

## ***The Marketing Strategy of the Dutch National Library: Its Necessity and Consequences***

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The last time I told somebody that I am an employee of the National Library of the Netherlands, better known in Holland as the *Royal* Library, the guy responded: “Really? So do you see the Queen often? What sort of books does she read? And did you already meet the new fiancée of the Crown prince?” At painful moments like these - because our library has no connection at all with the Dutch royal family - I tend to change the subject and I will ask: “Did you enjoy Jurassic Park III? How about those dinosaurs?”

Nevertheless this is very awkward, because the Dutch National Library is without doubt one of the most splendid libraries of our country, a library with huge collections of rare books and manuscripts, a library that in fact took giant steps into the development of storage facilities for electronic publications, a library that is a wonderful place to work. Why is this institution relatively unknown to the general public? Or is this the way it should be? Is a national library *intended* for small exclusive groups of researchers and students? I don't think so. And neither do our directors.

Let us look into the mission statement and the marketing strategy of the National Library of the Netherlands. The Royal Library, or in its Dutch abbreviation: KB, was established in 1798 and is situated at The Hague. The KB became an autonomous institution in 1993 and is financed for the most part by the Dutch Ministry of Education, Culture and Science. The most important task of the KB is to collect all Dutch publications. There is no legal deposit in the Netherlands, however. So the acquisition of the Dutch published archive with rather limited funds is a big challenge.

In 1998 a committee of independent experts evaluated the KB. Their conclusion was, in short that the KB was on the right course strategically, the quality of its products was high and it had a leading position in technology. This all sounds great, but then the committee asked themselves why the collections of the KB – in total more than 3,3 million titles – were not used more intensively. Therefore their judgment was that the KB needed to be more aware of the desires and needs of its current and potential users, while also external communication would have to be intensified. Following the recommendations of this external committee in 1998 - “On the right course, but ...” - the KB developed a mission statement and a four-year marketing plan.

During the making of the mission statement, which was a new experience for the KB, it became apparent that a fundamental choice had to be made soon. If I put it very simply the choice for the KB was either - to quote Samuel Johnson - “to endure old age with honor and decency or to re-invent and reshape the organization.” The KB has clearly chosen the second of these two options, something that became apparent in the mission statement. If I try to summarize our mission statement it would be something like this:

The KB opens up a world of knowledge. It provides access to knowledge and culture from past and present to everyone in the Netherlands and beyond. This target group includes researchers and other information seekers with a special interest in Dutch history, language and culture, but also the general public. The KB actively wants to promote its collections, including the deposit library of Dutch printed and electronic publications, among this last group, which also includes schools. This aim to be there for *everyone* implies an anticipatory attitude and service focused on consumer orientation and reliability. The keywords in our mission are 'everyone,' 'access,' 'cultural meeting place' and 'service.' In fact it says: please come to us, we know how to find anything and we will make it worth your while. Believe me, this is a far cry from the situation from ten years ago, when empty reading rooms were considered to be a sign of civilization by some.

The mission statement is currently serving as the compass for all the marketing decisions and communication actions.

Next we started developing our marketing strategy. One of our policy officers became project manager and a marketing task force was formed, consisting of a number of marketing officers and the head of our Communications Department. The first step of this project was to collect as much information as possible about the services of the KB, its existing customers and target groups and its competitors. Also a lot of ideas were generated about how to reach more customers and improve the use of the KB and its collections. A wide selection of employees was involved in this. The strategic marketing plan concentrated on the four social functions of the KB: the traditional library, the virtual library, the KB as cultural institution and the KB as knowledge and service center.

First of all there is the traditional library, the actual building at The Hague. Although the KB is developing its digital collection rapidly, the paper collection will continue to play an important role. The capacity of the facilities is not fully utilized and the KB could attract a substantial number of extra visitors. Opening hours could be extended and the KB is also considering working more closely with nearby institutions like the Dutch National Archives and the Museum for Literature. There are plans for these three institutions to have a joint exhibition hall and a shop.

Secondly, further development of the virtual library is equally important. The KB already has a long tradition of servicing customers through telephone, letter, fax and e-mail, and its web site has recently been updated. What we would like to have, however, is a fully integrated virtual library with user-oriented products. The KB web site of the near future will include a virtual desk where all questions about our collections will be answered, an electronic reading room and integrated knowledge banks.

