

Audience Research

A briefing paper for health library and knowledge practitioners

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Researching your audiences is essential to deliver library and knowledge services which help support improvements in patient care.

This is a briefing paper for practitioners in the health sector delivering digital library and knowledge services, who wish to research their audiences but who may have limited resources to do so.

Why is researching digital audiences important?

NHS library and knowledge services have an important role in supporting health professionals care for patients in the areas of clinical decision-making, clinical governance, lifelong learning and research.

The health services of the four countries in the UK are spending large and growing sums of money on digital content and services, and the data capacity of networks and hardware is ever increasing. In the NHS Next Stage Review for England, Lord Darzi highlighted, 'the challenge of the continuing development of the information society, and the need to anticipate and respond to these changes'.

Whether you are producing your own digital content or providing a gateway to other people's, you must be able to demonstrate that in this changing world your service actively supports health care, that it is fit for the purpose and that it offers value for money. If you do not research your audiences you may not be able to provide this evidence. Furthermore, with the introduction of national quality frameworks, future funding may depend on having a clearer understanding of your service's contribution to patient care.

Transforming health information and knowledge services

The digital revolution is changing the way in which library and information services are delivered and the role of library professionals. The review of NHS Health Library Services in England highlights this as 'a recipe for either confusion or lost opportunity, or a new and better way of benefiting the public and patients'.

It is imperative that your service can respond to changes in the information society, that you understand how your audience wishes to consume digital content, and that your service evolves to meet changing demands and expectations.

With library and knowledge services provided by a variety of bodies including NHS Trusts, Royal Colleges, higher education institutions (HEIs) and professional bodies such as the BMA, it is

also important to understand the role of your service in the wider environment.

Where can I get support from?

As well as The Guide to Researching Audiences, which this briefing paper supports, a range of other services and publications is available in the sector to help you research your audiences. Much of them are focused on audience research in general rather than targeted at digital audiences, but the same research principles are applicable.

Whilst the administration of health services is devolved in the UK, some of the national information available will be more widely applicable. For example, England's **National Library for Health** has a wealth of information under 'Tools for Library Staff', including best practice guidance for 'Assessing the impact of a health library service', and information on user needs under 'service development'.

To help you understand how to **demonstrate value**, an LKDN paper entitled 'The value and impact of information provided through library services for patient care: a systematic review' gives some useful pointers.

The **Chartered Institute of Marketing** runs two useful courses entitled 'Marketing in the NHS – Principles & Practices' (2-day course, 14 CPD hours) and 'Marketing to Succeed in a Competitive NHS' (1-day course, 7 CPD hours). The latter is intended to provide an insight into the application of marketing principles to health care service provision within the UK secondary care environment, although it is likely to be more widely applicable.

Additionally, the **Market Research Society (MRS)** provides some best practice guidance to promote the professionalism of research on the internet.

Links to all these resources can be found on the next page.



Audience research in the health sector

Working collaboratively

It is widely seen as an important objective for library and knowledge services to work more collaboratively. For example, e-content in the health sector is procured by a range of organisations, and it is common for users to have a number of authentication credentials to access overlapping information resources. Joint activity can offer many benefits, for example collaborative procurement of e-resources may reduce spend on e-content, improve the user experience and allow specialist libraries to focus on the niche needs of users.

To make the most of collaborative activities, it is important for services to research their audiences to identify common and complementary needs, usage patterns, to identify users to be served by consortiums, and to facilitate discussions with publishers. A paper on the 'procurement of electronic content across the UK NHS and HE sectors' provides some excellent guidance on ways forward for collaborative procurement.

Quality assessment

The introduction of quality frameworks to improve NHS library and knowledge services is changing the way that services are assessed and evidence is collected. The frameworks focus on delivering services which meet the changing needs of users, and ensure that there is an appropriate evidence base. Working with your audience to understand their knowledge needs and requirements will be essential to provide this evidence.

Digital libraries

Evolution from the physical to the virtual world brings new challenges for understanding users' opinions of service quality and use of resources. A useful paper by the Association of Research Libraries (ARL) reviews the evolution of measurement and evaluation in libraries, including discussions on LibQual+, DigiQual and Measuring the Impact of Networked Electronic Services (MINES).

Engaging your audience

When your users are busy professionals it can be difficult to engage them to take part in research. However, individuals have a requirement to maintain a portfolio of evidence to demonstrate that they are developing, maintaining and enhancing their skills within the workplace.

Contributing to research projects can earn individuals CPD points. This can be used as an incentive by services.

Finding out more about audience research

The Guide to Researching Audiences, developed by the Strategic Content Alliance, provides useful and practical information about audience research.

The Guide sets out the key activities in the lifecycle of audience research, which are driven by your target audience. It provides information on topics such as deciding whether to outsource

your research, and discusses various research methods such as surveying and web analytics.

Further reading

The Guide to Audience Research

<http://sca.jiscinvolve.org/2009/02/05/download-audience-analysis-toolkit>

Report of a National Review of NHS Health Library Services in England

www.library.nhs.uk/aboutnlh/review

NLH resources for librarians

www.library.nhs.uk/forlibrarians/toolkits

LKDN paper: the value and impact of information provided through library services for patient care: a systematic review

www3.interscience.wiley.com/cgi-bin/fulltext/118715199/PDFSTART

Chartered Institute of Marketing courses (A-Z)

www.cim.co.uk/ProfessionalDevelopment/Training/CoursesAtoZ.aspx

Market Research Society internet research guidelines

www.mrs.org.uk/standards/internet.htm

Procurement of electronic content across the UK in NHS and HE sectors

www.jisc-collections.ac.uk/media/documents/jisc_collections/procurement_report_final_22jan07.doc

National Service Framework of Quality Improvement (England)

www.library.nhs.uk/forlibrarians/nsf

A Quality Assurance Framework for Knowledge Services Supporting the NHS (Scotland)

www.nes.scot.nhs.uk/docs/news/Quality_Assurance_Framework_for_NHSScotland_Knowledge_Services.pdf

The evolution of measurement and evaluation of libraries: a perspective from the ARL

http://muse.jhu.edu/login?uri=/journals/library_trends/v056/56.4.kyrillidou.html

The Strategic Content Alliance

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This briefing paper and The Guide to Researching Audiences have been prepared by Curtis+Cartwright Consulting Ltd on behalf of the Strategic Content Alliance. They are part of a series of guides developed to support people in the public sector understand their digital audiences and deliver audience-focused services.

This work is part of a wider initiative led by the Strategic Content Alliance, which aims to support UK citizens gain best value from the public investment that has been made in digital content.

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