

## BEST PRACTICES IN WEB BASED SERVICES OF LIBRARIES

Arindam Guha Biswas, MLIS, UGC- NET, WB- SET

**ABSTRACT** - 'Best Practice' can be termed as overall development tools or measurements to uplift a service after implementing it. Libraries provide various types of services to its users. In this article, we try to focus on web based library services and its various types and how to implement 'Best Practice' in web based library services and to find out hurdles and how to overcome such hurdles with some suggestions.

**Keywords-** Best Practice, Web Based Library Services, Types of Web Based Library Services.

### 1. INTRODUCTION

Best practice is the ideal requirement with some techniques and qualities to implement and to make a standard high for any service. Libraries are serving its clientele from ancient ages with its stock of documents. But as the time progresses and for the sake of need of the hour, library services also changed its path from traditional book transaction to modern information facilitation. Librarians are also changed accordingly and now they are became cyberian or modern techniques quipped technological persons. Besides their library science knowledge, now requires modern tech- savvy and information hunter role to satisfy their users. Now in the age of information explosion, it is hard to track the information updates from all over the world depending upon the user's interest. Best practice comes to play a lead role here. Best practice is some guidelines or norms through which libraries can pace up to the information explosion at certain stage and provide users the best available and affordable services.

### 2. BEST PRACTICES DEFINITION:-

According to Wikipedia , "best practice is a method or technique that has been generally accepted as superior to any alternatives because it produces results that are superior to those achieved by other means or because it has become a standard way of doing things, e.g., a standard way of complying with legal or ethical requirements.

Best practices are used to maintain quality as an alternative to mandatory legislated standards and can be based on self-assessment or benchmarking. Best practice is a feature of accredited management standards such as ISO 9000 and ISO 14001".

According to ODLIS (Online Dictionary of Library and Information Science), best practice is "the application of

theory to real-life situations, procedures that, when properly applied, consistently yield superior results and are therefore used as reference points in evaluating the effectiveness of alternative methods of accomplishing the same task. Best practices are identified by examining empirical evidence of success".

Concise Oxford English Dictionary describes 'Best practices as quality of most excellent or desirable type or most appropriate, advantageous, highly improved, outstanding, par excellence services or the customary or expected procedure or way of doing something that is usual or expected way in a particular organization or situation, guidelines for good practices. In this process of developing best practices we take action rather than good ideas, and we improve our skills.'

Australian Best Practice Demonstration Program defines best practice as, "the pursuit of world class performance. It is the way in which the most successful organizations manage and organize their operations. It is a moving target. As the leading organizations continue to improve the 'best practice', goalposts are constantly moving. The concept of continuous improvement is integral to the achievement of best practice"

### 3. NAAC AND BEST PRACTICE:-

NAAC stands for National Accreditation and Assessment Council. It is created by University Grants Commission (UGC) for assessment of the universities and colleges. It is set up in 1994 in Bangalore based on the recommendations of National Policy of Education (NPE) in 1986. NAAC works for excellence in education in colleges and universities and also emphasises on library services. A document prepared by NAAC on Best Practices on academic libraries states "Best practice may be innovative and be a philosophy, policy, strategy, program, process or practice that solves a problem or create new opportunities and positively impact on organizations". The following four best practices prescribed by NAAC in broader terms to improve the library services -

1. Management and Administration of Library.
2. Collection and Services.
3. Extent of User Services.
4. Use of Technology.

### 4. WEB BASED SERVICES OF LIBRARIES:-

NAAC suggested every aspects of library services for betterment termed as 'Best Practice'. But we deals in this

article only the web based services provides by any academic library. So the scope of the article is based on the web based services of libraries.

#### 4.1 What is a Web Based Library Service?

A web based library service is an electronic service provided digitally via library website to its clientele. According to White (2001), it can be defined broadly as 'an information access service in which users ask questions via electronic means e.g., email or web forms'.

