**DEMONSTRATING MARKETING EXCELLENCE**

**Further Education Libraries - Winner**

Marketing Excellence Award entry by: Ms Joanne Stewart, LRC Manager

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Organisation Profile/ Overview:

Coleg Cambria is a newly established college (2013) formed from the former Deeside College and Yale College. The sites spread over a wide geographical area and incorporate the former Welsh College of Horticulture and College of Agriculture at Llysfasi. Coleg Cambria has over 7,000 full-time equivalent students and offers a wide range of vocational and general education courses both full and part-time. It has extensive facilities including fully staffed library services on 5 of its sites and a small library provision on its smallest site.

Category Entered: Further Education Libraries

Project Title: 24/7 Services in One Place

Context:

The recent merger of two large colleges in North East Wales in 2013 presented the respective library services with a whole host of opportunities and the realisation that the wealth of books and e-resources within each collection could be exploited to a far greater audience than ever before, maximising their value and allowing the library service to be at the heart of such provision.

At the point of the merger the two library services had already collaborated and as a result the library management system was unified making access to the collection across the six sites possible. A shared digital streaming service was also procured and overall the service as a whole had quickly delivered a joined-up approach. However, with the individualism of each site, wholesale marketing of the e-resource collection, catalogue and streaming service struggled due to the use of different access arrangements. There were wide variances in the use of the college's virtual learning environment (Moodle) by each service due to the existence of 3 Moodle sites which lead to a piecemeal approach and inconsistencies with access arrangements for e-resources that the services procured. Rather than a resource being made immediately available from one point of access, it started to rather depend on where you looked and with teaching staff frequently travelling around between the sites, it was obvious that the library service needed to tackle this as a matter of urgency.

The opportunity to build a single website came as a result of discussions with a Senior Manager who was able to offer a website through the College's Wordpress account and also the time of the college's professional web developer. Although the college is a Google partner and one of the former colleges had successfully developed a library website using Google Sites, it was decided this lacked the functionality of a more design led product such as Wordpress. Wordpress also had a number of other advantages, it was supported by an excellent forum of users , and regular updates and plug-ins were available to maintain a design which could accommodate new developments and applications.

Before the website had started however, the web developer moved posts and the service found itself totally in charge of this project with very little knowledge of website development. This proved to be an unexpected yet exciting opportunity for the library service to take full ownership of the project and to acquire new skills and competences.

Aims and Objectives:

There were a number of key objectives to this project and of equal importance were the issues of finding a platform where resources emanating from the different services could be easily combined and additionally, allowing the 5 main service points to share resources but retain their identities albeit under one service heading.

It was also imperative to deliver a website with clear labelling and a hierarchy and design which was intuitive. Visual appeal was also a high priority to encourage engagement and limit turn-aways.

Another key objective was to deliver a clear route for off-site access to a number of particular cohorts, broadly categorised in to fulltime learners who require access from home and those on work based programmes, often high level and professional in nature with high expectations.

With the work starting in February 2014, it was anticipated that there would be enough content to present a formal launch in September 2014. Although six months seemed a generous allowance of time, we understood from the outset that web development is a thief of time and kept fairly modest expectations in check of what we were likely to achieve.

When discussing design it was agreed at an early stage that all curriculum areas required a presence at launch. This would necessitate careful mapping of subject areas and departments. In the case of some larger departments sub sets were identified. However it was deemed vital that all areas were represented and tabs populated to ensure the website was perceived as valuable, relevant and worth repeat visits. A poor initial experience may lead to poor long term growth and use.

Initially, concentration was given to developing the more popular subject areas so that a larger proportion of students could test the site prior to the end of the 2013/14 academic year. We were able to gain some early statistics and could see patterns of use emerging which helped to inform subsequent development.

Strategy and Planning:

The decision to design the website with a particular style or template was arrived at by reviewing both public and commercial websites. Although some web designs were incredibly engaging with a high degree of media they were limited in the amount of information they could display via menu options or graphic links. Due to the span of curriculum and skills topics we need to present a careful range of top level menu options with embedded sub menus would be required. However the journey from entry point to desired resource should be achieved with minimal navigation, and this was a major design consideration.

During the six months building and preparation time there was ample opportunity to review progress – the project was dynamic in nature and took account of trials with students up until July 2014. Early statistics prior to the September were very encouraging and helped us to hone content and further develop the key subject areas.

