



PATCHING THE PUBLICITY DISCONNECT: PROMOTING INFORMATION RESOURCES AND SERVICES TO OHIO'S VETERINARY PROFESSIONALS

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ABSTRACT: Veterinarians, like other health professionals, must commit to a program of lifelong learning to maintain knowledge of scientific developments in their field. Continuing education courses, conference attendance, and participation in local veterinary associations offer some opportunities to maintain and update clinical practice skills. Keeping abreast of the scientific literature offers others. Most veterinarians, however, report a preference for consulting a textbook or a colleague when confronted with a situation requiring additional information to resolve. Most fail to consider using the collections and services of a veterinary medical library [1, 2]. In general, access barriers to veterinary information mirror those identified in research on outreach to human health professionals: lack of time; cost; lack of an appropriate source to satisfy an information need at that time of need; and geographical isolation. [2, 3]. With only 32 veterinary medical libraries in North America, the reality is most veterinarians live beyond a reasonable driving distance from a veterinary medical library. This inhibits their access to the highly specialized information these libraries collect and retain. Previous research on information needs assessment for library outreach has determined that patrons sometimes suffer from "not knowing what they are missing." An introduction to new information sources, "can awaken an awareness of previously unknown and deeper, possibly more significant information needs" [4]. The Ohio State University Veterinary Medicine Library conducted a study in 2003 of the information needs of Ohio veterinarians and identified a publicity disconnect: veterinarians would use the library more, but were unaware of the collections and services the library offered [2]. To address both the publicity disconnect and update veterinarians' knowledge of information resources, the library developed a focused marketing plan. Implemented with the release of the library's new document delivery program for veterinary professionals in February 2005, the plan outlined activities intended to promote not only the library's collections and services, but also freely available online information resources such as PubMed and Consultant. The plan was also designed to respect the individual learning styles of the adult learner by using multiple methods and formats for communicating the library's marketing message. This paper reports the efforts of The Ohio State University Veterinary Medicine Library to remove barriers and facilitate access to veterinary medical literature in Ohio through the implementation of a defined marketing plan.

Introduction/Literature Review

"At a time when our public is challenged on multiple fronts," wrote Carla Hayden, American Library Association President, in the summer of 2003, "we need to recommit ourselves to the ideal of providing equal access to everyone, anywhere, anytime, and in any format ... By finally embracing equity of access we will be affirming our core values, recognizing realities, and assuring our future." [5]. This comment inspired an entire book examining library outreach as a means for enhancing equity of access for all user populations, not just those traditionally identified as underserved. By making equitable access a mandate for all user populations, the library "facilitates the discovery of knowledge, offers resources to improve quality of life for residents and promotes intellectual freedom and lifelong learning." [5]. The library recognizes that barriers to information access are a reality and include not only geographic, physical, and social circumstances, but also a lack of knowledge regarding library services.

For libraries serving veterinary professionals a unique responsibility and outreach opportunity exists. With only 32 veterinary medical libraries operating within North America, equitable access to veterinary

information or lack of equitable access is a true reality. Most veterinarians live beyond a reasonable driving distance from a veterinary medical library. Like other health professionals, however, they must maintain knowledge of scientific developments in their field, requiring them to attend continuing education courses, conferences, and maintain knowledge of the current scientific literature. Lack of time, cost, inability to identify or utilize an appropriate source to satisfy an information need at that time of need, and geographic isolation are all factors cited as access barriers to veterinary information in professional practice [2, 3].

Previous information needs assessments for library outreach have determined that library patrons sometimes suffer from "not knowing what they are missing." An introduction to new information sources "can awaken an awareness of previously unknown and deeper, possibly more significant information needs" [4]. This became readily apparent during a 2003 study by The Ohio State University's Veterinary Medicine Library of the information needs of Ohio veterinarians [2]. Comments from study participants indicated a publicity disconnect: none were aware of

the collections and services the library offered. Further, only two indicated they obtained information for their practice via the Internet. Reasons given for not using the web included a lack of knowledge of where to locate authoritative veterinary information.

