

# User Centric Best Practices of Khandwala College Library\*

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## ABSTRACT

*The Khandwala College Library's innovative initiatives focus on users of its institution as well as the users of different academic institutes. It follows an open policy to share the information helpful for research and teaching activities. The Library's efforts in attracting the user base to its innovative services are well received. Right from automation to stock verification, from certificate course for researchers to launching an abstracting database of conference papers for educators/researchers, from training librarians to researchers, many innovative activities are being carried out. The paper shares details about selected innovative initiatives carried out by Khandwala College Library.*

**Keywords:** *Best Practices, Khandwala College Library, ICon-AD, COIST*

## 1. Introduction

The Khandwala College Library's services and activities revolve around its users. User and their needs are the top priorities of the Library. As customer is considered a king in business, the Library considers its user a king as the success of the Library and its services are greatly dependent on the users. The Library's innovative initiatives are a passionate approach and attempt to go beyond the routine library and information services. All the healthy practices discussed in this paper are those that have impacted users, image and credibility of the Library in myriad ways.

In this paper, each practice is presented under four sub-heads viz. (a) Practice- that introduces the best practice and its basic features; b) Process- that shares the pre-and post implementation tasks of the practices; c) Outcome- that reveals the evidence of success of the practice. d) Future Plan- that envisages the target to be achieved with the respective best practice.

## 2. About Khandwala College

Nagindas Khandwala College, Malad (W), Mumbai, one of the best Colleges of University of Mumbai, is imparting quality education from last four decades. The College

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is affiliated to University of Mumbai and reaccredited by UGC-NAAC with 'A' Grade (3<sup>rd</sup> Cycle). It runs courses ranging from graduation to Ph.D with around four thousand students and nearly hundred skilled and experienced teaching faculty with active supporting staff. The College has all necessary educational infrastructures. Being an ISO 9001:2008 certified educational institute, it is also one of the Lead Colleges of University of Mumbai. It has bagged many prestigious awards including IMC Ramkrishna Bajaj Award, BEQET Award, Education Excellence Award of Indus Foundation Inc., USA, and Best College status conferred by University of Mumbai for the year 2012-13.

### **3. About Khandwala College Library**

The Library and Information Centre is one of the state-of-the art College libraries in the western suburbs of Mumbai. The Library is instrumental in impacting large number of students, researchers, educators and trainers serving in and out of the College. Rich with qualitative collection of kind of documents, the Library is fully automated with latest library functionalities, technologies and equipments. The following best practices further introduce the Library and its activities.

### **4. User Centric Best Practices**

#### **4.1. Certificate Programme for Research Scholars (COIST)**

- a) **Practice:** The Library undertakes teaching and training activities for the researchers and post graduate students of different colleges and universities. A short-term Certificate Programme for research scholars i.e. Certificate Course in Online Information Sources, Tools and Techniques (COIST) was introduced in 2013. The course is open to all but preference is given to the research scholars pursuing research degrees. The Course is being conducted twice in an academic year.
- b) **Process:** The COIST imparts an extensive training on online information sources, tools and techniques for researchers. The scope, syllabus and teaching method are planned and executed with the help and advice from the LIS experts and senior educators. The official website (<http://www.coist.weebly.com>) of COIST was hosted with sufficient information about the course curriculum, eligibility criteria, fees, resource persons, online admission procedures etc. The classes are conducted on five Saturdays for four hours a day. The classes are engaged by noted information professionals working in premiere academic institutes of Mumbai and adjacent cities. The programme is practical in nature and each participant appears for a test of hundred marks at the end of the programme. The grade-based certificates are awarded to the successful candidates.
- c) **Outcome:** The Course is well received by the researchers as the response is astounding. So far the Library has successfully completed three batches and trained thirty two researchers of different domains and universities. It is found that the researchers mastered the art of exploring the scholarly literature online. The course has immensely helped their research work and publication activities. Interestingly, many of the researchers who successfully completed the Course contact the Library staff often to discuss their queries or learn more on the issues discussed in the Course.

