



Report on CILIP Marketing and Communications Group bursary award 2020

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Sarah Cull and I started our application for the inaugural Marketing and Communications Group bursary in February 2020, before we knew the impact the COVID-19 pandemic would have on service delivery. We applied for the bursary as we were one year into leading a new marketing group for the RCN Library and Archive Service (LAS) and felt we would benefit from the input of an experienced library marketing professional. We wanted a consultant to critique our strategy, plus provide training for the LAS staff in the marketing group. We learnt in June that we had been successful, by which time the UK had been 'locked-down' for nearly 3 months and our approach to marketing the library and archive services had necessarily changed significantly.

Through the RCN matching the bursary, we were able to engage Ned Potter to run two 0.5 day workshops for the marketing group on strategic marketing and social media, and a 2 hour consultancy meeting for Sarah and myself. In addition, we covered preparation time to personalise the workshops for the RCN and time to review our documents in advance of the meeting. Sarah Cull retired from the RCN in October 2021.

Our hopes for the workshops and consultancy

The new marketing group was formed in 2019 and for the first time had a focus on marketing the day-to-day library services. Neither Sarah or I had significant strategic marketing experience before this, although like library staff in many institutions, we had been involved in various library marketing activities. The LAS had been allowed to create separate Twitter, Facebook and Instagram profiles to the main RCN accounts, and has its own e-newsletter. We compete with other RCN services for space in RCN member magazines. In 2019 a significant amount of marketing activity was through LAS staff presence at RCN events around the UK and supporting RCN regional staff with student recruitment events at universities.

When writing the application we wanted to invigorate the team members, and create less reliance on one or two eager staff. We also hoped to explore ways to reach our wide and diverse membership – the RCN has over 450,000 members throughout the UK, including registered nurses, student nurses and healthcare support workers – nearly all of whom are potential library users. The LAS is responsible for UK-wide online library services, runs the Library and Heritage Centre in London, and the Archive in Edinburgh. There are also libraries in Belfast, Cardiff and Edinburgh which are managed by staff outside the LAS.

The RCN has taken a cautious approach to reopening and welcoming staff and members back into its buildings. The workshops were held in December 2020, at that time RCN LAS staff were still working from home, the library was closed and there were no in-person events for members.

Feedback on the consultancy and workshops

Ned Potter provided a very useful critique of our marketing plan, in particular that we were trying to 'market everything, all the time, to everyone'. He also highlighted that we had many granular objectives, e.g. to increase views of webpages, when it is very difficult to prove that marketing is affecting these targets. Ned praised our segmentation of users, which we had developed for Customer Service Excellence, and introduced the ideas of campaigns and using User Experience (UX) methods to understand our users from a marketing perspective.



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The workshops were held on consecutive days, in total 14 LAS staff and 1 staff from the Northern Ireland library attended the workshops.

In the strategic marketing session we focused on developing a 'brand' for the library, ways of finding out what our users think of us, and grouping services into marketing campaigns.

In the social media session we thought about how to embody the LAS brand via social media platforms, the strengths and weaknesses of each platform, how to best utilise our time and the tools available to help.

One useful comment across both workshops was to both try everything at least twice, but then to be ruthless and cut messaging that doesn't get liked.

Feedback in December 2020 after the workshops:

Thank you for organising – one of the most useful trainings I think I've ever had at the RCN. I think we should set aside budget do to something like that annually as a kind of reflect and refresh.(FR)

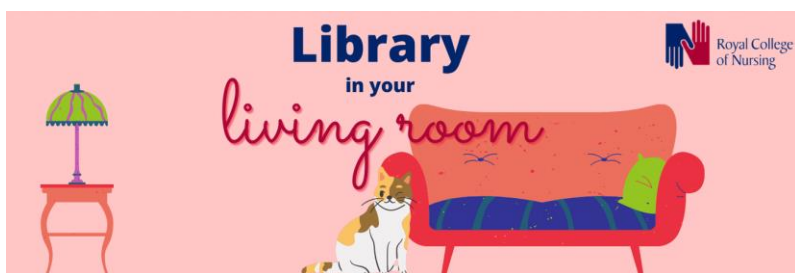
They were brilliant, exactly what we needed. A great mix of big picture and smaller quick fixes, with so much useful stuff. Now we just need to put it into practice. (SC)

What we changed after the consultancy/workshops:

For 2021 we threw away the detailed plan and specific targets and instead focussed on targeting groups of services to a specific audience with unified branding as a campaign. We also ran our first UX project to find out what users think of the library and how the library fits into their lives.

The RCN continued to be cautious during 2021 and we re-opened the London library to members in July (prior to March 2020 the public had also been welcome to visit the exhibitions and attend events). COVID did work in our favour by decreasing the focus on services only available physically in London, and increasing members familiarity with accessing services online. We continued to hold events and training sessions online.

Campaign 1: Library in your living room



The 'Library in your living room' campaign ran from February to April. Through this campaign we wanted to make members feel more empowered to use our online library resources. We promoted our self-help videos, our new Libkey widget and Browzine, Subject Guides and our literature searching tools.

Campaign 2: 'How may I help you?' #YourRCNLibraries



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The Your RCN Libraries campaign ran from April to July. The focus of this campaign was to promote the real people still available via telephone and webchat, and online training sessions for members to connect with.

We made sure to highlight that staff from each country library were still available.

