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Marketing of Library and Information Services in Global Era: A Current Approach

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Abstract

This paper deals with the marketing of library and information services in the global era. It discusses about the marketing concept of today's library and information centers covering various topics such as management of libraries and commitment to customer's satisfaction. It also defines the marketing and its current approach to library and information services at the global level. It also describes customer/user's topic such as customers' priorities, customers' expectations, individuality responsiveness, relationships, quality of services, professional skills and competencies and value added services. The 5 Ps of marketing mix, i.e. product, pricing, place, promotion and person (staff) have been discussed. The marketing should aim at effective library and information services. The "service trinity", i.e. users (customers), the staff (service provider) and information resources and system should be taken care of from the view of these services. In the modern age, the library and information services (LIS) are customer (user) oriented. Therefore, users' priorities, expectations and needs should be taken into account. The services should be value added according to the current requirement of the users. It is concluded that the modern libraries are information markets and the library users are consumers of information. The ultimate objective of the marketing of library and information services should be the dissemination of the right information to the right customer (user) at the right time.

Keywords

Introduction

The interest in marketing has tremendously increased over the past few decades in libraries like other service centres; education, health, transportation, insurance, banking, etc.

For a long time, we (librarians and information professionals) had enjoyed a supplier's market and we lost our interest in working for our customers, and yet we want customers to come back. However, we should always keep in mind that only satisfied customers

come back and there are greater chances that a dissatisfied customer will find some other suppliers of information to meet his information need. Hence, there are some unique reasons that require marketing orientation in library and information services and it will help us in:

1. Management of Libraries: Due to explosion of information at global level, the more information available in the market, therefore management of libraries is necessary to meet information needs of users. "The world in which libraries exist has changed dramatically. It moves faster, relies on technology and competes more intensely. Fearful that change may threaten our existence, we must look to marketing to help us manage better" (Keiser & Galvin, 1995).

2. Commitment to Customer Satisfaction: In particular to library services area, the users are fund providers, patrons, employees, etc. As such, satisfaction of the customer is of primary concern in the marketing process and the entire ethos and shared values of the organization owe the responsibility of satisfying the customer. The library and information center is not a profit-oriented organization in marketing. The increased customer satisfaction will result in the increased willingness to use and pay for the services offered. Hence, the customer's satisfaction has a direct link with the support we get for the library and information services.

3. Understanding Customers: When we talk about customers, we have some very fundamental questions to ask, questions that affect any and everything else we do. Such questions include: Who are the customers? Whom are we trying to serve? What is the interest area? What can we provide to serve these interests? What are the conditions for offering information services and products? How well do we communicate with our users and how they communicate their needs to us? There is a common understanding that who knows better about the library then s/he knows better about its resources, facilities, services, and products particularly in the information era. The most important role of marketing in library and information centre is to find information/products for the customers, not customers for the information/product. We must always remember that no library *owns* its users to the extent that it determines their likes and dislikes. We must pay attention to users' requirement and preferences.

4. Welcome Again and Again: We should deal with a smile to the users. We should give positive attitude and favorable relationships with users. But they will come again only if their present needs are well met, and in meeting the information needs of users marketing attitude plays a vital role.

5. Libraries need to grow: According to Ranganathan's 5th law "*Library is a growing organism*". Due to global information explosion, more information comes every second and today's information is old very fast for tomorrow. Libraries continue to face continuing changes in the environment strategies and outcomes. Good marketing efforts take care of all resources and how it can be done in an efficient way.

6. Improving our Image: In today's business environment, "Librarians who take marketing seriously will earn "*street cred*" in their organization. This will be benefited to them in career terms, but will also help to accelerate the death of the old buddy-duddy image and herald the arrival of the focused, business-like, customer led librarian" (Cotte, 1994). A good reputation may involve cordial relations with the community, good facilities, high service standard, good discipline, a well-qualified staff and good results. As such, marketing efforts can help us in improving our image through improved services.

This article targets to highlight the various aspects of marketing of library and information services in order to make these effective and efficient in modern electronic era.