Information professionals and experts have appreciated the initiative. Dr. R Guruprasad, Scientist, KTMD, CSIR-National Aerospace Laboratories (NAL) says “This course which is of immense value to a Ph.D. research scholar or even a Post Doctor as being aware of online e-resources, tools and content building software are extremely important.” (personal communication via e-mail, November 11, 2013). And Dr. Neha Chaudhari, Centre for Internet and Society opines “The course is a wonderful idea. The course outline seems very comprehensive.” (personal communication via e-mail, November 11, 2013).

- d) **Future Plan:** A similar course shall be introduced for research guides of different domains and universities in the academic year 2015-16.

#### 4.2. Indian Conference-Abstracting Database (ICon-AD)

- a) **Practice:** The ICon-AD is a non-profit initiative and a growing database of abstracts of papers presented at conferences held in India. The ICon-AD was conceived keeping the status of Indian conferences and publication trends in mind. It is observed that not all conference organisers publish the conference proceedings. Publishing conference papers holds importance because conferences always focus on the ongoing or futuristic trends of a particular domain (Hulagabali, 2014).
- b) **Process:** The aim was to share the topics/papers that were discussed in the conferences and also to connect the readers with the authors to exchange the scholarly information. After the successful installation of DSpace (an open source software), the data of some selected conference abstracts were fed. With rigorous testing and rearrangement of the data according to the fields given by DSpace, the beta version of ICon-AD was launched on 1<sup>st</sup> January, 2014.

The organisers of various conferences were then contacted. The utilities of the project were shared with them and requested them to share the conference abstracts. The abstracts were collected with a formal agreement to share the abstracts for the larger interest of the readers. Each abstract was then formatted with ICon-AD’s style sheet and converted in pdf file-format. Metadata entries were fed in the database and sufficient information about the conference, its organiser and the organising secretary’s details were added. The archival of abstract is one of the routine activities of the Library staff as we are receiving increasing number of abstracts from the conference organisers.

- c) **Outcome:** The response was overwhelming from the conference organisers. The database helped form collaboration with twenty two academic institutes that came forward and shared their conference abstracts. As of 1<sup>st</sup> February, 2015, the database comprises 1220 abstracts (of 30 conferences) written by 1597 authors. The biggest evidence of success of this practice is that Google Scholar is indexing ICon-AD entries. Readers can now search and find abstracts from Google Scholar too. On the other hand, the database has helped the authors to have a strong online presence with their academic contributions and that is attracting many more readers.

Information professionals and experts have appreciated the initiative. Nevena Tomic, Library Manager, Students' City Cultural Center, Serbia says "It is an interesting archive and valuable resource." (personal communication via LinkedIn, September 9, 2014). And Dr. Marianne Bamkin (of OpenDOAR's), Centre for Research Communications, Nottingham University says "It appears to be an interesting archive and valuable resource" (personal communication via e-mail, June 23, 2014).

- d) **Future Plan:** Efforts will be made to incorporate the conference abstracts of reputed institutes like IIM and IIT; funding and sponsoring bodies (for conferences) like ICSSR, UGC, DST etc. and research institutes like TIFR, BARC, ISEC, IGIDR, NAL etc.

#### **4.3. Earn While You Learn Scheme (EWYLS)**

- a) **Practice:** The EWYLS is started in 2011-12 and is one of the popular best practices of the Library. The students are much familiar with this scheme as they have been seeing their seniors working in different departments of the College (under this scheme). Any student studying in second or third year of graduation and wishing to pursue a part-time job in the different departments of the College (including Library) can apply for the scheme. Five students are recruited every year. The selected students are required to work for four man-hours a day in respective section of the College and offered monthly stipend.
- b) **Process:** Teachers introduce the EWYLS in the classes at the beginning of the College. Students obtain complete details about the scheme from the Library staff too. Desirous students submit written application to the Librarian. After initial scrutiny, the students are informed to appear for Aptitude Test that comprises MCQs and also few descriptive questions ranging from general knowledge to current affairs. Post-test, the selected students are called for group-discussion and interview. The list of successful students is posted on the website and they are placed in different departments.
- c) **Outcome:** Students working in different departments of the College understand the functionality of an education institute. Their perception of their own College becomes more positive as they see it being an employee as well as a student. Their innovative ideas and noteworthy contributions also helps improve the system.
- d) **Future Plan:** Providing part-time job opportunity to more number of students with formal training programmes from the corporate trainers and educators. It is also planned to start 'Sponsor a Trainee' scheme to provide stipend to the selected students working under the scheme.

