Eureka! Library Innovation Challenge

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In March this year, the University of Manchester Library held the final of its second Eureka! Library Innovation Challenge. Hosted by television presenter and comedian Phill Jupitus at the nearby Contact Theatre, it was the culmination of long preparation and hard work by colleagues across the university library as well as by the competition entrants, and saw the winner being presented with a cheque for £1,000 by University Librarian Jan Wilkinson, as well as a commitment to developing their idea into a working library service.

ORIGIN OF THE IDEA

Eureka! is an opportunity for students to submit an idea to improve the library, and to see that idea fully implemented into a service that will benefit the experience for library users.

The idea for Eureka! emerged from the library's Innovation Group, formed from a wide cross-section of library staff in 2012, to collect and generate new ideas and to steer and champion new projects that emerge from those ideas.

Customer engagement in library developments has been at the forefront over recent years, most notably with the award of Customer Service Excellence status[1] and the success of the library's award-winning Alan Gilbert Learning Commons project, the first university building to fully embed the student voice in its design and development.[2]

The competition, therefore, is an alignment of both our desire to innovate and a commitment to engage directly with our student audience.

Fig. 1 Innovation group

THE CONCEPT TAKES SHAPE

Envisioned as a Dragons' Den-style competition, students were asked to send in their ideas, and then the shortlisted finalists pitched their ideas to a panel of judges in front of an audience of their peers.

The panel was made up of local entrepreneurs and business leaders - a natural choice to judge the quality and feasibility of competition entries - together with the president of the Students' Union representing the student body.

MARKETING: ENCOURAGING SUBMISSIONS

The message was simple and direct: this was an opportunity for students to make a genuine difference to library services.

The promise of a final in which shortlisted entrants would be able to speak directly to business leaders and entrepreneurs was an important factor in attracting the hundreds of entries we received. Financial backing was also provided to implement the winning idea, as well as the incentive of a £1,000 prize for the winning entrant.

On the creative front, we adopted a clean and bold approach in the visuals, using bright block colours. We also decided to create a set of short 'teaser' videos for the launch of the campaign. These were filmed in-house as tongue-in-cheek illustrations of possible ideas - a member of staff using roller skates to speed up the delivery of books; a student being led away by a security guard to face his punishment after returning a

book late; and so on, with the call to action being 'can you do better?'

We began the campaign in December 2013, aiming to plant the idea in the minds of students in time for them to submit entries before the deadline of 14 February 2014. The videos were showcased on our website, with content changing weekly. This proved to be an effective approach, with over 7,000 views for the kick-off of our campaign.

The campaign was centred on our website, with social media and digital signage providing supplementary channels, and we had a few dozen submissions before the Christmas break.

We produced a final marketing push for entries following the January exam period, a new video with a more direct call to action being produced. By the 14 February deadline we had received hundreds of entries.

Marketing: the final

Phill Jupitus, well known for his engaging style and comedic charm, was brought on-board as a celebrity host for the final. For the event, we hired the Contact Theatre, located within our campus.

Shortlisted finalists were given training in presentation skills, and each was filmed being interviewed about their ideas. This was edited for use at the event and subsequently published on the library website.

We employed a countdown approach for the build-up. We announced judges, finalists and finally the host on a week-by-week basis, to encourage students to attend the event. To help manage the event, students booked (free) tickets using an online event booking system, and more than 250 signed up.

The event itself was organised in a standard theatre style, with the judging panel and students presenting on the stage. Finalists pitched their ideas to judges with the help of a large screen for their PowerPoint presentations. These were kept to five minutes, followed by a ten-minute grilling from the judges!

A social media stream continued throughout the event.

An interval followed the presentations, during which the judges retired to a room with a couple of library advisers to debate their decision, and the audience was treated to refreshments.

Fig. 2 The judges

As the audience resumed their seats, pre-filmed interviews with the contestants were projected onto the screen. The winner was announced as Jack Green, for his idea of a book delivery App to show the availability of a book and allow students to request it to be delivered to a central hub for collection. Judges and host were available post-event to mingle with contestants and audience members, providing a chance for questions, enquiries and general networking.

Fig. 3 Jack Green presents his winning idea

Post-event marketing continued with the winner's name and details being published immediately on the library and university websites, and stories outlining the event were run on the Students' Union website, in *Mancunion* (the student newspaper) and in *UniLife* (the university's staff magazine). Edited film of the event and a post-event interview with the host were used in subsequent promotion, with the highlights video achieving over 5,000 views within a few days of

Fig. 4 Phill Jupitus presents

the competition. It was hosted on the student web portal, which helped to drive traffic to it.

IMPLEMENTING THE WINNING IDEAS

The 2014 winning idea, from student Jack Green, is currently in the early stages of being developed.

The winning idea from the previous year (proposing bookable study spaces) is due to be implemented in June this year - with Telepen, the company developing the technology, successfully marketing the product to other libraries.[3] Jade Brodie, the winning student, has been part of the entire process, allowing us to stay true to the spirit of the idea and providing her with the experience of having been a part of the project from start to finish.

The standard of entries received led to us develop some other ideas submitted as Quick Wins. These included book baskets to transport books around the library; the installation of plants to improve the atmosphere of our main library building; and a textbook rescue campaign, which encouraged departing students to donate their textbooks for the library to pass on to the next generation of students, free of charge, at the start of year. There were a number of entries about providing relaxation and refresh areas, and this inspired our highly successful WellBeing campaign.

OUTCOMES

The Eureka! campaign signals strongly to our students that the library is serious in its commitment to engage with them as partners in order to improve our services.

For those shortlisted for the finals, there has been the opportunity to engage with business leaders and entrepreneurs and to develop their presentation skills in front of a large audience. Students have been overwhelmingly positive about the experience of being a Eureka! finalist, and what they have learned from it in terms of presenting and selling their ideas. The Eureka! project manager, Nick Campbell, invested time in mentoring each student, and this has been particularly valued by the students.

Through the marketing of Eureka!, the library has been able to communicate the priority we place on engaging with our primary audience, demonstrate our role at the centre of the student experience, and make a valuable contribution to perceptions of the university as an institution actively engaged with leading local business figures. In only a few months following the first competition, ideas submitted by students had been put into practice, adding genuine value to the student experience.

Fig. 5 Jack Green with his prize cheque

Eureka! has not been a quick win, but the results demonstrate the investment we have made in the campaign. For all concerned, the results illustrate that, when part of a truly collaborative effort, we can have a fundamentally positive effect on students, the library, the university as a whole, and the perceptions of the wider local community.

Videos and information from the campaign can be found at http://manchester.ac.uk/library/eureka-campaign.

Notes

1   Library awarded Customer Service Excellence certification.' http://www.library.manchester.ac.uk/aboutus/news/name-186504-en.htm [Accessed 20 April 2014]

2   Winner: University of Manchester.' http://www.theguardian.com/higher-education-network/2014/feb/18/winner-university-of-manchester-facilities-project [Accessed 20 April 2014]

3   EUREKA, Telepen and the University of Manchester.' http://telepen.co.uk/eureka-telepen-and-the-university-of-manchester/ [Accessed 20 April 2014]