Public Relations for Academic Libraries in the Digital Age

Doreen Siegfried

ZBW – German National Library for Economics

Abstract: The digitization of science has significantly widened the range of tasks and services of science libraries such as the German National Library of Economics (ZBW). Primary materials are now digital, and research data management is an important new field of activity. This development may appear logical to libraries, but it is not so to scientists, who have been socialized to see the library as an analog space. Against this backdrop, ZBW designed a campaign to change this outdated perception among German economists. An evaluation of the campaign's results showed quantitative and qualitative improvements. German economists now know ZBW as a library that conducts its own research, that is committed to science policy, and that builds new technical infrastructure.

Keywords: image campaign, science library, evaluation, digitization of science, long-term engagement

Introduction

In view of the digitization of science and the associated movement toward open science, the range of tasks and services of science libraries has expanded significantly (Scheliga & Friesike, 2014). Primary materials are digital, and an important new field is research data management (Tochtermann, Toepfer & Vlaeminck, 2016; Fecher, Friesike & Hebing, 2015). This expanded role is well understood in library and science policy circles. Scientists, on the other hand, are socialized to think of the library primarily as an analog place that is characterized more by printed material than by provision of digital content.

This divide between perception and reality is the reason science libraries have spent the last few years extensively and repeatedly explaining their current service offerings. The German National Library of Economics (ZBW), for example, considers it important that scientists, as library users and partners in research projects, fully understand how libraries are moving into the digital world, what new fields of activity they facilitate, and what new services they offer.

Science libraries such as ZBW want to close this gap and to raise awareness of their ongoing transformation and, in particular, their new digital offerings for researchers. To do this, they must be in continuous dialogue with their target audiences. Constant image building is required. (The same applies to academic and public libraries, as well [Umlauf, 2009]). Below, a

comprehensive case study of an image campaign by ZBW will show one way that this can be done.

Point of Departure

A representative study among economists at German universities in 2013 showed, among other things, that economists knew ZBW by name but did not associate it with online services, science policy commitment, or research activities. In fact, ZBW has long since evolved from a traditional specialist library for economics into a modern digital information infrastructure facility (Tochtermann & Meyer 2015). Both the acquisition and use of digital information are steadily increasing (Siegfried, 2014). A research group with three chairs in computer science financed by third-party funds addresses the digitization of science from different perspectives (Tochtermann, Peters, & Scherp, 2015). In addition, ZBW is active in national and international science policy debates, in particular those that relate to open access, open research data, and open science. In 2014, ZBW received the German "Library of the Year" award. Closing the gap between the perception of ZBW among economists and the reality of ZBW's actual efforts remains a major challenge for the library's PR officers.

The Communication Task

The library's target audience are students and researchers in economics at universities and research institutes in Germany. Its image campaign had to be tailored to the needs and interests of these audiences. Increasing internationalization at German universities has led to many English and bilingual courses, so the campaign was designed in both German and English. The first task was to bring home to the target audience that ZBW:

- Enables economists to find and download more than a million economics documents;

- Supports economists in open access and research data management and develops solutions together with them; and

- Has its own research group of computer and information scientists conducting applied research into the digitization of science.

The next task was to evoke the following desired associations with ZBW among target audiences: oriented towards the future, dynamic, strong in innovation, focused on technology, and committed to partnership.

The Communication Objectives

Qualitative Communication Objectives

Since a marked gap existed between economists' perception of ZBW and its actual activities, the library embarked on a long-term and continuously evolving communication project. It sought to achieve the following perceptions and behaviors among economists at German research institutions.

- Economists know that ZBW enables online access to scholarly literature. They know that the library is a provider of digital content.

- Economists know that ZBW welcomes projects and active participation in open access and open research data; helps with finding and handling research data in economics; and provides support for disseminating and archiving open access documents in economics.

- Economists perceive a change in the library's image and increase their engagement with the library to a new level. They recognize the library as an equal partner, trust its innovative capacity and dynamism, and want to increase joint projects with it. They recognize the library as an important player in economics, as a relevant service provider, and as a research partner.

Quantitative Communication Objectives

The campaign's objective was to increase the number of economists at universities and other research institutions in Germany who know ZBW. The initial value in 2013 was 68.6%. By the time an interim evaluation was conducted in 2016, that number had grown to 89.7%.

Image Building in Three Phases

The image campaign of ZBW consisted of three phases and ran for four years. It ended in 2017.

Phase I	Winter semester 2013/14 – Summer semester 2014	• Aim: to generate attention • Focus: online documents
Phase II	Winter semester 2014/15 – Summer semester 2015	• Aim: to increase attention • Focus: open access, open research data
Phase III	Winter semester 2015/16 – Summer semester 2017	• Aim: to create sympathy • Focus: research and development

Phase 1: Digital instead of analog

The first phase aimed to change perception of ZBW as a hoard of printed documents and to bring home the library's core competency: provision of international specialist literature to students and economists, primarily online and digitally. The library created eye-catching images of everyday situations whose motifs were five familiar concepts from economics—the hog cycle,

the business cycle, the supply-and-demand graph, the break-even point, and the product life cycle—to play on the idea that economists recognize their own discipline in any setting. Each of the images was accompanied by a headline that explained the image for non-economists. A link to a dedicated website was also provided (e.g., http://www.alles-finden-zbw.eu/english/). ZBW distributed these media materials online and via social media channels.

