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University Library web sites in Kerala as marketing tools: an Evaluation

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Abstract

University libraries are undergoing a major metamorphosis consequent to the development of Information Communication Technology. Digital as a medium for marketing is likely to dominate in this decade due to the fact that digital became the predominant channel for accessing content. Many of the university libraries are now trying to use their websites for distributing documents and selling images and full texts online. Web marketing strategy aims to help the university library optimize the use of its information products and services. So it is indispensable to study the importance of library websites and to explore the reality and potential of the home page of university libraries in Kerala as a vehicle for marketing and public relations. The objectives of this study are (i) to analyze the present promotional activities of University Libraries in Kerala (ii) to analyze and evaluate the contents of university libraries websites in a marketing point of view and (iii) to build a model webpage for university libraries in Kerala which is suited for marketing. Both primary and secondary data used for the study. The primary data was collected from the university librarian or in-charge of the four university libraries viz. Kerala University Library (KUL), Mahatma Gandhi University Library (MGUL), Cochin University of Science and Technology Library (CUSATL) and CH Mohammed Koya Library of the University of Calicut (CHMKL). The secondary data was collected from the website of each of the university library under study. Analyzed various university library websites at the national and international level and identified 23 links which have potential for marketing and repositioning the image of the library. The study examined how far the websites of university libraries in Kerala are equipped for marketing with respect to the identified links. The study revealed that most of the libraries in Kerala used traditional modes of promotion. CUSATL is on the top with a variety of promotional activities for their information products and services. The study also found that the websites of KUL, MGUL and CHMKL are not marketing oriented. Hence this paper is an attempt to propose a model website for the university libraries in Kerala, which has enough potential to market its information products and services.

Key Words: University Library, Websites, Marketing tool, Web marketing, Kerala, Promotional activities

1. Introduction

University libraries in Kerala are being challenged as never before to maintain their relevance in higher education and to their academic community. Information quality may be a prime differential between resources offered through a library service and the “Google-

mentality” of new generations of users. However, only if university libraries market their services effectively to these users will they continue to hold a prime role in fulfilling the information needs of their universities. University libraries are undergoing a major metamorphosis consequent to the development of Information Communication Technology. The resources, products, systems, services and use patterns are changing rapidly with the advancement in computer, communications and multimedia. Internet, linking millions of users around the world is now a popular media for selling information products and services and it influenced all our daily activities thus Bill Gates called “Web life style”. Technology offers a range of tools for marketing including websites, e-mail, RSS, SMS, blogs and wikis. They can be used alongside more traditional channels to help university libraries build awareness, usage, satisfaction and loyalty. Digital as a medium for marketing is likely to dominate in this decade due to the fact that digital became the predominant channel for accessing content and the digital environment supports highly targeted, measurable campaigns. Many of the university libraries are now trying to use their websites for distributing documents and selling images and full texts online. Web marketing strategy aims to help the university library optimize the use of its information products and services. So it is indispensable to study the importance of library websites and to explore the reality and potential of the home page of university libraries in Kerala as a vehicle for marketing and public relations.

2. Objectives

The objectives of the study are:

- To analyze the present promotional activities of University Libraries in Kerala
- To analyze the contents of university libraries website in a marketing point of view
- To build a model webpage for university libraries in Kerala

3. Data and Methodology

Both primary and secondary data used for the study. The primary data is collected from the university librarian or in-charge of the four university libraries viz. Kerala University Library (KUL), Mahatma Gandhi University Library (MGUL) , Cochin University of

Science and Technology Library (CUSATL) and CH Mohammed Koya Library of the University of Calicut (CHMKL). The secondary data collected from the website of each of the university libraries under study. By identifying various links from the websites of various university libraries at the national and international level a model website created for the university libraries in Kerala.

4. What is online marketing?

Marketing is the process by which products are made available to the ultimate customers from their point of origin. It consists of all those activities which are meant to ensure the flow of goods and services from the producer to the customer. Online marketing is a modern business terminology that addresses the needs of organizations, merchants and consumers to cut costs while improving the quality of goods and series and increasing the speed of service delivery¹. As far as library concerned, online marketing means promoting the library and generating revenue from information products and services in a variety of ways.