In the third place the KB has an important role as a cultural institution. There are frequent exhibitions, guided tours, all sorts of cooperation with museums (such as the Rijksmuseum in Amsterdam), all of which should be intensified. Also, educational programs and products will be developed.

Finally, the KB has a great deal of expertise and knowledge at its disposal, which is gladly and frequently used by fellow institutions in the Netherlands and abroad. The function as knowledge and service center should be strengthened. The outside world is not sufficiently aware of the leading technological position of the KB, so external communication on this point is going to be improved.

There was one interesting thing about the process of defining the marketing strategy of the KB: it changed the way we were thinking about our organization. In fact the development of a mission statement and the creation of a marketing plan led to a departure from being an exclusive research library to becoming the largest public library in the country, a library that holds every Dutch publication ever written and published or that at least can tell the customer where they can find this material.

What are the results of the new marketing strategy? Although we are in the middle of our year plan, we are of course constantly evaluating. I have to say that the results are encouraging. Our marketing plan has helped us to attract more people to our building and more visitors to our web site. Also, more and more people in the Netherlands and outside our country are getting to know the KB. I trust that one day I can go to a birthday party and say: I am an employee of the KB and that everyone will ask: "Really, are there any vacant positions?"

As a member of the Standing Committee of the IFLA-section on Management and Marketing I should *warn* you however: my field of expertise is not marketing, but management. I would like to conclude with a warning for every library with ambitious marketing plans.

Basically there are two conditions for success, and I am not going to say money is one of them. If you think it is, you should hire a creative financial officer and tell her or him to make sure that sufficient funds are available for the coming years, as this is one of his or her primary tasks. No, the two conditions for marketing success are: (a) involvement of all sections of the organization and (b) absolute commitment from all sections of management.

First of all, be absolutely sure that the people on the work floor know what management is doing. It is our experience that enthusiastic plans made by a small group of high officials are not effective. Involve, inform and train your staff. Listen to what they have to say. In my experience the best practical ideas and suggestions come from the people whose daily job it is to help customers. The mission statement says literally that a flexible staff is required in a fast changing world. The KB expects its staff to dare to take initiative and responsibility. In return the KB will give them room to maneuver, stimulate them in their professional development and be a reliable and steady employer. And, like I said, to involve them in the new marketing strategy.

Secondly, I told you that because of our new marketing strategy we started to think about restructuring the KB. In my experience there are three groups that evolve when an organization changes its course or is reorganizing. As soon as the chief executive has

announced a change of course two groups form immediately: a group that absolutely agrees with the powers that be and also a group who will oppose every attempt at innovation. Both groups are - in management terms - easy targets, because they are both visible and approachable. If somebody disagrees with you, you can at least try to persuade him or her. There's also a third group that is the most dangerous. This is the group of managers who will say that they like your new marketing strategy and that it's high time that something happened, but who in practice will not move an inch. This behavior is what I call "the bravery of being out of range". The chief executives and marketers should make absolutely sure that this group is permanently committed and involved. The ranks should be closed. Maybe this is the real challenge: not to develop marketing strategies or create fantastic web sites, but to make sure that *every* manager in your organization is ready and willing to take a small step for mankind, but a giant step for your library.

Slide 1

The logo consists of the letters 'KB' in a white, serif font, set against a dark blue rectangular background.

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## Slide 2

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- The KB was established in 1798 and is situated at The Hague
- The KB became an autonomous institution in 1993 and is financed by the Ministry of Education, Culture and Science
- In 1998 a committee of independent experts evaluated the KB: “On the right course, but ...”

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Following the evaluation of 1998 the KB

1. Prepared a mission statement
2. Developed a marketing strategy

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The starting point for the mission statement was a fundamental choice:

The KB could either

- endure old age with honour and decency

or:

- re-invent and reshape itself

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### 1. Mission statement of the KB:

The KB opens up a world of knowledge. It provides access to everyone in the Netherlands and beyond. This target group includes researchers and others with a special interest in Dutch history, language and culture, but also the general public. The KB actively wants to promote its collections, including the deposit library of Dutch printed and electronic publications, among this last group.

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### 2. Marketing strategy of the KB:

The four social functions of the KB:

- traditional library
- virtual library
- cultural institution
- knowledge and service centre

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Conditions for marketing success:

- involvement of all sections of the organization
- absolute commitment of all sections of management

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