Tactics and Implementation:

Visual over Virtual

The ITLS website was a significant part of the student induction during September and October. The induction presented a tremendous opportunity to highlight the new web site and guided instruction sessions by library staff allowed learners to explore resources and develop digital literacy skills. These initial hands-on sessions provided a platform for future marketing opportunities and engagement.

We used a number of opportunities to promote the website. Most of the site libraries have very large interactive screens and this allowed for a visual experience even when no demonstrations were taking place. With the screens in situ, on demand demonstrations of the website became easy for all library staff to undertake. Very soon into the new academic year, library staff were invited to go into classrooms to give demonstrations and teaching staff were delighted with the ease of use of the website. This was hugely important to the service. Our ability to talk and show staff and students was our strength in terms of marketing opportunity. Suddenly we were in a position to compete with all the other websites but our foothold was much stronger in that we were able to guide students to high quality information and not hope that the website would be found in and among the plethora of others. It was the return of the information gatekeeper!

Providing a number of access points to the ITLS webpage was always a priority and its success was also going to depend on clear sign posting from a number of sources. The library service managed to negotiate a key link on the College web page and also on the newly developed Moodle platform, and teaching staff also linked to the website from their own subject pages securing potential for even more traffic to the website. Traditional bookmarks and flyers were also available and still remain a useful tool but the face-to-face approach has been the most effective in respect of driving up activity.

Some of the libraries embedded a Google+ communities for their respective site information pages with library staff nominated as moderators. During the induction each student was provide with a tablet or Chromebook and they were invited to view and join their library Google+ community. This has enabled the library service to reach learners instantly with updates, news and alerts. Library staff have also used the communities to support information literacy with guidance and links to useful content and apps relating to wellbeing and study skills. The Google+ Communities are also used to redirect students back to new or developing resources within the ITLS page, with library staff providing reviews of new services and e-resources. In this way the ITLS page and the social media tools embedded within it are generating interest and growth. In other cases, some libraries developed virtual reality segments that highlighted the website and other services and so there was an excellent use of opportunity throughout this particular period of time.

The different sites all had varying approach to social media so therefore there was a healthy mix of Google Communities, Facebook and Twitter and these continue to exist.

Results/Measurements/Outcomes:

The use of the website has been phenomenal and beyond our expectations. We have made full use of Google analytics to watch the increase in activity on the web site and from September 2014 to December 2014, our statistics were:

Sessions 8,315

Users 5,459

Pageviews 24,847

These figures were not just the result of the early campaign around induction but revealed a steady growth week on week which convinced us that our diverse approach to marketing had been successful.

We marketed revision resources for our A level students over the Christmas period who would be taking mock exams in January and were amazed to see that 5 people looked on the site on Christmas day making us feel that our strapline "24/7 Services in One Place" continues to resonate with our original intent and purpose.

There is continual development of the website and the library service has expansive plans, now looking beyond the expected to bring a fresh dimension to the website going forward. Current work on the website to include the use of video and e-learning packages is important now but there is recognition that the website in time will be able to offer so much more to the student experience and we are open and optimistic about what that future might be.

As such this project has succeeded on time and met our aims and objectives. The cost of the project is wholly in staff time and without a dedicated web developer is something to be aware of when planning such a project. However, the website has successfully brought in a high yield in terms of raising the profile of the service and has achieved more visibility than we originally thought possible. The website has managed to be both the marketing tool and the marketing product.

On reflection, there are clearly some things that we would have done differently including perhaps a more joined up approach to our social media presence from the outset but the current mix is working well and remains relevant to the needs of each site. In any case, the website needs to remain dynamic so it is inevitable that there will be constant change and what was right 6 months ago will be possibly changed in the next 6. One thing that is our new constant however is our web presence because that is now at the heart of the Coleg Cambria library services.

www.cambria.ac.uk/itls

Date of Project: February 2014 - ongoing

Summary:

Coleg Cambria IT and Library Service's website development has changed the dynamics of its provision and now truly offers 24/7 Services in One Place. The website promotes the wide range of high quality learning resources and has seen a high flow of traffic since its official launch in September 2014

Supporting information for Coleg Cambria

Please could I add the following link as supporting information?

Coleg Cambria - 24/7 Services in One Place Submission

I also need to include Patrick Cox (patrick.cox@cambria.ac.uk) as co-founder of the project.