5. Why online marketing?

For many users, the web site is the library! Some users never visit the library for information due to their Google mentality. For others, a web site is just another branch of their favorite library and a great place to shop for information 24/7. More libraries are providing services and marketing on the Web as a response to changes in the way the world accesses information, the number of internet users continues to increase and information access has shifted, i.e., web is integrated in to their life style

The availability of resources on the Web changes the way user's access information. Libraries can benefit by letting the community know what the library provides and marketing library strengths to match users' needs. Marketing positions the library in the minds of the community as a valuable resource, builds good customer relations, and contributes to a positive relationship with media, businesses, local government agencies and organizations. Often marketing is about changing perceptions. Everyone benefits when we find out what users really want, and when we let our community knows everything that a library can do, in the library or on the Web.

The major objectives of university library web pages are;

- To provide quality products and services;
- To market library products and services and makes some revenue;
- To meet the user's needs efficiently and effectively; and
- To provide value added services

Web marketing opportunities are growing considerably with new methods of marketing to reach all users. Examples include, to name a few, developing library blogs to promote services, using wiki software to involve users in creating web site content, creating webcasts (Podcasts), photo and slide sharing, working to integrate the catalog with other online systems for seamless information delivery, and providing RSS feeds. As libraries shift more services to the Internet, the library web site becomes increasingly important as a product or service in its own right and as a major tool in marketing other products of the library. Libraries can use the Web to provide services, to market services, or as part of the marketing process ².

Content and design considerations are critical in creating a web site that satisfies the customers and is an effective marketing tool. The library web site is part of the public image of the library in the community. Recommended contents for a library home page are, library name, location and phone, library hours, Link to branch information, link to catalog, links to services, programs, calendar, and about the library, link to site map, news and events, link to "support the library", Friends group, or a way to get involved as a library supporter ³.

Special features and benefits of library products and services create value in the minds of customers. The value of a web site to a user is determined by the following:

- Quality - users will compare the quality of the library's web site to commercial sites.
- Performance - the web site needs to meet industry standards for performance, the amount of time pages take to load, for example.

- Durability - users want to be able to count on a site that always has what they need and doesn't change frequently.
- Reliability - the site should be free from technical problems and work the way users expect it to work.
- Image - the site should project the image that market research has shown users will be comfortable with and will be attracted to, and the site should promote the correct image of the library.
- Trends - web sites are dynamic and quickly outdated, technology changes and user expectations also change.
- Accessibility - the site should be easy enough for beginners, accessible by those with special needs, and possibly available in other languages if needed in your community.
- Availability - the site needs enough bandwidth to support usage demands.

6. Promotional activities in the University Libraries

Promotion is used to communicate information about information products and services to target market audiences thereby facilitating the exchange process. Promotion involves mechanisms by which the target groups are informed about the resources available, services and products offered by the library and information centres. Promotion is the only concept of marketing which are widely practiced by the university libraries in Kerala. All types of libraries have employed some form of library guides, pamphlets, accession lists, exhibitions, displays, talks etc.

Essentially, the purpose of promotional activities is said to be to communicate, to convince, and to compete. So the library's promotional packages need to be designed to achieve these objectives. A promotional campaign should always be preceded by assessing the information products/services. In this context, the information collected in the market segmentation stage should be useful. Promotion can build up a strong image of the library. A well-planned promotional effort can stimulate potential users to use its products.

These promotional activities when systematically carried out can effectively raise university library's image. The promotional methods used in the university libraries are personal or direct face-to-face selling such as seminars or workshops, open house etc. or non-personal means such as advertising such as prints ads, posters and displays, brochures, independent website, press release, house journal of the university library, facts sheets, catalogues and direct mail. The library should communicate what it has to the customers through advertising, publicity, and other promotional programmes. The promotional activities of the university libraries in Kerala according to the opinion of the head is given in Table 1

Table 1
Promotional activities in the University Libraries

Promotional Activities	KUL	MGUL	CUSATL	CHMKL
e-mail/Bulletin Board	N	Y	Y	Y
Computer network	N	N	Y	Y
Independent Library website	Y	N	Y	N
Interlibrary loan	Y	Y	Y	N
Library Brochure/Guide Book	Y	Y	Y	Y
Extension services	Y	N	Y	N
Display/Posters in the library	Y	Y	Y	Y
Personal intimation	Y	N	Y	Y

Table 1 shows that the main promotional activities of all university libraries are library brochure and display of posters in the library. E-mail/Bulletin board facility adopted for the promotion by all university libraries except KUL. Most of the libraries used traditional modes of promotion. CUSATL is on the top with a variety of promotional activities for their information products and services. Only KUL and CUSATL have their own website but MGUL and CHMKL used their parent university website for promoting library services. This indicated the need for a potential website for all the libraries in Kerala for marketing their information products and services. Also University Librarians rated the methods adopted by the respective libraries to disseminate information to the

users in a four-point scale as efficient and effective. This reveals that they are not fully satisfied in the promotional activities of their libraries.