#### 4.2 Different Web Based Library Services-

There are various services which can perform by a library through its website. Some of them are Web OPAC, Bulletin Board, e- newsletter for library activities, virtual tour, online database, e- thesis access, e- books access, ask the librarian, FAQs on library website searching and article findings, subject directories etc.

For any big academic library like a university library, it is hard to find for a new user about his/ her specific material from the library website. Libraries also give links to institutional repositories to the website. So, from a vast canvas of information, a systematic arrangement and guide to user helps to find the desired result.

#### 4.3 Web OPAC

OPAC stands for Online Public Access Catalogue. Web OPAC means library catalogue can be searched through internet. In general practice, the library website provides a link to OPAC page for browsing items. Users can see the status of the document before placing demand for a particular item. They can reserve an item from OPAC and can see the account status of them remotely.

#### 4.4 Bulletin Board

Bulletin Board is an electronic communication forum used in library website through which libraries can display or inform the users about a specific topic of interest. It is a generalised message service to all the users. Users can see it and put reply on it also. It is an interactive service.

#### 4.5 e- Newsletter for library activities

e- Newsletter is an informing service to the users about library activities. It is published electronically monthly or a certain periodicity. With the help of pictures of activities and attractive design, it promotes the library marketing as well as user awareness service. It is published in library website or a separate link is given to the library website for retrieval.

#### 4.6 Virtual Tour

Virtual tour is a way through which users can get a glimpse of the library through pictures. Generally virtual tour is a photographic slide show to show the areas of

different parts of library like reference section, stack area, circulation counter etc.

#### 4.7 Online Database

Online database is created and managed by commercial vendors for providing subject access to its users. Many libraries use it on payment basis. It doesn't provide full text retrieval. Some examples are Web of Science, Current contents etc.

#### 4.8 e- Theses Access:-

Some universities provide e- access to theses submitted to him through library website or institutional repository which has also linked with library website. INFLIBNET introduces 'Sodhganga', through which any user can access full text of theses which were awarded in different Indian universities. Sodhganga is a union repository of theses and universities upload their awarded theses in Sodhganga. Library website also gives link to Sodhganga for the users.

#### 4.9 e- Book Access:-

Library website also gives links to freely available e-books websites from where students can easily download and utilise the contents. If any library is purchasing e- books then they can provide user id and password to students for authentic utilisation of the e- books maintaining digital right.

#### 4.10 Ask The Librarian:-

Ask the librarian is a web 2.0 feature where users can interact with the librarian or some specialised staffs for getting their information and to solve their problems regarding website access, user authentication, library rules and policies and related information. It is an interactive service via email or instant messaging service. Users ask for any query related with library and some technical staff will answer the queries.

#### 4.11 FAQs:-

FAQs stand for Frequently Asked Questions. It is a pre assumption of problems which may be faced by any user and a guided instruction to solve the problem is stated in a question and answer format. It will help the user to understand the solution he/ she faces during searching of library website or retrieving some information or documents from institutional repository.

#### 4.12 Online Journals:-

Libraries are now purchasing journals in both print and electronic forms. Due to updation facility, easy access and remote access helps e journals to be more popular. Online journals have different formats like PDF, HTML, SGML, Bitmaps etc. Many publishers built digital library for their publications and library users can access them with user id and password or in the college or university campus with IP

based purchase. Some examples are- ACM Digital Library, EBSCO Databases, Elsevier's Science Direct etc.

## 5. HOW TO IMPLEMENT BEST PRACTICES IN WEB BASED SERVICES

Best practice is the overall development of the web based services provided by any library. It needs certain developments-

