

THE IMPORTANCE OF MARKETING IN COLLEGE LIBRARY SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

The paper discusses and emphasizes the need for the adoption of marketing approach by the university libraries to augment their financial resources and exploit new information technology to provide better information support to the users. Highlights the marketing concept and its various activities and how these activities can be successfully applied in the marketing of library and information products and services in university libraries. Also discusses on the problems in implementing marketing concept to library and information services. Provides various definitions of marketing. Suggests to promote marketing of library and information services in university libraries in view of the budgetary cuts by UGC ;mad State governments. Deals with method of designing services and products. Concludes that the marketing policy of the libraries needs careful planning, structuring, execution and evaluation with regular review.

Keyword: Library Product, Services, Marketing, Skill, Analysis, Evaluation.

INTRODUCTION

The marketing of information in the university libraries happens to be a recent phenomenon. In India, the universities are being funded by the UGC and state governments. This may be the reason that the information providers in the university libraries are not seriously thinking in terms of marketing their products and services. The university libraries until now depended upon common sense standards for the acquiring of information and disseminating of the same to the users. Their efforts in this direction can at best be described as casual or immature. The result is that information services provided by the libraries have not proved very beneficial to the scholars. The libraries have failed to provide the required information support to the users because the services provided by them are often not user-oriented or need based. The reason for this sad state of affairs is that users are not involved in the design of services and they are not made aware of the potentialities of information services and how these services can benefit them in their pursuits. The result is that whatever services are available, remain either unutilized or underutilized. However, this state of affairs can be activated by adopting suitable marketing strategy.

The librarians in the university libraries can play significant role in catering to the needs of different groups of the academic community -students, teachers and research scholars -for

furthering their educational research. They are more responsive to their user's needs and wants and more effectively achieve the library goals and objectives. They are not fully exploiting the comparative advantages that they possess in comparison to private sector information agencies. Rising prices of reading material, information explosion, introduction of new information technology, shrinking funds, devaluation of money, declining support to libraries have made it necessary for the university libraries to reconsider their position and to utilize some of the tools that have made it possible for profit organizations to operate efficiently, effectively and profitably. One of the tools which is appropriate is marketing their products and services.

A library operates routinely with a known set of customers. A library also operates on trust. When a client walks into the library, he trusts that he will get the material or information that he needs. The library, in turn, trusts that the client will return the items within the specified borrowing period. The specific structure of a library with its strict requirements as to efficiency demands a focus on the quality of value-adding processes. If a library is to be managed according to quality criteria, quality needs to be defined and made measurable. The indicators found must be captured in a measuring system for the sectors "cost and performance", "customer satisfaction", and "staff satisfaction" that facilitates quality controlling and provides staff with controlling parameters for everyday work. The most important condition of effective library services is to support continuous enriching dialog between the library and society by agreeing upon quality targets, which relate to the maintenance or improvement of quality standards.

Concept and Definition of Marketing Library Services

Marketing, in its broader sense, is the social instrument through which the material goods and culture of a society are transmitted to its members. Marketing, in its library sense, refers to the instrument through which information (both raw and processed) are transmitted to its members. Kotler² has rightly defined: "Marketing is the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives. It relies heavily on designing the organization's offering in terms of target markets needs and desires, and on using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and service the markets."

In the words of Stanton³, "marketing is a total system of interacting business activities to plan, price, promote and distribute want satisfying products and services, and present to potential customers."

Dragon⁴ neatly defined the concept of marketing and outlined its major aspects as "follows." "Marketing is a systematic approach to planning and achieving desired exchange relations with other groups. Marketing is concerned with developing, maintaining, and/or regulating exchange relations involving products, services, organizations, persons, places or causes."

Zachery and Williams considered that 'marketing is planning that focuses on products,; place or mode of delivery, adjustment of cost/price to the market, and promotion to ! Specifically targeted segments of the special librarian's market."

Samuel Sweet Green in his often quoted speech at the ALA Conference in 1876 advocated "improved personal relations between librarians and readers." It could be said that today's marketing of library services has its roots in parts of the USA and Northern Europe, in countries with few illiterates and more money, libraries, and library schools than the rest of the world. This certainly does not mean that the idea of libraries reaching out to "the common man" has not occupied librarians in other parts of the world. For instance, there is the example of the "library movement" in India at the beginning of the 20th century (Romberg, 1997).

What Does Marketing Mean For Librarian?

In recent years, marketing has been gaining importance in libraries throughout the world. Self-support policies, increasing competitiveness in the marketplace, rising customer expectations, and widening access to information are some of the main reasons for this trend. To survive in such an environment, library and information centers must identify their users' needs and integrate this information into the everyday workings of the library.

Steps for Marketing in Library Services

1. Maintain your relevance
2. Stop being taken for granted
3. Promote an updated image
4. Visibility
5. Competition for resources
6. Valuable community resource
7. Competition for customers
8. Beneficial
9. Survival
10. Rising expectations

Marketing of College Libraries Services

It can be said that the concept of information marketing is still in a state of infancy in college libraries in India. Factors which characterize the difficulties of information marketing are :

1. Lack of proper assessment of requirements, wants and needs of the users;
2. Casual approach in supplying information to the potential users;
3. Lack of perception of how much information services and products can contribute to boost research and development activity;
4. Lack of perception of the economic aspect of buying information on the part of the user of information.

The recognition of information as a commodity or organizational resource is not very new in the developed countries. But the situation is different in a developing country like India. In

the college environment, it still sounds strange to think of information as a marketable commodity. In the university, the main objective is the growth of knowledge and stimulation of research while in a market, the main objective is profit making.