7. Positioning the university libraries

Positioning is defined as the way a product or service, company or institution is perceived by the client, customer, investor, consumer or voter. Positioning is achieved through promotion and communication programmes. Positioning of university libraries plays an important role in the development of marketing strategy. It refers to how the library is perceived by the various customers it serve. In addition to positioning the library as a whole, position of individual products and services is important. Each segment of the user requires separate positioning strategies. Special communication programmes, special events, special service, etc. will enhance the position of the library. An image building exercise is imperative on the part of the University library. This has to start with the various appearance of the building, furniture, library guides, arrangement of books on the shelves and labeling in the shelves. A proactive approach to the information requirements of the users by the staff is also called for. Effective use of the press and other mass communication media and the web is also needed .

8. Web strategy for marketing

It is nothing but how the library website assist library to make money directly or indirectly from the internet. Their strategy depends on library's offline and online goals and provides a step by step process of either beginning or improving the library's web site and online activities. The number of things to consider when developing a web strategy for a library such as the library's main goal in relation to web marketing, analyze similar websites of other libraries, registration of the domain, technical capabilities, pricing policies, and identify the products and services that are to be marketed, legal issues such as intellectual property , copy right etc.

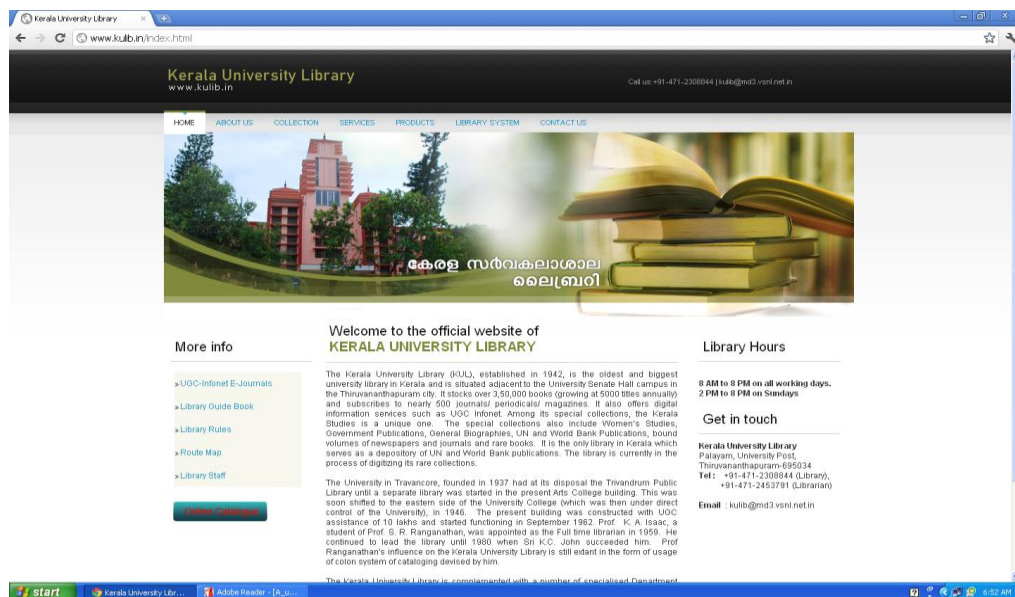
9. websites of university libraries in Kerala

9.1 Kerala University Library

The website of KUL hosted in 2011 has direct link to their collections by listing the special collections viz. Kerala Studies, Women studies, Government publications,

General Biographies, Bound volumes of Newspapers, UN & World Bank Publications, Theses, Bound volumes of periodicals (Science & Social Science), and Closed Reference (Rare Books). All these are potential sources for marketing. Even though, Kerala University Library has a digital archive of rare books called “*LIDAS*” and is not even listed the webpage. The catalogue of the library books can be accessed through the website only on library working days from 8am to 7.30pm, which is a major drawback for marketing initiatives. List of e-journals under UGC-INFONET consortia is given in the homepage so that everyone can only search the journals, but no provision to access the full text through website from remote locations. The information products and services are also listed in separate links but no further links. The website is not frequently updating since it is being powered and maintained by “Cyber Tips”, a private agency. In the marketing point of view links to route map, contact address and working hours is highly appreciated.