Phase II: Support in research data management

The second phase in 2015 focused on ZBW's services and expertise in open access and open research data in economics. The library chose three images illustrating the advantages of open access and open research data—i.e., that sharing and openness increase visibility and allow moments of success and satisfaction—for economists, especially those who are at the start of their careers. The image headlines were variations on the theme of success, and, again, link to a dedicated website was provided. Beyond these images, campaign messaging spoke to the audience on three levels.

- Emotion: ZBW gets involved and dares to break new ground.

- Intellect: ZBW presents precise numbers and arguments in favor of open access and open research data

- Credibility: A look behind the scenes and at individual ZBW employees (see http://www.forschung-einfach-teilen-zbw.eu/wir-kennen-uns-aus.html).

Phase III: Exploring digitization of science

In June 2016, ZBW started the third phase of its image campaign. In the first two phases, the library focused on services currently on offer, but the emphasis of Phase III was on internal strategic transformation processes—specifically that ZBW staff conducts research in computer and information science and is active in science policy. These efforts aimed to carry forth ZBW's mission: providing excellent services for economists.

For economists, who see libraries only as a source of literature, it is not logical that ZBW should undertake applied research in computer and information science with the goal of understanding the digitization of the science system. Helping economists understand this transformation presented the greatest challenge in the image campaign. The tasks for phase III focused on:

- Providing background information on open science and digitization of the science system, as well as demonstrating why these issues important; and

- Communicating achievements, such as the establishment and findings of ZBW's own open science research group, as well as ZBW's activities in science policy and their results.

For the third phase, the library fashioned three visuals that spotlighted economists' passion for optimization—a passion shared by ZBW in its search for excellence as a provider of modern and innovative services. The headline was the same for all three images, and a link was provided to a web page that explained ZBW's research activities in greater detail (http://www.zbw-forscht-fuer-oekonomen.eu/). In this third phase, ZBW also made extensive use

of testimonials from well-known economists to emphasize the relevance of its research activities to its target audiences.

Tactical-Operative Implementation

For the four-year image campaign, the library developed and implemented a fully orchestrated and cross-media communication strategy entirely in house. Strategy, guiding ideas, text and image motifs, as well as all content were developed independently by the marketing and public relations department of ZBW, without the involvement of a public relations agency. After the rollout of the image campaign in November 2013, ZBW invited well-known economists (e.g., presidents of renowned institutes such as the Ifo Institute for Economic Research and the Kiel Institute for the World Economy) to act as brand ambassadors and support the credibility of the messages.

Overall, the organization focused on direct communication via e-mail, roadshows, and events such as the annual conferences of the major professional associations. The library also distributed its messages with the help of partner organizations and groups, such as economics associations, libraries, graduate schools, faculties, student councils, and communication experts in economic research institutes. ZBW used landing pages with additional text and visual information, videos, posters, booklets, postcards, flyers, information stands, testimonials, and pro-bono web banners and advertisements in economic journals.

Evaluation

At the midpoint of the image campaign in 2016, the library carried out a representative interim evaluation (302 telephone interviews / quota procedures).[1] These were the results: 89.7% of economists at universities, colleges, and non-university research institutions knew of ZBW. In 2013, only 68.6% had this awareness. Much more important, however, was that 85.3% knew that ZBW provides literature online and digitally and is not a closed-stacks library; this was the key messaging goal from Phase I. Among economists, a total of 95% were aware that ZBW is a service provider for digital content. A total of 85% of respondents knew that ZBW is an active force for open access and open research data (the core message of Phase II) and helps them find economic research data. In addition, 75% knew that ZBW helps with handling research data and 67% knew that it helps handle, prepare, and archive open-access documents in economics. The results of this evaluation showed clearly that the stated objectives of the campaign had been achieved as a result of the campaign's combination of communication measures.

Conclusion

The scientific landscape has been in transition for quite some time due to radically changed information and communication behaviors. This has had significant implications for science libraries' communication with its stakeholders, be they scientists, students, funders, advisory boards, partner libraries, professional associations, or business partners. In addition, individual science libraries have been under ever-increasing pressure to sharpen their image. As

a consequence, the demands on communication professionals have grown to include the management of relationships and engagement with various library constituencies.

Trained public relations professionals are urgently needed in both public and academic libraries. A glance at job advertisements shows that, as a rule, libraries require a university degree in library and information science for individuals who will manage strategic communication, i.e., conceptual-level strategic communication planning, media relations, event management, fundraising support, marketing, social media work, online editing, merchandising, internal communication, and the publication of annual reports. However, a library and information science (LIS) degree provides insufficient training for this level of professional communication management. LIS programs should expand their curricula accordingly and offer not only specialization in the complex tasks of communication management but also in other subjects of increasing importance such as computer science and law.

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