While the Internet offers opportunities to facilitate information access to previously underserved or geographically isolated health professionals, easier access does not always translate to increased use of information resources and services available [6]. Indeed, research on the information needs of rural health professionals found "librarians need to make sustained efforts to convince this group of the benefits of using information services, thereby changing their information seeking behaviour" [7]. Such change, according to a US National Library of Medicine report on outreach, requires "repeated contact, including hand-on training" and an "awareness that there is a human resource that can be consulted as questions and problems arise." [8]. To date, no formal studies of library outreach to veterinary professionals have been conducted. To address the publicity disconnect and increase Ohio veterinarians' awareness of and use of information resources available both online and through The OSU Veterinary Medicine Library, the library developed a defined marketing plan. This paper reports on the planning and activities required to design and execute this marketing plan in an effort to remove barriers and facilitate access to veterinary medical information in Ohio.

Methods

Marketing may be described as "a behavioral influence business" [9]. The intent is to influence or change the behavior of a target audience through education and other means. In effort to increase Ohio veterinarians' knowledge of and use of the information resources and services available to them, the library developed a defined marketing plan. The plan was designed to respect the individual learning styles of the adult learner by using multiple methods and formats for communicating the library's message. Proposed activities included publishing articles highlighting the library's services through state wide veterinary newsletters and magazines, an exhibit at the Midwest Veterinary Conference, messages distributed through state wide listservs, presentations at the meetings of regional veterinary associations, and the creation of a professional quality brochure.

Recognizing that financial support was required to finance the graphic design and printing of a professional quality brochure, the author applied for and successfully received an Outreach Project Award from the Greater Midwest Region of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine [10]. The application process for this award proved to be a valuable exercise for defining and developing the marketing plan, as it required the author to write measurable objectives and establish an evaluation component for the entire project. A timeline outlining all marketing activities and a target month for each activity's completion was also created. The library's

overall goal was to contact each veterinarian practicing in Ohio at least once.

The library then worked with The OSU College of Veterinary Medicine's Public Relations office and the University's Marketing Communications department to design a brochure which would complement the college's pre-existing marketing materials. Since over 75% of veterinarians licensed to practice within the state of Ohio graduated from The Ohio State University, the author determined it would be more effective to promote the library using the The OSU College of Veterinary Medicine brand, not The Ohio State University Libraries. Thus information regarding The OSU College of Veterinary Medicine was included in the brochure, along with information on The OSU Veterinary Medicine Library, its collections, Courtesy Card applications for Ohio veterinarians, PubMed, and the library's Document Delivery service .

The launch of the yearlong marketing campaign was timed to coincide with the launch of the library's Document Delivery Service for Ohio Veterinarians in October 2004. A list of current veterinarians licensed in Ohio and reporting an Ohio address was obtained from the Ohio Veterinary Medical Licensing Board to facilitate the direct mailing of the library's brochures. The author also applied for an Exhibit Award from the Greater Midwest Region of the National Network of Libraries of Medicine to support the costs of exhibiting at the Midwest Veterinary Conference, which was scheduled from February 24-27, 2005 at the Greater Columbus Convention Center in Columbus, OH. This award was granted in December 2005 [11].

The evaluation component for the project is still in progress and reflects the project's objectives: 1) to create a sustained marketing campaign to successfully increase awareness of the information resources and services available to Ohio veterinarians, both online and through The Ohio State University; and 2) to enable Ohio veterinary professionals to identify a resource for veterinary information, other than a colleague or personal book collection, which is freely available online or by subscription. To determine whether marketing materials and activities were effective in increasing both awareness of and use of the information resources and services, a survey was designed to determine how the veterinarian learned of the library's services and whether he or she utilized any of the information resources highlighted during the marketing campaign to locate veterinary information resources . Approved by the University's Institutional Review Board for Human Subjects, this survey will be emailed to every third user of the library's document delivery service and every third user asking a reference question via the phone or the library's Ask-A-Librarian email service. To track the effectiveness of the marketing campaign in increasing use of the library's services, the number of requests made through the library's Document Delivery service will be recorded both during the project and for six

months afterwards. The library also plans to track the number of reference questions received from veterinary professionals both via the telephone and the library's Ask-A-Librarian email reference service.