Figure1
Home page of the Kerala University Library



No provision to promote with "New Technologies in Libraries", such as presentations for blogs, RSS, wikis, folksonomy, tagging, library catalog 2.0, multimedia, Flickr, Podcasting, You-

Tube, social networking sites (MySpace, Facebook), virtual worlds (Second Life), Web 2.0 and Library 2.0. The home page of the Kerala University Library *www.kulib.in*⁴ is given in Fig.1

9.2 Mahatma Gandhi University Library

MGUL has no independent website, but some information about the library is provided in a link of Mahatma Gandhi University. MGU Theses online is available in *www.mgutheses*⁵ in and the home page is given in Fig.2

Figure 2
Home page of the MG University online theses of the library



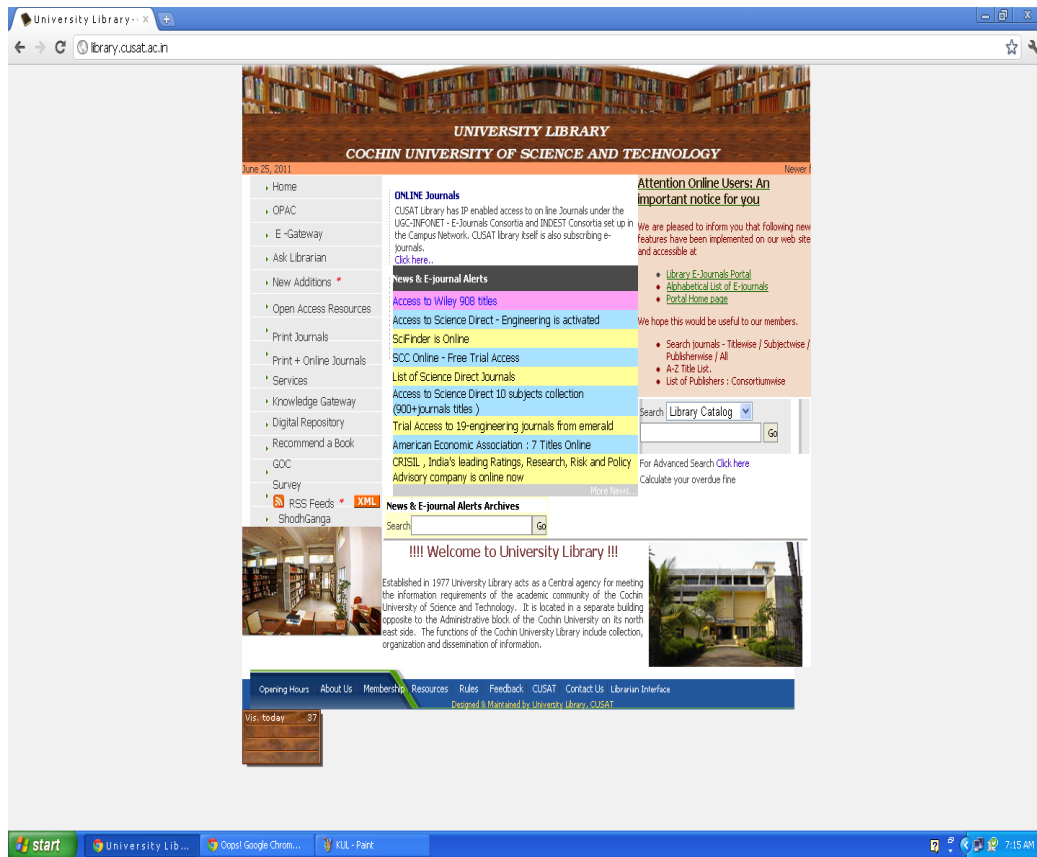


9.3 Cochin University of Science and Technology Library

CUSAT library website, www.library.cusat.ac.in⁶ is maintained by CUSATL has provisions to e-gateway, open access resources, pint as well as subscribed online journals, INDEST and UGC-INFONET consortia journals, knowledge gateway, digital repository, recommend a book, online library catalogue, feedback, rules, resources, membership, librarian interface etc. Some of the links have enough potential for marketing thus CUSATL webpage is more market oriented than other libraries. The library website is given in Fig.3