Marketing - Meaning

There is a new meaning of marketing in library and information sector. There is still considerable misunderstanding in most of the library and information sector as to what constitutes effective marketing. To some, it is still primarily equated with selling and the pursuit of sales, rather than customer satisfaction (Gupta, 2003). Many libraries are still reluctant to make the change necessary to focus on the marketplace, even when the need for more active marketing is generally agreed. As such, the developing marketing initiatives of libraries and understanding of the total marketing concept among library and information professionals need some basic marketing frameworks that they have taken so far.

Broadly, the concept of marketing is depicted as follows:

1. Marketing as a set of techniques: Generally, it is viewed as a set of techniques involving a number of processes. An organization that embraces the marketing concept tries to provide products and satisfy customer needs through a coordinated set of activities and that also allows the organization to achieve its goals' in such approach marketing, planning work together (Dibb et al., 1994). The key activities of such concept are:

- An assessment of which the customers are, the services they want and the benefits they are looking for.
- Analysis of the library's strength, weakness, opportunities and the services it provides.
- Assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of competition.
- Understanding what they real differences are between the library and the competition.
- A practical action plan which draws on this understanding of the market place and sets out measurable actions to achieve the current objective.

2. Marketing as a philosophy: It was less than three decades ago that marketing came into the field of library and information services as thinking and orienting library and information services business/library and information services in marketing term. Integration of marketing into library philosophy is helpful in reinforcing and reiterating the basic values of the profession in a changing environment. In one sense, it implies commitment to shared professional beliefs. The most widely agreed beliefs are about library services "*to provide the right information to the right user at the right time*". This involves reducing barriers to access and use information and empowering users in making use of their own, particularly with the use of modern technologies.

Marketing help us the following aims of the library and information services:

- A focus on the users own purpose and on helping the individual user to articulate these at every level.
- A focus on the users, giving them an environment in which they can sit, study, work and on giving them an experience of good service.
- A belief that every individual user has different needs, requirements and expectations when s/he visits/approaches the library.
- A commitment to helping the user in acquiring skills in obtaining the information from various sources and means.

Marketing should first of all, be an attitude of mind. This is the foundation of successful marketing (Gronroos, 2000).

3. Marketing as an Approach: There are exploited symbolic dimensions to human and physical resources while serving the user. In this approach everything, human skills, service attitude and information resources are put more closely to serve the customers' information needs.

According to Ranganathan, "*service trinity*" has great relevance with such approach in the case of libraries. Ranganathan consider:

1. Users (customers)
2. The staff (service providers)
3. The information resources and system (different type of material, systems, procedures, etc.) have greater relationship with each other in library and information services.

4. Customer-Driven Marketing: Philosophically, users are the central entity in every type of libraries. Customers are the main part of the service sector. We need to incorporate elements of client or customer-centeredness in our approaches to serve users. Users also expect recognition, attention, and appreciation for their individual needs and desire for self-expression. Services organization should concentrate more in developing customer orientation in every operation of the organization. Their focus is on distinctive competencies: value, delivery, customer defined quality, relationship management and a customer focused organizational culture.

Definition of Marketing

Let us try to search answers to the following questions? What is marketing? What does it mean? Why is it so important in the current scenario? How does marketing relate to information service?

Kotler (1994), a professor of marketing, adopted the following definition of marketing:

> "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 the target market's needs and desires and as using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate and serve the markets."

There are 7 major points to be emphasized in the above definition:

1. Marketing is a managerial process involving analysis, planning, implementation and control.
2. Marketing is concerned with carefully formulated programmes - not random actions - designed to achieve desired responses.
3. Marketing seeks to bring about voluntary exchange.
4. Marketing selects target markets and does not seek to be all people.
5. Marketing is directly correlated to the achievement of organizational objectives.
6. Marketing place emphasis on the target market's (consumer's) needs and desire rather than on the producer's preferences.

Customers - Top Priority

The new customers do not know about library rules and regulation, therefore it is duty of library staff to give orientation for maximum utility of library. They do not care about rules and ways of doing business. They care to adapt its products and services to fit their

problems. This represents the evolution of marketing to the customer-driven. We must always remember the following points:

- Customers are the most important people to be served in library and information centers.
- They are not dependent on the library; rather the library depends on them.
- They are not just from outsiders but part of the library.
- They are not just statistics, but also they are human beings.
- They are the people who bring their wants and needs and we are there to meet their information needs exceedingly.

