the moment libraries use Facebook profiles only for informing. Respondents found that basically nothing would be wrong if one day Facebook wouldn't exist anymore. Social media is not a priority to libraries, some even don't think about it as one marketing channel.

Discussion

Using social media for marketing libraries is very important as interviewees responded, but on the same time not all libraries use those possibilities. Although it is proved that libraries who market themselves in Facebook are satisfied (Hendrix *et al*, 2009) and advertising there can improve visibility of organization (Chan, 2011), Estonian university library workers are not very confident users of social network. Librarians feel that Facebook is one-time phenomenon which will disappear soon or new sites will take over its place.

Fear of loosing Facebook is main purpose of why librarians are not very active in Facebook pages. Those few uploaded pictures and some posts don't require much resources which libraries have already low. Like Calvi *et al* (2010) found there are two types of libraries' Facebook pages it is also noticable in Estonian context – one big library have more time and people to improve their 'Page' and that results in higher degree of feedback and activity of users.

Overall the results of content analysis showed quite low activeness of Estonian university libraries' pages. From one side librarians do not update content on the pages very often, many times there is just one new post per week. In my opinion this is too little, that way we cannot speak about 'making library more visible to public'. Sure social media is great way to show what library is and organization can win a lot with being in Facebook as Sokoloff mentioned, but on the other hand sometimes librarians see their actions on social sites differently than it is visible to users (Jacobson, 2011).

Facebook is being used mainly for announcements, it is reduplicating libraries' web site. Interestingly librarians don't feel a reason to change anything or to do something differently. Although most pages were created to be more youthful and closer to university students then published content is still as dull and formal as in official documents. Facebook marketing is not mentioned in any of the strategic papers, it is not told how librarians must communicate in social media. For many students it is important to talk in their language and in 'human' way to attract attention, this is also a way libraries could apply in Facebook (Riza Ayu, Abrizah, 2011).

Overall the study showed that Estonian university libraries are rather passive in Facebook. Management doesn't see the reason to promote library too much in social media as other mediums (web site, everyday work, mailing lists) work well enough. This is also main cause why some university libraries doesn't have Facebook pages created – librarians feel that everything traditional works still fine and readers are aware of library.

Conclusion

University libraries are frequently using different marketing channels. But the exploit of Facebook is rather poor due to many different reasons: lack of resources, no need to be there, other channels are good enough. Librarians are aware that using Facebook needs a lot of attention and work as pages there should be updated more often than once a week to be successful. Although there are no official strategies nor instructions prepared university libraries still try to exist in Facebook even without specific goal to reach.

Social networks have so much potential and libraries have been given a possibility to use everything Facebook offers. Now it is last minute to start taking Facebook seriously and exploit it in maximum way. Estonian university libraries should start being more up-to-date and accept new technology as well as new ways of marketing themselves.

Acknowledgements

I would like to express my very great appreciation to assoc. prof. Aira Lepik for her valuable and constructive suggestions during the planning and development of this research work; also to the staff of Institute of Information Studies and to my colleagues in Academic Library of Tallinn University for their support.

This research was funded by European Social Fund's Doctoral Studies and Internationalisation Programme DoRa, which is carried out by Foundation Archimedes.

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