

IF YOU KNOW WHERE TO LOOK...

Improving usage of electronic resources at Daystar University

Rosemary Gitachu, 2009

Access to a variety of resources and media is vital to the development of a research culture, enabling groups such as researchers, policy makers, and students to find and use the information they need. However, when these resources are not being used, it is equally important to find out why and ensure that users not only have the appropriate training, but are also aware of what is available to them. Kenya's Daystar University identified this problem and took steps to address, and improve on, their usage statistics.

As with libraries in similar institutions, the remit at Daystar University Library focuses on providing access to information relevant to the research, teaching and learning needs of our user community. Developing and maintaining effective access necessitates employing a range of media and, as such, we are fortunate to have an excellent collection of books, magazines and journals (national and international). In addition to this, we have CD databases, videos, DVDs and, as a member of the Kenya Libraries and Information Services Consortium (KLISC), a host of electronic resources and online databases subscribed to through the Programme for the Enhancement of Research Information (PERii). While maintaining such a wide array of media has helped to improve access to information, it is vital that they are kept up-to-date.

One way of ensuring this is monitoring the use of these resources. This allows us to see what resources are in demand and feeds into the subscription renewals process nationally. When analysing what we had gathered, we noticed Daystar had a surprisingly low usage rate. Naturally, we were keen to improve on this and investigated why the usage statistics were so low. Some of the reasons were beyond our immediate capacity to change, such as slow connectivity. However, it became clear that awareness, or lack of, was a contributing factor. We determined that by providing training to raise awareness we would have a significant impact on usage.

To this end, we ran a workshop specifically for library and teaching staff as well as research students, focusing on introducing and accessing the electronic resources

The workshop was of great help to me as it was an eye opener to more e-journals we were not using in our Library. Also I gained more insight and confidence in training other users on e-journals access and use.

Workshop participant



Participants applying search techniques at an electronic resource training workshop

available to them. Additionally, we considered the challenges of access and attempted to identify solutions. To develop and support this workshop, the PERii Kenya coordination team, via KLISC, suggested applying to INASP's small grant scheme – a project designed to support both local and national initiatives and projects. We applied and were successful in obtaining a grant to cover the workshop's running costs.

The workshop was a success, attracting participants and trainers from a wide variety of roles and experiences. The opening address set the tone with positive comments from Prof. Kombo, the Deputy Vice Chancellor's office (Academic Division). This address outlined the benefits gained by Daystar University from e-journal subscriptions and the need to maximise this impact by embracing ICT technology. Furthermore, there was a good gender balance with 37 female and 49 male participants. The workshop trainers included members of the PERii Country Coordination team and institutional staff who were KLISC members and had previously attended or facilitated similar events.

Following the training the participants were asked



'Promotion of academic journals' workshop participants

for feedback relating to the workshop content and its relevance to them. The responses indicated participants were able to improve skills in efficient and diverse information searches across a variety of resources. The majority felt that the workshop's key impact would be an increase in the use of computers to access relevant information, enabling them to better research on their own and to help others by sharing information and transferring new searching skills. When asked to do a self assessment on their ability to share and transfer skills, all of the 43 respondents were confident they could train others.

Despite the general satisfaction of participants, slow internet connectivity still proved to be a challenge. Given the large number of participants and the constraints of a one day event, slow connections cause serious issues and delays. Fortunately, while connectivity caused some frustration, we were able to complete the objectives.

The diversity in participants was largely met with positive praise. One comment received was "It is hoped that the library will strive to enhance communication with the teaching departments in the areas of electronic journals to sustain the enthusiasm." This suggests the mix of participants created a good opportunity to foster exchange and led to an appreciation of different roles. However, this mix was also noted as a limitation, resulting in an inability to focus the content on a specific area, meaning the workshop had to be designed around common issues, challenges and skills. It is hoped that the skills learned will be passed on to colleagues and may allow for smaller, more user-specific workshops in

I learned how to access e-journals free of charge. Since I am doing PhD research, this has been very important for me. I have also used the articles to improve and update my lectures.

Workshop participant

I feel better equipped and also feel attached to the e-journals. I find myself wanting to explore some of the features we used, such as personalising one's account.

Workshop participant

the future.

One example of such a workshop has already occurred. Four months after the original workshop a two-day 'Training of Trainers' workshop for librarians was conducted. The aim was for this target group to develop an in-house training programme focusing on different user groups. The programme is intended to take place over a specific time period and then continue on an on-going basis. In addition to the value of user-specific training, the workshop highlighted a desire to focus on improving internet connectivity and for continued, even mandatory, workshops, to keep training up-to-date and reach wider numbers. Additionally, opportunities to share experiences with other electronic journal providers on a regular basis were suggested as a way to foster best practice.

The workshop was intended to increase awareness of available resources and teach new, transferable skills to participants; in this respect, it was very successful. Questionnaires at the end of the workshop showed positive feedback. However, it was the impact review 6 months later that showed the long term benefits – particularly the application and expansion of the workshop activities. By reaching out to a diverse group and ensuring they were confident in both using and teaching these skills to colleagues, the workshop has had a notable impact - an impact which has the potential to move far beyond this initial group of participants.

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The following are some associated links:

Daystar University
www.daystar.ac.ke

INASP
www.inasp.info

Training Materials:
www.inasp.info/training

Recent INASP activities:
www.inasp.info/kenya-events

Small Grants:
www.inasp.info/small-grants