Customers - Expectation

Library and information professionals should strive hard to gain a far vision of 'who our customers are', 'what they want', and 'what are their social characters, values, desires, aspiration'. The advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has enabled education and technology in self-help and do-it-yourself activities in libraries. The 21st century customer will place high value on self-reliance, adaptability and survival under difficult conditions and the ability to do things of his/her own.

Individuality

The new generation customer is a global citizen who is more demanding and individualistic, seeking change and value conscious. S/he shares a consistent set of tastes, preferences and has a growing commonality of his task across the globe.

Responsiveness

It is the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. This dimension emphasizes attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customers' requests, complaints and queries. Responsiveness is demonstrated in terms of accessible employees, least waiting time and attention to problems.

Relationship

To measure customer satisfaction, the relationship between the customer and the library must be understood. A customer relationship comprises of a hierarchy of encounters through facilities, resources, services and service providers.

To serve the customer the library should serve as host, as advocated by (Ranganathan, 1961), considers that like a host, the library should provide full hospitality to a user - as a supreme guest at the premises of the library. According to Ranganathan (1961):

- Give service with full attention and sincerity.
- Give him/her service to the best capacity at your command.
- Give him/her service in all modesty and in full freedom from any touch of prestige or ego.
- Give him/her service in full measure there should not be any offence to the laws of library science.
- Acquire the best knowledge and information for giving him/her your best service. We cannot retain customer unless given prompt and relevant service in a personal way. S/he is human; and human personality alone can keep good humor, make the appreciation of the value of books which blossom in him/her and transform him/her into a willingness beneficiary of the library.

Quality Services

The user of the service is the ultimate judge of the quality. S/he weighs the value s/he receives from a service organization against the time spent and/or the efforts involved besides the monetary burden in getting the desired service and thus decides the quality. Users seldom define the quality of the library and its services in terms of stock size, annual budget, physical facilities, staff and the mere number of services. No doubt, these are some of the essential criteria for providing quality services; it benefits the service itself that users look for. Quality service in part depends on how well various elements function together in a service system (see Figure 1).

These elements include the people who perform the specific service in the service chain, the equipment that supports these performances and the physical environment in which the services are provided. The management concept achieving service excellence is termed as Total Quality Management. It is a customer need driven management process. It emphasizes on identifying customers needs expressed in customer's own words and then linking customers' perceived quality into internal processes and measuring the impact of quality measurement on the market place.

Figure 1. Relationships between library services and the customer
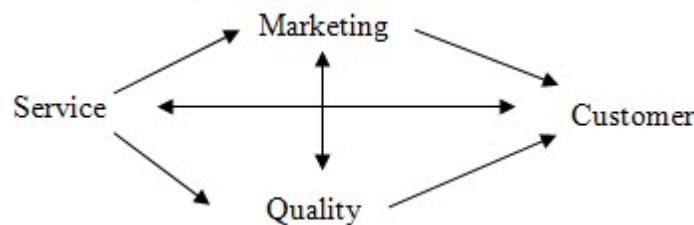
Relationship with Users

The relationship with users mainly depends upon the commitment of the organization and its people towards customers, intimacy between them, and the trust of customers for the products and services. The relationship is fairly a complex issue for library and information services (LIS) managers, for them it is a strategic issue, but for customers it is just a communication process (Levitt, 1983). LIS managers need to break the ice and take responsibility to initiate, nurture, and forge sustainable relationship with customers offering services in a more satisfying manner to succeed in the new millennium (Gupta, 2000a).

Professional Skills and Competencies

Libraries do not require a good marketing person to run marketing operations, like a business firm, that person would immediately hire an advertising agency, change the ad campaigning, redesign company logo, design the brochures, train the sales force, retain a high powered public relation firm and alter or otherwise reposition the company's complete image. On the contrary, marketing is nothing but a way of doing business, which does not require good marketing persons, but certain skills or attributes, which are in no manner different from other service organization (Coote, 1994).
Marketing is:

- a belief in service and trying to achieve customer's satisfaction;
- a clear understanding of their organization's overall aims and objectives;
- an ability to assemble and interpret information for the benefit of the customer;
- good communication skills, both oral and written;
- enthusiasm and commitment; and

- ability to take criticism, not always constructive.