To accelerate the pace of research and development, it looks imperative to find a confluence point of the academic and business approach to strike a balance between the two, so that the users can get the needy information for a payment and without wasting much of their precious time.

The following discussion highlights on how the market concept is applicable in the area of information services and products in college libraries.

Market profiling

- User affordability
- Extent of use
- Relevance of the service to users
- Repeat customers
- User preferences
- Staffing

Professional Skills for Marketing

- Perception of user needs and ability to obtain feedback from users
- Technical knowledge, such as ability to use the Internet
- Knowledge of various marketing strategies for promoting information skills
- The relatively low level of knowledge and lack of agreement on user requirements, wants, and needs.
- The subsidized non-market environment in which most scientific and technical information products and services are used.
- The virtual impossibility of estimating the value contributed by information products and services to the efficiency and conduct of research and development and the advancement of scholarly pursuits

Market Research and users' Analysis

Users of college libraries are becoming increasingly demanding these days. Now they expect a wide choice, speedy delivery, easy access and a range of services such as 'access to an Online Public Access Catalogue electronic information systems -including both bibliographic and full text services and microfilming facilities as well as more comprehensive and sophisticated information services provided by subject specialists, such as current awareness, in-depth enquiry and research services, and information skills programmes,⁶ besides the traditional ones. In response to users' demands and to support teaching and research programmes effectively, the libraries are required to provide all these services. But before introducing any service, the libraries should have a much better

understanding of users' needs and have closer liaison with them and a more proactive approach to identify the precise requirements of both groups and individuals, actual and potential users. For this they have to undertake the programmes of market research. These programmes should be concentrated around the users I customers and their information seeking behavior. Users' study I users' need surveys should be conducted regularly to identify who the users I customers are, the services they want, their expectation from the library and the benefit they are seeking. All this will help in determining how well the needs and expectations of the users are met with by the existing products and services and how these can be met with more effectively by improving the existing ones or by developing the new ones.

Development of Products and Services

The products of the college libraries may range from books, periodicals, reports to electronic documents and services from traditional ones like circulation, inter library loan, reference service to access to international databases, online searches and CD-ROM searches. Whatever the products and services of the library may be, these should be customer-oriented rather than product or service-oriented. The model of 'One-size fits all' has to be transformed into 'customized services' model.⁷ While designing the new products and services or redesigning the old ones, the librarians must keep in mind the users and their informational requirements, the existing infrastructural facilities available for the creation of products and services, technology to be used, library's strengths and weaknesses in terms of resources, personnel and areas of specialist expertise.

A new service I product can first be tested with few carefully chosen users I customers whose comments and suggestions may be taken into account in modifying the service I product, if necessary, before launching it more widely.

Distribution

Distribution pertains to dissemination of information through various channels. Traditionally, the users have to come to the library personally to receive or use the information, but due to the advent of information technology in college libraries especially the computers, telecommunications and networking have altered the picture altogether. Now the users can have access to remote sources of information. From marketing point of view, college libraries should go for computer based information storage and retrieval as it provides a better flexibility in access to information.

Promotion

Promotion is another important factor in marketing. It involves mechanism by which target groups are informed about the resources available, services and products offered by the library. It is essentially 'the library reaching out to its customers, the humanization of the market plan .IO In libraries, various methods can be used for promoting information services such as publicity through brochures, pamphlets, guides, journals, handbooks, public media, direct mail, demonstrations, exhibitions at conferences I seminars. Seetharama 11 claimed that 'word of mouth' campaign is the best mechanism for promoting the use of libraries.

Evaluation of Products and Services

A marketing approach cannot be effective without evaluation. Therefore, it is necessary to evaluate the effectiveness of the marketing programmes to decide the continuance renovation 1 discontinuance of the products and services. The effectiveness of the products and services must be evaluated in relation to organizations' objectives, internal strengths and weaknesses and customers' satisfaction and demand. If any product or service is in no longer in demand or is difficult to provide with the available resources or costs too much to maintain in a competitive market, then such product or service should be abandoned. It is as important as introducing new product or service to meet the demands of the customers / users. Regular users' surveys enable the university libraries to review how well each service matches with customers' needs and expectations and plan the action required to correct any discrepancies.

Topic of Marketing in college Libraries

- Create perception of need and thereby create demand;
- Ensure the optimum use of information.
- Improve the image and status of the libraries and library professionals.
- Tackle the problems of rising costs of reading materials, journals, and databases;
- Cope with the information explosion;
- Introduce cutting-edge information technology systems in library services;
- Balance shrinking funds;
- Save libraries from devaluation
- Save libraries from declining reader-support;
- Uphold the dictum that information is power

CONCLUSION

The technology is already superb and has even greater potential, but needs the wisdom of older minds that are trained and have built a lifetime of experience in making sure people get the information they need. Librarians are quickly responding to the challenge and are making sure they get their share of the information age financial largesse. Marketing in libraries has gone beyond special days and book displays. The value of marketing library's products and services has been recognized and now we as library staff need to develop and formalize our marketing strategies. We need to give the marketing function a priority within our other library duties. Sell the idea to your manager and other staff by aligning your strategies to your organization's strategic function and business plan. Putting it all down on paper gives your marketing ideas credibility and helps keep them focused. Thinking in terms of the wishes of customers and translating customer wishes into library policy also presupposes appropriate staff manage The budget cuts and the advent of sophisticated technology in the university libraries have opened up the new vistas for marketing information products and services. If the university libraries fail to catch hold of the opportunities, the scene will be captured by the commercial vendors. We know that the users do not mind paying for the services if they are useful and provided at reasonable cost. Therefore, the marketing policy of

the university libraries needs 'careful planning, structuring, execution and evaluation with regular review' end.

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