Results

The marketing campaign is still in progress and thus the results reported here are only preliminary. Early adjustments to the project timeline were required after installation of software for the library's Document Delivery service was delayed until September 2004, and the design process for the library brochure was not completed until November 2004. Following consultation with the College of Veterinary Medicine's Public Relations office, the author determined it would be more effective to wait until after the December holidays to launch the marketing campaign. The Document Delivery Service for Ohio veterinarians went live on the library's website in February 2005 and was promptly promoted in conjunction with the exhibit at the Midwest Veterinary Conference in Columbus, Ohio. Over 6,000 individuals attended this conference, with veterinary professionals, technicians and students comprising the majority of the audience.¹

For the exhibit, the library promoted the National Library of Medicine's free resources using a kit provided by the Greater Midwest Region of the National Library of Medicine (Appendix D). A standing height table holding a PC with a live internet connection was available at the front of the exhibit booth for live demonstrations of PubMed, Consultant, The OSU Veterinary Medicine Library's online services, and CAB International's animalscience.com. Copies of the brochure produced by the Veterinary Medical Libraries Section of the Medical Library Association and titled *PubMed Searching: Veterinary Medicine* were also available to give away, along with the newly printed *Library Services for Ohio Veterinarians*, NLM factsheets, and a color flyer with subscription information regarding animalscience.com. The author trained six OSU librarians to search PubMed and animalscience.com for veterinary literature and assist with staffing the exhibit booth. Over the three day exhibit 91 individuals visited with the booth and specifically spoke with the booth's staff. An additional 20 viewed a live demonstration. Others stopped by the booth to pick up brochures, candy, and free NLM and CABI Publishing pens.

The week following the exhibit, the library directly mailed to over 2,500 Ohio veterinarians a packet of materials which included a cover letter, the new *Library Services for Ohio Veterinarians* brochure, and a *PubMed Searching: Veterinary Medicine* brochure. A short article on the library's courtesy cards and document delivery service was also published in the May issue of *The Speculum*, the College of Veterinary Medicine's Alumni magazine [12]. In all,

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¹ Ohio Veterinary Medical Association, letter to author, May 27, 2005.

the library received a total of 35 applications for the OhioDVM courtesy card in March, and a total of 44 applications since the program launch. Veterinarians have demonstrated enthusiasm for borrowing items from the library's collection. Since the start of the marketing campaign, however, the library has received only one document delivery request. This may necessitate adjustments to the planned project evaluation methods.

Remaining activities include contacting local and regional veterinary medical associations to ask for an invitation to demonstrate PubMed and other free information resources and promote the library's services. The Central Ohio Veterinary Medical Association has already contacted the author and asked her to do a presentation on PubMed and the Library's Courtesy Card and document delivery services at their September meeting. Messages regarding the library's resources and services have yet to be distributed to the state wide listservs for veterinary professionals. These messages are now planned to be distributed during July and September 2005. The author also needs to contact the Ohio Veterinary Medical Association to ask if a short article regarding the library's services could be included in the organization's *OVMA Newslines* newsletter. This task should be completed by the end of August 2005.

Discussion

"Outreach is not a short-term project, but rather a long-term commitment" [13]. This observation supports the need to implement and execute a long-term strategy to address barriers to information access and use. Through repeated contact using multiple marketing activities, The OSU Veterinary Medicine Library is making progress towards raising awareness of the information resources freely available to veterinary practitioners. Such efforts may in time influence the information seeking behavior of veterinary professionals. The library's goal to remove barriers to information access through the Library Courtesy Cards for Ohio veterinarians and a document delivery service may also influence this behavior. Past research on library outreach has demonstrated that target populations are often unaware of the information resources they are missing [4, 14]. Additional research has indicated complicity, as library professionals have done a poor job informing library users of the information available to them [6].