These attributes are very much desired for the successful information service providers. Thus, skills, attitude and judgment of the service providers are important while marketing in library and information services.

Value added Services

Marketing today embraces an integrated value proposition. This in effect, would mean that with making a decision about using a particular service or evaluating a marketing relationship a customer not only looks at the product or value related to it, but s/he also evaluates the process, the total transaction cost. To a customer, value is the benefits received from the burden endured. Benefits may be product quality, personal service and convenience. Cost includes price and non-monetary cost as time, energy and efforts. In the process s/he interacts with the people, technology, methods, environment and the materials used to serve the customers in the library. In the marketing oriented library, the process depends on the customer preferences and cues to their requirements. Even the customers are an important partner to the process and in libraries most of the time, they put forward their views to overcome their problems and work with the staff to solve them.

By simply shedding long standing stereotypes, librarians have been able to take the 5P's of the traditional external marketing mix and use them to paint a more accessible service-oriented picture of library offerings for their customers.

The 5 P's of the traditionally external marketing mix with an internal twist for libraries should be considered is mentioned in Table 1.

Table 1. Five P's

Product:	Information resources and research services.
Price:	Free to employees. In other words, company sponsored. This is particularly important in an R&D environment where research budgets are tight and the company may not realize Return on Investment (ROI) in a project for some time.
Place:	Not necessarily a physical location anymore. A strong web presence is necessary. Libraries are virtual as well as physical spaces now and the possibilities in both these worlds are endless.
Promotion:	Internal bulletins, e-mails, the company intranet, the library web site, newsletters and poster campaigns are all effective promotional vehicles for highlighting new tools and advertising events.
People (Staff):	Staff is relatively a new element in marketing mix as its importance for the Development of strategies has only recently been realized. It is difficult to achieve satisfactory exchanges with public without suitable staff. That is why marketing experts now talk about "internal marketing", emphasizing that the entire staff must be at all costs involved in the organization's marketing strategies.

For the library to remain competitive, or even more fundamentally, to remain relevant, it has to change its image. It has to shed the image of a highly fortified storehouse of knowledge guarded by staff and security devices, a treasure house where the borrower is a nuisance or a potential thief. The new-age library ought to be a true service organization, a group of professionals who quickly identify in the vast ocean of knowledge the kind of information that different customers need and help them access it with the least waste of time and effort. A library that can survive and thrive in the Internet age is a knowledge-based social structure.

Distributors of Information

Information generation/production is a continuous process. On the other hand, the information gets accumulated at such a fast pace that the extraction of relevant information becomes difficult for the users to go through all of them. For this, proper distribution channels are necessary to fulfill the specific needs of the users.

Traditionally, libraries and information centers functioned as the facilitators. Some of the facilitators are:

1. Documentation and Information Centers: The purpose of these centers is to accelerate the information retrieval and dissemination process, e.g., National Institute of Science, Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), New Delhi and National Social Science Documentation Centre (NASSDOC), New Delhi, etc.
2. Information Analysis Centre: It is a type of organization whose key activities are analysis, interpretation, synthesis, evaluation and repackaging of information or numerical data.
3. Referral Centers: This function as a sort of 'information desk', which do not provide inquires directly with the information they need, but suggest sources (organizations or individuals) likely to satisfy the clients.

The purpose of marketing information services is to make such services more responsive to user needs and wants to improve people's satisfaction.

Conclusion

The modern library is now generally called an *information market* and the library user is a *consumer of information*. *Information* is a vital resource for research and development of any nation. Marketing is essential in making the proper planning, designing and use of such services and products for the better and optimal use of information. The library should give priority to provide excellent customer service enhancing its image as *information provider* in the information era. The library and information services should be user (customer) oriented in order to satisfy their *information needs* effectively. Marketing of library and information services includes customer (users) priorities, expectations, individuality, responsiveness, relationship, quality of services, professional skills and competencies, value-added services, etc. The ultimate aim of marketing here is *to provide the right information to the right user at the right time*.

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