Figure 3

Home page of the Cochin University of Science and Technology Library

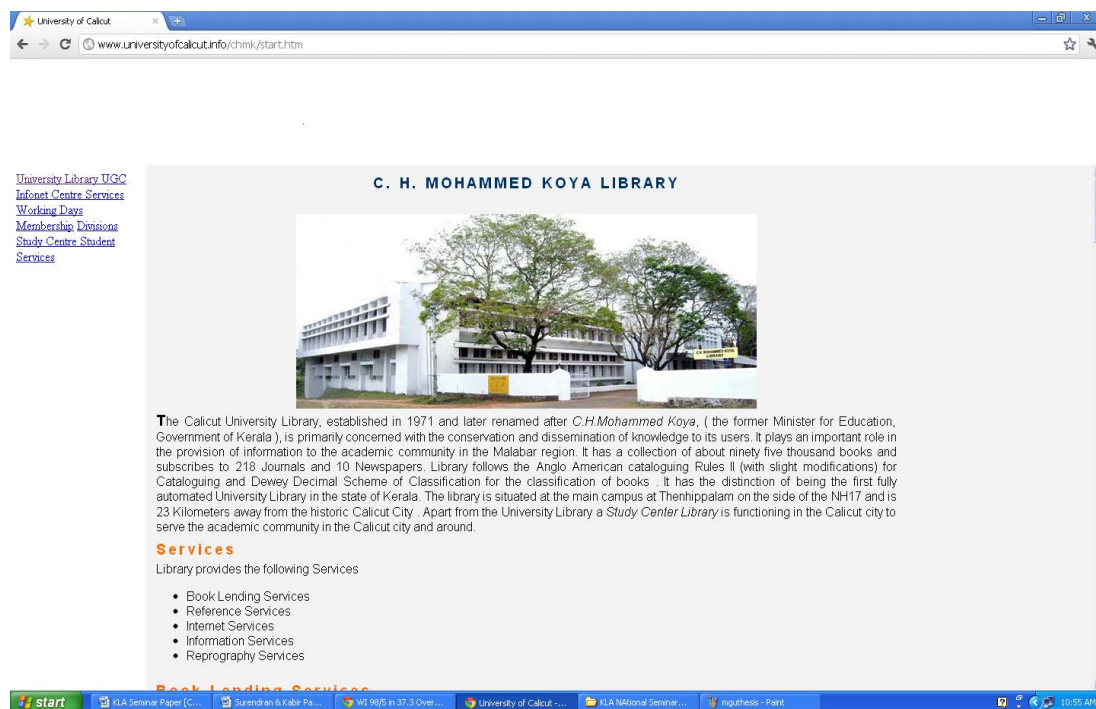


9.4 CH Mohammed Koya Library of the University of Calicut

CHMKL has no independent website. The information about the library is provided in a link of the Calicut university website which gives information about services, working hours and working days, membership, divisions etc. No search facility provided in the website with respect to the collection of services hence it is not market oriented. The content page of the CH Mohammed Koya Library www.universityofcalicut⁷ is given in Fig.4

Figure 4

Home page of the CH Mohammed Koya Library



10. Comparative Analysis of the University Libraries

Comparative analysis of the contents of the home page of university libraries is given in Table 2. It is revealed that CUSATL has more links followed by KUL. MGUL and CHMKL have provided basic information about the library and just listed their information services through their respective university websites. All the university libraries are providing information about their services, about us; contact us and library hours through their websites. The links provided in all the university libraries are not properly updated and not comprehensive. The marketing potentiality of the websites of the university libraries is and limited except in CUSATL. So it is very necessary to reconstruct the websites of the libraries by adopting new technologies and provisions.

Table 2
Comparative analysis of the web pages of the university libraries

Links in Home page	KUL	MGUL	CUSATL	CHMKL
About us	Y	Y	Y	N
Collection/Resources	Y	Y	Y	N
Services	Y	Y	Y	Y
Open Access Resources	N	N	Y	N
Information Products	Y	N	Y	N
Search (OPAC)	Y	N	Y	N
E-Gateway/Consortia	Y	N	Y	N
Knowledge gateway	N	N	Y	N
E-Journals	N	N	Y	N
Digital Repository	N	Y	Y	N
Library system/organization	Y	Y	N	Y
Recommend a book	N	N	Y	N
GOC	N	N	Y	N
Library guidebook/Brochure	Y	N	N	N
Library Hours	Y	Y	Y	Y
Library Rules	Y	N	Y	Y
Route map	Y	N	N	N
Library staff	Y	N	N	N
Flash News	N	N	Y	N
Ask Librarian	N	N	Y	N
Feed Back	N	N	Y	N
RSS Feeds	N	N	Y	N
Contact us	Y	Y	Y	Y