- Need a robust website with well equipped support like server, internet speed and bandwidth to handle according to the users of the library.
- If any library according to the institution's need established institutional repository, then the link should be given to the library website for better usability.
- Introduce social bookmarking in the website to follow is a need of the hour. Users can link with the social networking sites like facebook, twitter etc.
- Introduce web 2.0 tools to the library website like ask a librarian, RSS feeds to inform the users.
- Library Blog is also an effective tool to communicate with the users. In library blog, library can reflect the happenings in the library with pictures also.
- Introduction of 'new arrivals' with pictures of the cover page and content of the book attracts the users. Library website also has the provision to host it.
- Library website need to be dynamic or if static website is exists; blog can be introduced and linked to the website is necessary.
- Library can introduce e mail alert for new arrivals and happenings of the library through its website.
- Comment and feedback forms should be there in library website to evaluate its usability and modification for further betterment.
- Library should gives necessary links to its website keeping mind of the users' demand like free online encyclopaedia, thesaurus, free e- books sites and course related websites and information.
- Library can introduce mobile app for the website as it is now very much popular and useful to the users. Introduction of QR code to download mobile app is a free of cost way to make the web based services popular.

## 5.1. Limitations to Implementations

- There are always some hurdles to conquer to implement any better service or work. To implement 'Best Practices' in library web based services, are also some constrains. Some of them are-
- Lack of expertise and technical skills in implement web based services for the library.
- Some library professionals are not up to date and empathy to acquire new technologies.
- Lack of financial support.
- Lack of support from hierarchy, sometimes both from top to bottom and reverse also.
- Lack of participation from the users' side. As it is solely meant for the users and after implementation, if the users are not responsive, then the work is not fruitful.
- Lack of interactivity and participatory approach from both the users and service providers leads to a stagnant situation.
- Lack of infrastructure like a robust server for web based institutional repository, updated computers and OS, office packages and high speed internet connectivity are some pre requisite to implement a well developed web based library services.

## 5.2. Some Suggestions to Overcome the Limitations

- Some suggestions may be given to improve the services of the library. But ultimately the mental acceptance from top to bottom of any institution to implement web based library services and to maintain it is needed utmost.
- If financial support is given, library can hire a professional to develop a well balanced library website and to maintain it with expert or after getting training by library professionals can also maintain it routinely thereafter. It will only cost initially but maintenance cost will be zero afterwards.
- Nowadays open source softwares are available freely. If library professionals who have some basic skill in IT can adopt to use those freely available softwares for making institutional repositories using DSpace or Greenstone or can build a library website or blog using CMS like Drupal, Joomla or Wordpress.

- If needed some teachers and students who have the expertise in IT, can also be engaged in this project.
- Whatever the services can offer using web based technologies, users feedback is necessary to evaluate and modify it if needed. Students and teachers can participate voluntarily to make the project successful. But if the scenario is not much optimistic then the librarian needs to lead the way and to involve teachers and students by making committees to interact and use the web based resources optimally.
- Continuous campaign is needed for introducing any new service or product in the market. Libraries also need to market their services to its users for better usage.
- Library can introduce 'best user of the month' programme through which the picture of the best user can be uploaded to the website. It will be very effective way to capture the large users to the library website.
- Libraries can introduce 'online quiz' to the users and can give some prizes to them as they attract towards the website.
- Libraries can upload sample question papers to the website as students needs them simultaneously them can browse other items in the website and start liking the site.
- Best practice is a habit which can be inculcate among the stakeholders of the institution and librarian needs the leading role to make such good habit of the users.

## 6. CONCLUSION

Libraries provide different types of services to its homogeneous or heterogeneous clientele from long back. But the present decade can be categorised as the age of information. So the information seeking behaviour of the users has changed than the past. Users now demand updated information into their fingertips. Users of present generation are used to smartphones, tabs, laptops. So to pace up with the time and to fulfil the information needs of the users, library services need to be changed accordingly. Libraries now introduce web based services to its users. Best Practice comes in this situation for upliftment of the library services. Web based library services are described in this article and tries to find the difficulties and probable measures to overcome it. As today when it is now a question that in future the need of the library is required or not, it is the correct time to use 'Best Practice' to every fields of library services as if the users can't find any new and updated information from library in this 'Kindle' based age, then we need to re think of our services and find the best possible

way to make it up to date and usable to the users according to their information needs. 'Best Practice' comes to play here to enhance the service quality of the library particularly web based services provided to the users as the article dealing with that aspect only.

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