

# **Facilitating scientific research by a biomedical and life sciences gateway – University of Madras, a case study**

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## **Abstract**

The library and information landscape has transformed with the onset of the digital era and today traditional libraries have changed roles to serve as ‘Knowledge centres’ with their priority on value added electronic information services. Academic libraries, especially of the universities, are focusing on how best they can facilitate research by canalizing specific e-information services which compliment as cutting edge technology. This paper analyses the proactive role of the Science Campus Library, University of Madras in facilitating research. Focus here is on the subject- or discipline-specific gateways in Biomedical and Life Sciences compiled by the Library to serve as ‘one stop shop’ for the researcher thus serving as ‘info filters’ of the ‘info glut’ that they face. Electronic resources for these two Subject Gateways are categorized on themes - Herbal Medicine, Medical Informatics, Molecular Cell Biology, Microbial Biotechnology and Bioinformatics, Nutraceuticals, Life Sciences, Aquatic Biology, Ecology and Coastal Environment and Techniques in Plant Biotechnology. Each of these themes in turn focus on various links to theme specific e-journals and databases, Software, Patents, Theses, Reference Works, Protocols, Techniques, Search engines, Institutions, Associations, Societies Conference, Events. Methods of evaluation of these e-resources, compilation of the gateways and strategies of marketing the library services also give an overview of how the Library plays a major role in facilitating research for higher education.

## **Introduction**

A paradigm shift in the ecology of information needs and information access has emerged posing a tremendous impact on the quality of digital information and the electronic information services rendered. Libraries have changed their role and function to serve as dynamic engines to sieve the info glut and emerge as ‘Knowledge Centers’ with their librarians to crusade as ‘Knowledge Engineers’. This new information landscape warrants institutions of higher education such as University libraries to keep pace with innovations in technology and at the same time flaunt their abilities as cutting edge research libraries.

A pre-requisite of the electronic age is the need to reach out to users in new ways. Interacting with the users face to face has been dwindling down as many a time as transactions occur over the web. With the website becoming the library for many of the patrons it has become crucial to redouble its efforts to reach these non traditional programmes. The need to provide access to distributed learning, making everything available to everyone anytime, anywhere makes us realize the change in being customer driven without being customer led.

## **Reaching the Researcher**

The Science Campus Library of the University of Madras works with its mission to reach the researcher. The new role of the university library as a ‘Knowledge Resource Center’ is committed to fulfil the information needs of its clientele, namely the researchers. Scientific research is enhanced by the support of large resources of online content made accessible through the library portal.

The portal customizes various services and functions as a platform for web self-service right from library profile to focused research information sources such as e-books, e-journals, e-databases, institutional repository of scientific output, Subject Gateways. It serves as an asset to the institution with its role in content management.

Among the varied value added electronic information services provided by the library, focus here is on the 'Subject Gateways' compiled by the library, especially the Biomedical and Life Science Gateways.

Online content related to the following subjects is compiled under main themes such as:

### **Biomedical Sciences**

- Biodiversity and Bioresources
- Bioinformatics - Herbal Medicine
- Molecular Cell Biology
- Microbial Biotechnology and Bioinformatics
- Nutraceuticals

### **Life-Sciences**

- Aquatic Biology
- Ecology and Coastal Environment
- Life Sciences
- Techniques in Plant Biotechnology

Focus areas under these themes include online resources such as protocols, analytical techniques, lab manuals, subject gateways, image gallery of fauna and flora, interactive maps, patents, theses, information networks; electronic research tools such as e-books, dictionaries, encyclopaedias, directories, e-journals, e-databases, covering biomedical, pharmacological and drug literature, glossaries of botanical names, medicinal plants, biotechnology and food; online courses / tutorials, power point presentations, research news, industry news, computational tools; national and international resources such as associations, forums, societies, institutes, university departments; awards, grants, fellowships, PDF news, bio careers; events such as conferences, seminars, workshops...

All the content created or compiled having the researcher as the target will go under-utilized unless those services are effectively marketed. Lets see what are the marketing strategies adopted by the library to reach out its online content to its clientele.

**Relationship Marketing** - Ongoing research and investigation are keys to improving our understanding of the researchers' needs and wants from their libraries. While acquiring customers has been the objective of traditional marketing, here the concept of relationship marketing i.e. getting and sustaining customers is all that is aimed at. There has always been a community partnership to support research.

**Faculty Interaction Programme / Researchers Forum** - helps to interact with the clientele for whom the services are targeted. It aids in taking stock of their requirement, evaluate and improve with their suggestions and get more focused.

**User Orientation** - New members of the library are ushered in with briefs on the layout of the library and the services in store for their research. The programme catapults the library services into focus, kindling their research interests.

Training programmes / Workshops - develop their research skills in information access, and keep abreast with the current developments in their field. They are designed for different levels of users such as postgraduates, research scholars and faculty.

**Product presentations** of latest electronic resources, meeting information needs for new research and teaching directions complementally to the university, user training meetings and trials of the products such as e-journals and e-databases are a periodic feature. Feedback of the users in assessing the usefulness of the products helps in evaluating the marketing effectiveness.

**Bulletin Board** displays at vantage points of the library, **e-alerts** announcements at the library portal, e-alerts sent to faculty on their related research, **Posters** displayed to create awareness of e-resources, **Bookmarks, Folders, Mementos, Souvenirs** promoting e-products and services distributed on various occasions such as Workshops, Conferences, User meetings, Library Week celebrations etc. have definitely created a great impact on the minds of the researchers. They are far more informed than their counterparts at other research institutions.

**Quizzes and online seminars** organised by publishers and product vendors reach the clientele through the library's public relations mode thus mutually benefiting the publisher at one end and the researcher at the other.

**Public Relations (PR)** - Building relationships with journalists, government leaders, industry, identifying issues important to them and furnishing them with research material required by them is also a major PR plan of customer service and media relations that the library has developed over the years.

**Role of the Library Personnel** - Usage statistics aids in analyzing the level of utilization of the e-resources. The success of an entire process of evaluating, compiling and marketing the e-resources require a team of committed, skilful, proactive library professionals. Periodic training in developing interpersonal skills, team building, and professional communication skills enhances the calibre of the library personnel.

## **Conclusion**

The Science Campus Library of University of Madras has been very responsible in working in tune with the institution's mission to facilitate research. It serves as a 'Knowledge Resource Centre' with more and more content constantly being added to its database. Beginning with content generation to compilation and to usage of online resources has largely contributed to the quality of research at the University. Its proactive role in reaching out even before the clientele demands is one of its aggressive marketing strategies that place the researcher, the library and the information industry in an indispensable triangle.

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