National Libraries – Not Just For Researchers Only:
How to Market the Content of the National Libraries
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In the short time I have available I would like to briefly outline what the British Library is doing to open up access to its collections to all sections of the United Kingdom, and increasingly the international community outside of professional researchers.

The traditional role of National Libraries has been to provide an archive of materials – books, journals, manuscripts, maps etc – for the benefit of scholarly researchers. Access has been by personal visit to the reading rooms and strictly controlled. Students, amateur researchers, members of the public without a valid scholarly need have been largely excluded; little if any provision has been made for remote use; other than on site exhibitions, the contents of the libraries have remained largely inaccessible. While access was restricted to higher education and virtually all communication of information was paper-based, this was largely inevitable.

However, as we are seeing at this workshop today, this situation is changing.

What are the factors driving this change:
- Widespread use of information and communications technology, especially the World Wide Web and digital technologies
- Expansion of higher education
- The growing importance of lifelong and distance learning
- In the UK, the government's commitment to opening up access to information for everyone

More young people are continuing their education after leaving school and older people are increasingly returning to study for professional or leisure reasons. Much of the content of national libraries is just as relevant to them as it is to professional researchers. The development of digital technologies allows libraries to convert content to a digital format, which can easily and relatively cheaply be mounted on servers. The World Wide Web and the Internet not only liberate the communication of information in all its forms from the straightjacket of paper but also make irrelevant the location of that information. And the ubiquity of the PC whether at home, at work, in the public library or in the classroom simplifies access to it.

The British Library is today building on the opportunities provided by these developments. Our vision is to "Make available the world's intellectual, scientific and cultural heritage. Our collections and other great collections will be accessible on everyone's virtual bookshelf – at work, at school, at college, at home." And our mission is "To foster the pursuit of knowledge for the benefit of scholarship, research and innovation, and [and this is the key new addition] to encourage the broadest possible awareness and accessibility of the Library's collections for the benefit of the citizen."

Our access strategy is to:

- Make the Library's collections more easily available so that they can be effectively used by more people, at a time and in a way that suits them.
- Reshape those services for which there are alternative sources of supply in order to meet the changing needs of users.
- Contribute to the effectiveness of library provision within the UK as a whole by working with other library sectors to improve collaboration and coordination of activity.
- Develop as part of the global network of libraries in order to provide access to UK and international resources.
- Extend opportunities for enjoyment and learning offered by the Library.

What are we doing to widen access to the Library's content? Clearly the process will be slow, we will have to advance on a number of fronts and progress will be uneven. However, a number of initiatives have been started and significant progress has been made. Generally, developments fall into three categories:

- Providing information about the BL's content
- Converting or acquiring content in an easily accessible format
- Making the information and content available in user-friendly ways

Behind these developments are the enabling strategies of focusing on users, working in partnership with others and exploiting the web.

Information about content

Almost all the British Library's catalogs are now freely available from our web site:

The British Library Public Catalogue (BLPC). This is a web interface to the main British Library catalogs. These are divided between material available in our reading rooms and that available for remote document supply as photocopies or loans. Searching is free and the BLPC can be used by anyone anywhere in the world with Internet access. There is an order facility for users to order copies of material held by the Library's Document Supply Centre. Individuals can pay by credit card.

Other catalogues available are:

- The Manuscripts Online Catalogue. This is based on the traditional cataloging of the Department of Manuscripts and aims to cover all western manuscript accessions from 1753 to date.
- The Newspaper Library Web Catalogue. This includes entries for over 50,000 newspaper and periodical titles from all over the world, dating from the 17th to the 21st century, held by the British Library.
- The National Sound Archive Catalogue. This contains entries for almost two-and-a-half million recordings held in the British Library National Sound Archive and is updated daily. It is one of the largest catalogs of its kind anywhere in the world, covering both published and unpublished recordings in all genres from pop, jazz, classical and world music, to oral history, drama and literature, dialect, language and wildlife sounds.

Making content available

Clearly for some time yet the vast majority of the British Library's collections will only be accessible through personal visits to the reading rooms or by remote document supply. However, the Library is embarking on a major digitization program designed to make as many items as possible accessible in digital form via the web.

Some examples of current or planned digitization projects are:
- The International Dunhang Project. Established in 1993, its purpose is to promote the study and preservation of manuscript and printed documents from Dunhuang and other Central Asian sites through international cooperation.
- Electronic versions of Beowulf, the first great English literary masterpiece, the Gutenberg bible, the Tyndale bible and the Library's collection of Shakespeare quartos.
- Turning the Pages. This is a system that uses computer animation, high quality digitized images and touch screen technology to simulate the action of turning the pages of a book.
- Some examples of other famous documents which the Library has digitized are the Lindesfarne Gospels the Magna Carta and the Codex Arundel, a notebook of Leonardo da Vinci.
- The Library is also in the process of digitizing its Picture Library: 17,000 images will shortly be made available on our web site. While there will be free access to view the images, license fees will be required for commercial use.

Content is also being made available through co-operative ventures with other organizations. For example:
- Fathom, a web-based service providing high quality sources of knowledge in key subjects.
- Telemedicine Information Service. Operated in collaboration with the University of Portsmouth, this service brings together those working in the field of telemedicine and telecare, to encourage them to share information and experience and to provide an information resource on telemedicine activity in the UK.
- Heritage Image Partnership. This is a new web-based picture library bringing together instant access to artworks, engravings and photographs from the vast collections of a number of Britain's leading institutions.

Access routes

Clearly the main access route is going to be via the web. We will shortly be launching a completely new British Library web site which will make it much easier for users to seek out and use the vast range of products and services which we offer.
However, not everyone has access to the Internet, and there are other ways in which non-researchers can interact with the Library.

- Personal visit. Only researchers with a valid reason for consulting original material are allowed into the reading rooms. This is unlikely to change in the near future, though we are looking at how we might widen use of the reading rooms. However, the new British Library building at St. Pancras has fairly substantial exhibition areas where many interesting items from our collections are displayed. There are also exhibitions on relevant topics, for example papermaking and calligraphy. Regular major exhibitions are arranged, for example Chapter and Verse; a thousand Years of English Literature and the life and works of Oscar Wilde, The Lie of the Land: the Secret Life of maps. Occasionally exhibitions are sent out to other locations, for example Pictures of Health: a photographic exhibition at the Homerton Hospital in London.
- Programs for schools. Each year the Library's Education Service offers a new program of free events for schools and colleges featuring gallery visits, tours and talks, workshops, seminars and teachers' events. We also have a special web site for education, called Living Words, as well as a full publishing program of books, CD-ROMs, videos and resource packs.
- Events for families. These are free and suitable for children ages 5-11 with at least one accompanying adult. Recent events have been: Making Illuminated Manuscripts and Working the Printing Press.

Conclusion

I have tried to show briefly, through the example of the British Library, how a National Library can open up its doors literally and metaphorically to the non-specialist. Clearly there is still a long way to go, but we hope that we are gradually becoming a relevant and accessible resource for many people who until recently would have thought of the British Library, if they ever thought of us at all, as remote and not for them.

END OF REPORT