
How to give your users the LIS services they want

Sheila Pantry and Peter Griffiths,
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As the user is at the heart of why and how we provide library and information services (LIS), it is vital that information professionals thoroughly understand, meet and predict users' needs – and, where necessary, manage their expectations. Pantry and Griffiths have written a comprehensive book outlining these issues, and emphasising how user behaviour has changed and will continue to change, in conjunction with rapid developments in technology and communication tools. Their book discusses the contexts in which users are seeking support from LIS and suggests approaches for getting to the heart of what users want. This is an important task as libraries strive to remain relevant in an increasingly digital world.

The book starts by addressing the fundamental question of how to understand the users. The authors focus on the use of an information audit to address the issues related to this – finding out who your users are, where they are and what they want. One of the themes running through the book is the onus placed on users to communicate their needs, particularly as these needs change; users have a significant stake in the quality of the service provided and should engage in feeding back their opinions on it. It is up to LIS staff to find ways of getting hold of this information.

The chapters that follow address a range of issues. The need to understand your current users – and the range of needs likely to be experienced by the different types of user within one LIS – is discussed. There is also a consideration of how to manage user expectations and how to keep your users. The importance of continuing professional development is also outlined. Pantry and Griffiths neatly sum up the approach required to address

user expectations: 'Give your users superior service and convenience ... Find out what users want and within the constraints of cost and priorities aim to provide it' (p59).

The book discusses how to identify and meet the current and future needs of LIS users, but it also considers whether past data can help identify trends in user behaviour and needs. The authors acknowledge that, whilst trends may help predict user needs, past data does not guarantee what future users will want. The various merits and pitfalls of surveys are also covered. Chapter 6 discusses how understanding user needs can be linked to strategic planning and marketing. Pantry and Griffiths also emphasise the importance of ensuring that senior managers, who may not be LIS professionals themselves, are aware of the value of the LIS to the wider organisation and realise that it acts on the wishes of its users. They argue that a strategic plan must include how the LIS will meet user needs and how these needs are measured and acted on. Communication, as ever, is key.

The last three chapters focus on the changeable nature of LIS users' needs and expectations. This includes how to keep track of changes and how to ensure user loyalty. There is also a discussion of new ways in which information professionals can use their skills to maintain the value of the LIS – particular mention is given to reputation management. Pantry and Griffiths move on to highlight the need to remain one step ahead of users in anticipating their needs. The final chapter looks to the future: the importance of the library as a space is mentioned, with some interesting suggestions for how the space can be developed creatively, allowing users to determine what they need space for. Some suggestions given include 'blogger stations', 'video studios' and 'imagination rooms' (p121). The chapter concludes by emphasising how the next generation of library users will work differently and expect different services – and that library and information services need to adapt if these user needs are to be satisfied.

The book is generally well structured and easy to read; the clear signposting of different sections will allow a reader to dip into the pertinent parts as required. Each chapter finishes with a summary of the main ideas and there is a substantial bibliography and reading list for following up related sources.

This title will be a useful overview of the importance of understanding the users of today's LIS

and of pre-empting the needs of those coming up behind them in a fast-changing and complex digital world. Pantry and Griffiths close their book with an observation on what today's LIS should aim for:

'a modern library consists (we suggest) of the perfect balance of virtual and printed resources housed in a building designed and constructed to deliver those resources in optimum conditions, managed and facilitated by professional staff who are activists in their profession...'. (p134)

If we can fill such a library with satisfied users, we will, hopefully, be in a strong position to argue for the ongoing relevance and validity of library and information services.