11.Evaluation of University Library websites in a marketing point of View

With the advent of the internet, and more specifically the World Wide Web (WWW), libraries have undergone a revolution in the way that they operate and provide information services to users. By the mid-1990s, academic libraries, along with other educational, non-profit, and business enterprises, had developed Web pages. In recent years, university libraries have been urged to include marketing links in their Web sites to increase visibility and support for academic research and learning. It also help librarians better market their services on-site and online. Since the introduction of the CMS, the website is being increasingly used as an interactive communication tool with users. Here

is an attempt to study how far our university library websites are equipped for marketing. The method used by analyzing various university library websites at the national and international level, identified 23 links which have the potential for building the image of the library and scope for marketing. How far these are applicable to the four university libraries under study is analyzed in Table 3

Table 3
Links of the University libraries in a Marketing point of view

Sl.No.	Links	KUL	MGUL	CUSATL	CHMKL
1	About us- Vision, Mission, location, working hours, staff, history, contact us	Y	Y	Y	Y
2	Resources-Collection, Spl Collection, Database etc.	Y	Y	Y	Y
3	Online Search-OPAC	Y	N	Y	N
4	Information Services/Products - Bibliography, Indexing, Abstracting etc.	Y	Y	Y	Y
5	Institutional Repository/Digital Repository	N	Y	Y	N
6	Personal accounts-Login for renewal, reservation, overdue payment etc.	N	N	Y	N
7	Links to Consortiums(UGC INFONET,INDEST)	Y	N	Y	N
8	E-Books/E-Journals/E-gateway	N	N	Y	N
9	Connections to networks (e.g. DELNET,OCLC etc.)	N	N	Y	N
10	Interlibrary loan	N	N	Y	N
11	Information Literacy programmes/Orientation	N	N	N	N
12	Library Blog- Reader's advisory blog	N	N	N	N
13	Chat with staff/Ask Librarian/Virtual Reference	N	N	Y	N
14	Access to online communities (MySpace , Twitter, Face book etc.)	N	N	N	N
15	Online pathfinders (e.g. Career guidance)	N	N	N	N
16	Links to localized contents(e.g. Kerala Studies, Malabar studies etc.)or special collections	N	N	N	N
17	Notification of library events and news	Y	N	Y	Y
18	Opinion polls, feedback etc.	N	N	Y	N
19	Purchase suggestions (Book, Journal etc.)	N	N	Y	N
20	Newsletter/Brochures/Guide books	Y	N	N	N

21	Open Access Gateway	N	N	Y	N
22	Research help – Research guides, Research Centers, Report writing etc.	N	N	N	N
23	RSS feeds for rapidly changing content	N	N	Y	N
	Total	7	4	16	4