Over the past year, the author has recognized the benefit of establishing a defined marketing plan to remain focused on promoting the library's services and information resources to targeted population groups. The author has also realized this plan must be flexible to take advantage of new opportunities and adapt when original plans may not be executed as intended. For example, the current Courtesy Card enables Ohio veterinarians to borrow an unlimited number of books from The OSU Veterinary Medicine Library and up to five books through OhioLINK, a state wide catalog of Ohio's college and university libraries. Through OhioLINK, a veterinarian may

borrow a book from any college and university in the state and request that the book be delivered to any college or university library in the state. Thus, if a veterinarian living in Toledo requests a book from the University of Cincinnati, he may indicate that he'd like to pick the book up at the University of Toledo's Carlson Library. Unfortunately, OhioLINK has a restriction that if a book is available at your home library, which would be The Ohio State University Libraries for individuals holding an OSU Libraries' Courtesy Card, you must request a copy of the book through your home library's catalog first. Since there is no OSU Libraries location in Toledo, the Veterinary Medicine Library must mail the item to the individual, delaying delivery time. This is a common occurrence, as OSU offers the only veterinary medicine collection in the state.

In 2004, OhioLINK conducted a pilot test with the Cuyahoga County Public Library, system near Cleveland, Ohio and the Upper Arlington High School Library near Columbus to determine whether to extend OhioLINK borrowing privileges to other libraries within the state. The project was expanded to the Westerville Public Library near Columbus, Ohio in April 2005. Thus Ohio veterinarians may be able to directly borrow books from The OSU Veterinary Medicine Library through their public libraries in the near future. This would eliminate the need for an OSU Libraries' Courtesy Card, permitting veterinarians to borrow books and pick up books at their local public library. Such a program has the potential to provide equitable access to information for all Ohio residents, regardless of where they live. The project also offers new opportunities for The OSU Veterinary Medicine Library to reach out to Ohio veterinarians. Presentations and promotional materials created by The OSU Veterinary Medicine Library are now customized for veterinarians who live in areas serviced by the OhioLINK pilot project to inform them that they may borrow materials directly from our library through OhioLINK.

Further, the author originally intended to include information regarding PubMed and other free online resources in the article published in *The Speculum*, The OSU College of Veterinary Medicine's Alumni magazine. While writing the article, however, the author realized she would have an opportunity to contact veterinarians twice through this publication if she focused on document delivery and the Library Courtesy Card for Ohio veterinarians first, and then wrote a second feature focused on searching PubMed to be published in another issue of the magazine later that year. The author has also realized that enough *Library Services for Ohio Veterinarians* brochures were left over from the exhibit and the original direct mailing that a second mailing may be possible in summer 2005.

The Document Delivery service will need to be evaluated in the near future to determine why it is not being utilized. The library currently uses ILLIAD's Odyssey, which requires patrons to enter information for each citation they request. This requirement, along with the \$10 per article fee the library must

charge to recoup its costs, may be discouraging veterinarians from using the service. Participation in Loansome Doc may address this issue by enabling veterinarians to submit requests directly through PubMed. While PubMed does not comprehensively index the veterinary literature, it does index titles most often used by veterinary clinicians, including the *Journal of the American Veterinary Medical Association*, the *Journal of the American Animal Hospital Association*, and all four editions of the *Veterinary Clinics of North America*.

The OSU Veterinary Medicine Library is committed to improving communication with veterinarians practicing within the state of Ohio. By actively marketing the library's collections and service in concert with freely available online information resources, the library hopes to improve veterinarians' awareness of the resources available to them and ultimately influence their information seeking behavior. With the unique combination of services and resources provided through The OSU Veterinary Medicine Library, online through databases such as PubMed and Consultant, and through the State of Ohio via OhioLINK, equitable information access may soon be a reality for all Ohio veterinarians, regardless of where they live.

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