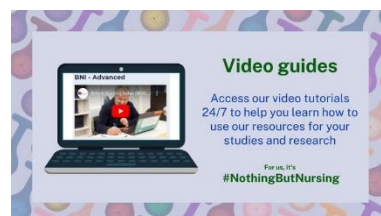
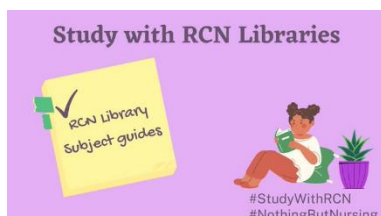


Campaign 3: Summer Reads



The Summer Reads campaign ran over August and rather than promoting specific library services, the focus was on sharing some of the less 'clinical textbooks' titles in the library and giving members a space to relax.

Campaign 4: For us, it's #NothingButNursing



This campaign was timed to fit with the start of the university year and new students starting undergraduate nursing degrees. We started using the hashtag 'Nothing but Nursing' to focus on our the uniqueness of our collection and staff experience in supporting nurses and healthcare support workers. This hashtag was inspired by feedback from the User Journeys project.

User Experience – User Journeys project

Following Ned's suggestion and explanation of the benefits of using User Experience to inform marketing, in July 2021 we conducted our first UX project that involved interviewing members about all LAS services. The project aimed to identify how the RCN library features in users' daily research lives. Users were recruited via a bulk email to library users and Learning Reps, and in total 6 interviews were conducted. All the interviewees are Registered Nurses, and work in a variety of settings – acute NHS hospitals, mental health trusts, and community nurses. They were also spread geographically – Yorkshire, Wales, Bedfordshire, and London.



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There were no set questions and the interview evolved out of an initial visual brainstorming activity. Interviewers asked the interviewees to explain what they had drawn and then followed up topics of interest as they arose in the conversation. The results were wide ranging and rich in depth and allowed us to make a series of recommendations based on what was discussed in the conversations, rather than answers to specific questions.

Overall, feedback was overwhelmingly positive. Interviewees mainly wanted the opportunity to praise the library services and tell us how much they had used us and how valued we are.

One particularly interesting interview was with a regular eLibrary user, who goes straight to the Advanced Search and has not explored the rest of the website. This user was unaware of our information training, literature search service and video tutorials, is also not on the library mailing list or a social media follower. As a result we're exploring this year how to create links from the search results webpage to other services, and to promote sign-up to the library newsletter.

All the interviewees emphasised how having a nursing-specific library saved them time and they knew all the resources would be of relevance – this led to the creation of the #NothingButNusing campaign for Q4. The interviewees also commented on the transition from student to Registered Nurse and loss of access to university libraries and librarians, and that therefore we should try to target members at this stage to emphasise that the RCN libraries are here to support members in their ongoing CPD and research needs.

Feedback from workshop attendees in January 2022

I asked workshop attendees to reflect on the workshops and whether they feel our marketing approach in 2021 changed as a result:

Ned's workshop helped to focus and clarify an area that can feel very broad and dense. He suggested a structure to campaigns and to be more selective in approach. This helped me when thinking about future campaigns and I refer back to his workshops often. (GC)

The workshops were brilliant, and Ned helped us understand the depth of what was possible with marketing and helped us work out what we wanted to aim for as a service when marketing to users. His CAPE planning documents formed the basis of each of the campaigns we experimented with last year (2021) and were invaluable in helping us plan our marketing goals, making sure they were focused and had clear objectives. The session he provided on social media helped give the social media team more confidence to try new things, and as a result we were able to develop our voice and brand, to the point where the main RCN comms team have noticed our work and fed back positively. (JN)

Ned Potter's workshops had a big impact on how we approach marketing. It brought all the excellent work we were doing together so that we had a targeted and concentrated message for our audience. The success of the new ways of working has inspired me to apply the 'campaign' method to our regional contacts to ensure our key messages are effectively communicated. (CP)

Conclusions

When applying for the bursary our key learning aims were:

- Have a better understanding of how to market the library effectively
- Know how to create an effective marketing and communications plan
- Know how to optimise our use of social media
- Know how to overcome the difficulties of marketing to a primarily remote audience



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The feedback above demonstrates that we have met and exceeded our hopes for these learning aims. Everyone has felt invigorated and excited to try out the suggestions in our 2021 marketing activities. In particular we refreshed and refocused the way we use social media.

In our annual survey, conducted over October 2021, the percentage of respondents who don't use the Library choosing 'not aware' as the reason for not using decreased to 26%. This compares with 40% choosing this reason in 2019.

We gained around 500 Twitter followers across 2021. Comparing Q4 2020 and Q4 2021, engagement with our Tweets increased from 1.6% to 2.2%. We gained 300 Instagram followers and now have 925 followers. Instagram was the social media platform we felt least comfortable with before the workshops, this year we have varied the content and used Instagram Stories for the first time.

In the application we included rethinking how to market services to our geographically spread members. The COVID-enforced closure of our physical libraries has increased emphasis on the online offer available to members wherever they are. Users of the eLibrary are still weighted towards London and the South East, I think it will take longer than a year to address this historic imbalance in users. It was pleasing therefore that the volunteers for the User Journeys project came from around the UK.

I echo the feedback from my colleagues above, the workshops and consultancy feedback have given us a solid foundation in marketing skills and a huge variety of ideas which we will be testing for a number of years. I feel much more confident about setting appropriate targets for our marketing activities and recognising the limitations for measuring the influence of marketing on uptake of our services.

Thank you to the Marketing and Communications Group for awarding us this bursary.

Liz Pinel, Customer Services Manager, RCN Library and Archive Service.



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