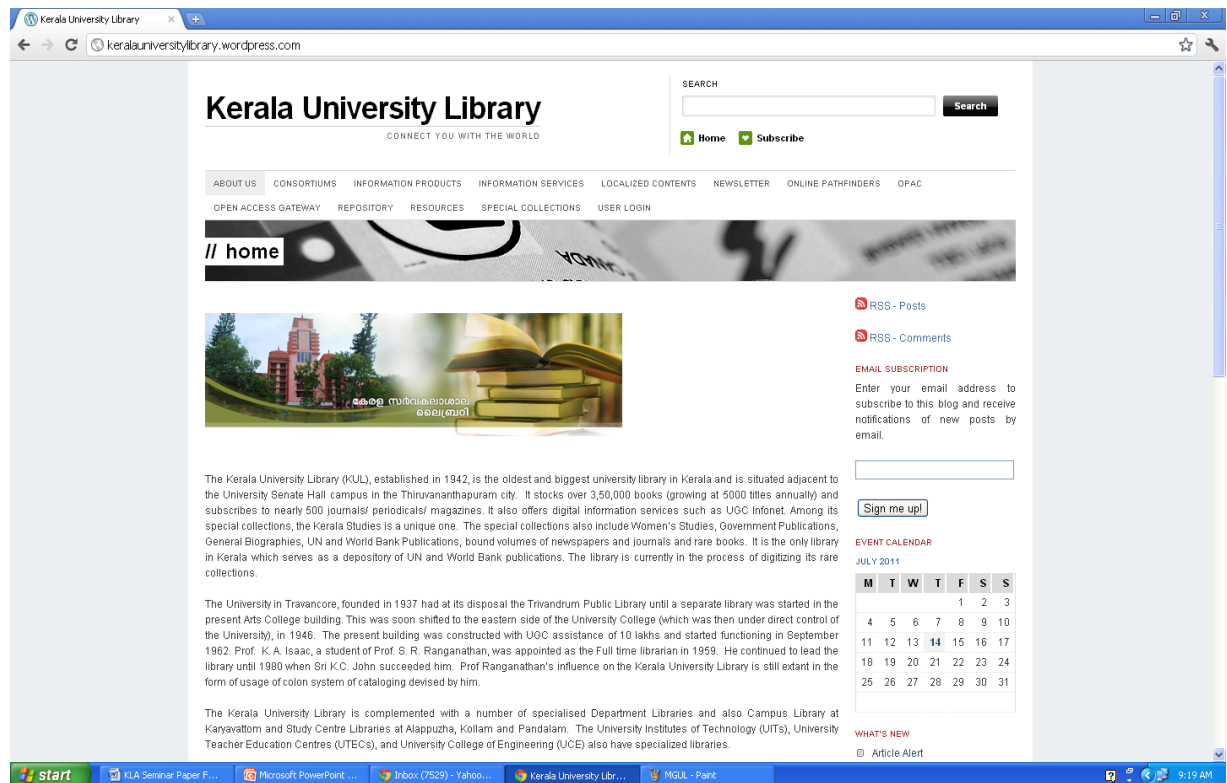
Promoting library's services, information products, resources, and programs online become a lot easier with the help of library website. CUSATL and KUL have already been using their own website for propagating library news, notices, information services and products while CHMKL and MGUL used their university website for doing the same. Table shows that out of 24 points the score for CUSATL is maximum with 16 points and least for MGUL and CHMKL with only four points. The corresponding score to KUL is only seven. This shows that the websites of KUL, MGUL and CHMKL are not marketing oriented. This emphasized the need to build or reconstruct the websites as a strategy for repositioning and marketing.

12.Model Website for University Libraries in Kerala

A web site marketing plan specifies evaluation methods for marketing goals. Since the introduction of CMS, the university library website has improved considerably in terms of usability, delivery of a consistent brand image and the quality and accuracy of information provided to users .The success of the web site may differ with user groups. For those with disabilities, special considerations are needed for design. Library users expect value from a web site: good performance, reliability, durability, quality, appealing appearance -- and a wide variety of features and options that enhance access to library resources and increase availability and accessibility. The webpage of the university library should be user friendly i.e., helping the users by giving them clear signals and organizing the page in a way they expect and immediately give researchers the information they want without extraneous options. With a successful homepage, users will not be confused at all; they will know exactly where to go to get the information they

want. A model website for the university libraries in Kerala, which has some marketing potentialities, is given in Fig. 5

Figure 5
Model home page for the university libraries in Kerala



Good marketing requires evaluation. The marketing plan establishes specific measurable goals and methods of evaluation. For web sites, evaluation methods may include usage statistics, feedback and comments surveys, or polls -- and usability testing. Many sites take advantage of programs that monitor usage: time users spend on the site or a page, what pages were visited in what order, number of times per month a page was used, most used pages, least used pages, etc. Counters, weblogs, and capture of demographic information with cookies provide constant monitoring. The library Web site requires additional evaluation: usability testing and solicitation of feedback are recommended. Evaluation of web sites should be done on a frequent and regular basis, should consider needs of all user groups, and results should be used in site updating.

13.Conclusion

Promotion is an important area in marketing of information services and products in university libraries. The university libraries in Kerala are using conventional mode of promotional activities to build an awareness of what the library offers. A well planned promotional effort in the university libraries can stimulate potential users to use its products and services. It is extremely difficult to inform users of new services as they become available through traditional modes. Communicating what libraries do has always been difficult and as remote use increases, new strategies are required. Therefore, online strategies with the potentiality of Web 2.0 technologies can be used for marketing in the university libraries in Kerala by reconstructing their websites.

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