#### **4.4. Training cum Mutual Learning Programme (TMLP)**

- a) **Practice:** Many librarians and researchers of different institutes access our library. The queries and consultations of these user categories are different. To make this assistance more formal, we introduced the TMLP. This initiative helps learning the

best things about each other's library mutually. As regard to research scholars, training them on effective use of different sources of information especially online information sources is necessary. With this observation, the TMLP was devised and is being conducted preferably on any Saturday based on the demand from the librarians and researchers.

- b) **Process:** The librarians/researchers need to contact the Librarian with queries. Depending upon the scope of the queries, the discussion (on any Saturday) is arranged. The discussions are recorded and feedback from the participant is taken. The event details are then enumerated in the Library records as well as posted on the Library's blog.
- c) **Outcome:** Catering voluntary assistance to the researchers and librarians became formal through TMLP initiative. The prominent outcome of TMLP is two dimensional. Firstly, researchers' complex queries help us study, review and serve them well with the required solutions. Secondly, both librarians and researchers help us know what way we need to develop our system, improve services and sharpen knowledge too. This initiative was a learning curve for us as it helped us conduct training in a formal and effective way. Moreover, it helped us plan and conduct the training, prepare training documentation, analyze our strength and scope for improvement etc. Such approaches constantly help us in showcasing our initiatives to inspecting bodies.
- d) **Future Plan:** To conduct more number of training programmes on regular basis and also inviting senior information professionals to train the librarians and researchers.

**4.5. Miscellaneous Practices:** The Library believes that every library ought to have its Library Social Responsibility (LSR) for serving the academic and social community directly or indirectly. Following healthy practices try to achieve the same.

- a) **Association with Voluntary Libraries:** The Library and its staff associate themselves with some non-profit voluntary organisations that are instrumental in starting and maintaining libraries for the public. For instance: a pilot study on such libraries, located in Mumbai and Thane districts, was undertaken to know the libraries' working condition. Personal visits by the Librarian and some student volunteers were made to around twenty plus such libraries. Connecting with these libraries helped us share our ideas on latest technology available for libraries, documentation methods, information marketing skills, undertaking use and user studies, stock taking methods, etc. The visits to these libraries are being made as and when the libraries need any assistance from us.
- b) **Discussion Forum for Researchers:** Understanding the need of a platform for research scholars to share their queries related to their research, research policies/guidelines, current trends, job openings, training programmes, ongoing discussions, forthcoming conferences etc., the Library launched online discussion forum i.e. Indian Forum of Research Scholars in Social Sciences (IFRSSH). More than six hundred researchers, educators and librarians mutually and actively

participate in the discussions and share information. This initiative helped us learn various different information needs of researchers that are different from the users of other categories.

- c) **Research Reference Services:** The library offers free membership to research scholars (of University of Mumbai and its affiliated colleges) pursuing doctoral degrees. The service is catered against the official request (letter issued) by the research supervisor or librarian of their institute to avail the said service. More than fifteen to twenty researchers are using this service every year.
- d) **Inter Library Loan (ILL):** The Library offers ILL for the libraries located in the adjacent localities of the College. Based on the written application by the librarian or head of the institute of the participating library, two books are issued for one month. This benefits us in maintaining the professional relation with other libraries.

Apart from the above healthy practices, following are some of the selected best practices of Khandwala College Library.

- e) **In-house Printing of Borrowers' Cards:** As stated before, the Library is fully automated with library management software and other latest technology. The Library staff prepares the borrowers' cards (with barcode) in the Library itself by using a multi-colour printer. The staff are trained to handle the database as well as the printing of cards. The colour ribbons, PVC cards, barcode labels and cleaning kits are being used to print the cards. This move has helped us in issuing cards to students on time and save money as outsourcing of the same work would cost us more.
- f) **Document Archive and Management:** The acquisition section is equipped with scanners. The Library assistants scan every invoice at the time of processing the books. The scanned invoices are codified (with the date of invoice, vendor, subject and course codes) to maintain uniformity and easy retrieval for future use. The Library assistants are also scanning and archiving syllabus copies and old question papers. Both the documents are accessible to students from our Internet facility centre. Students can download and share them with their fellow classmates. This has avoided repeated requests for hard copies of question papers and syllabus copies and also helped avoid improper handling of (the bunches of) question papers and syllabus copies.
- g) **Automated Stock Verification:** The Library uses wireless mobile scanners while stock checking. The library staff takes the machine to the stack room and scans the barcodes of the books individually. The device works on Wi-Fi mode and can store ten thousand records. The accession numbers are beamed on the computer (note pad). Later the note pad, bearing the accession numbers, is imported to the database and the status is marked (against each scanned book) as 'on shelf'. This device is handy, user friendly and helps save time, energy, avoids duplication of efforts and also brings accuracy in the stock verification process.

- h) **Online Presence of the Library:** Connecting with the users online is as important as meeting them in the Library every day. The focal objective, behind having a strong online presence of the Library, is to market our information services and thus create interest and awareness about the utilities among the users. Considering this, we started adding sufficient information about the Library, its services, facilities, list of best practices, library staff publications, online requisition form etc. on our College website (<http://www.nkc.ac.in>); we also created Library's official blog (<http://www.nkcblogspot.com>) in 2009; and also opened accounts in social networking sites. On behalf of the faculty, the Library adds the publication details of its faculty on Google Scholar and their selected PPTs on <http://www.slideshare.net>. It is also important to state that the Library manages the College's official website right from content development to updating the site. All these supportive online activities have helped boost the image of the Library as well as the College.
- i) **Project on our Library:** We support our students (of BSc Information Technology and Computer Science) to undertake projects on our Library. For instance: students of IT and Computer Science compile programmes to design library software with basic modules. Moreover, many BLISc and MLISc students of different universities have undertaken project works on our Library as partial fulfillment of their degrees. Such research studies have helped us identify our limitations and improve the system.
- j) **Internship Programmes:** The Library offers Internship and Training Programme for Library Science student/s and professionals. Every year we are training one M.L.I.Sc. student studying in Department of Library and Information Science, University of Mumbai for 15 days as Internship Programme at our Library. Such programmes are helping the Library staff to sharpen their training skills and provide the best possible training to the interns.
- k) **Students Participation in Decision Making:** To involve students in decision making Student Library Advisor Committee (SLAC) is formed and the meeting of the same is conducted twice a year. The initiative has helped understand the students' issues related to the Library and address them constructively.
- l) **Language Learning Initiative:** One third of the students need training on communication skills especially in English. The teachers are putting lot of efforts in improving students' learning ability in the said language. To support this from the Library, we issue books on grammar, essay and stories to the students. The students exchange the books and return them every month and take up new books. This results in gradual improvement in their learning, writing, reading and applying skills.
- m) **Online Requisition:** Library is a democratic institute. Students of our Library are free to recommend any books to the Library. They can recommend the books online and the book/s is/are procured within eight working days (subject to availability). This initiative brings smile on the students' faces as they feel their requests are honoured by adding the book/s in the library.

- n) **Internet Facility Centre:** Students can access Internet in the Library premises on designated computers for thirty minutes a day. The access period is extended if any computer is not occupied by any other student. The students are also free to access Internet on Wi-Fi mode. This Centre also helps the Library staff to orient the students (coming to Library for accessing the Internet) about various open access sources available online and the databases subscribed by the Library.
- o) **Publication:** The Library publishes books and conference proceedings under the banner of Khandwala Publishing House (KPH), a publishing unit of our College. So far KPH has published four books.

## 5. Conclusion

The Khandwala College Library strives hard to sustain the above discussed initiatives. The practices are reviewed periodically to accommodate the necessary changes to make the initiatives more innovative and user centric. These practices have not only helped us in building a strong and active user base but also helped us in our studies, teaching and research activities. Though few of the above initiatives are general, we are admired and appreciated by our readers, faculty, management and also the users working in different institutes who are part of our services. The Library's aim is to build a library that supports learning, teaching, training, research and publication activities of the users. And the above initiatives are the testimony to it. Dr. R S Deshpande, Director of Institute of Social and Economic Change who gave his remark about our Library in the visitor's register as: "Khandwala College Library is equivalent to any good research institute's library" (personal communication, February 15, 2008). We feel this is an apt remark and we are putting every possible effort to achieve this status.

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