

CUSTOMER-ORIENTED MARKETING: A SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT FOR PLATFORM LIBRARY SERVICES

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Abstract

Access to information is a fundamental human right that can break the cycle of poverty and support sustainable development. The coming into being of the libraries is to serve people of the community. With the advent of the Internet, there seems to be a gap between the librarians and the 21st century library users. Nevertheless, this gap can be bridged if the librarian can take the new marketing strategy called customer-oriented marketing that focuses on identifying customers' needs and taking the library to the door step of their numerous users. This article focused on how customer-oriented marketing can be done in the library settings, impact of customer-oriented marketing strategy on library products and services, qualities of a customer-oriented librarian, and difficulties to marketing library and information services. The study concluded that librarians should proactively adopt customer-oriented marketing in order to promote and sustain the library products and services.

Introduction

The problem of development has occupied the attention of scholars, activists, politician and development workers, local and international organizations for

many years with an increased tempo in the last decade. On the other hand, libraries and information centres are facing a lot of challenges in this era of information revolution where library users are confronted with a lot of information for sustainability at their disposal. IFLA (2015) affirmed that the library is the only place in many communities where people can access information that will help them improve their education, develop new skills, find jobs, build businesses, make informed agricultural and health decisions, or gain insights into environmental issues. This unique role makes libraries and librarians important development partners, both by providing access to information in all formats and by delivering services and programmes that meet the needs of information users in a changing and increasingly complex society.

Libraries as non-profit organizations are different from other business organizations in that they do not seek to achieve financial profit, but they need to implement market orientation, which guarantees sustainability and the ability to face the * great competition for excellence in order to meet the needs and desires of the users that are characterized by constant change (Klaib, 2012). Madhusudhan (2008) noted that users are not patronizing the library products and services as expected and this setback has made the information professionals market their products and services. Conventional marketing of information products and services holds that a market orientation provides an organization with a better understanding of its customers, competitors and environments, which subsequently leads to superior organization performance (Kara, Spillan & Deshields, 2005).

Singh (2009) defined a -market-oriented library as one whose actions are consistent with the marketing concept. There has been an increasing interest of library and information professionals in understanding the constructs of market orientation. Nicholas (1998) opined that marketing is frequently viewed as a set of strategies and techniques that belong to administrators outside of librarianship. However, librarians are also involved in the process of marketing. According to Nicholas, the definition of marketing by the UK Chartered Institute of Marketing states: "Marketing is the management process which identifies, anticipates and supplies customer requirements efficiently...". Thus, the essence of marketing involves finding out what the users want, then setting out to meet those needs.

Sharma and Bhardwaj (2009) noted that the challenges to library services from changes in educational approaches, the impact of technology, new methods for information provision and declining budgets have made

information professionals adopt marketing to improve the management of library and information centers for sustainable development (Madhusudhan, 2008). Marketing of library products and services is of great importance to any information centre irrespective of the size because it draws attention of the library audience to the existence of the library products and services, Day (1998) asserted that even firms with first class technologies and business systems have only the necessary conditions for success; unless they have superior skills in understanding, satisfying and retaining customers they will not realize their full potential. For, libraries to achieve their full potential, inculcating the concept of customer-oriented marketing strategy which relies on customer demand to pull the product to the market place rather than having to push the product on consumers should be of paramount interest (Mack, 2015). Jestin and Parameswari (2002:1) found that:

Libraries and information centres have begun to realize that marketing of information products and services is an integral part of administration, especially as a means for improving user satisfaction and promoting the use of services by current and potential users. Three main factors, namely the information explosion, the technology revolution, and escalating library costs are responsible for encouraging the library profession to develop a marketing approach in its operations and services. Some information service managers feel that marketing is inimical to the nature of their activities. But with increased competition in the world of information, marketing is a factor for survival.

Jestin and Parameswari further indicated that marketing is planning and managing the organization's exchange relations with its clientele. It consists of studying the target market needs, designing appropriate products and services, and using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and serve the market. Strong market- oriented libraries are more effective in creating a unifying service culture with market orientation at its core activities. They demonstrate a tendency to carry a customer philosophy approach in all the functional activities by putting customers at the centre. Team work, coordination, internal communication and sharing of information are at the best in this kind of market orientation. Libraries can regularly monitor more customer surveys by segmenting the market and can attach a high importance for providing marketing training and customer competency to library staff. They use the result of customer surveys for making changes in the library products and services. Simultaneously, they

also keep on watching the market trends outside their libraries and sometimes conduct a study to understand the services and products of competitor libraries (Singh, 2009).

Literature Review

Literature was reviewed under the following sub-headings:

- Customer-oriented marketing in Libraries.
- Impact of customer-oriented marketing strategy on library products and services.
- Qualities of a customer-oriented librarian.
- Difficulties to marketing library and information services.

Customer-Oriented Marketing in Libraries

Customer-oriented marketing otherwise known as customer orientation is a marketing strategy which placed its priorities on customers' needs and satisfaction. Houston (as cited in Idassi, Young, Winistorfer, Ostermeier & Woodruff, 1994) noted that customer orientation involves a commitment to the understanding of customer's needs and a willingness to adjust the market forces to satisfy those needs. It involves permanent improvement in business processes, a dynamic interaction between the company and its customers (Talpau & Boscor, 2011). In the library setting, customer orientation marketing is a process in which the librarians identify the information needs of their esteemed library users and tailor their resources and services towards their information needs and also taking the library to the door step of the users. The main purpose of customer orientation marketing is-satisfying the customers' needs. To do this, information centres/libraries have to exceed its customers expectations (Kotler, 2008). To achieve customers' expectations, the librarian has to formulate a kind of one-on-one interaction with the users to collect/know their information needs and where possible, deliver the needed information at the door step of their users or to perform what is regarded as home service for their users. No wonder Filipovic, Milicevic and Zarkic-Joksimovic (2000) opined that the best orientation is the one that is focused on the creation of the target market

Librarians participate in the process of assessing their users' needs and trying to fulfill them. Thus, they are already marketing the library information skills. However, in order to do this effectively librarians need to embrace the total marketing function involving market research and analysis, service planning and promotion.

Market Research and analysis

Market research involves the systematic gathering, recording and analyzing of data relating to the demand for a service or product (Katz, 1988). The parent organization needs to be analyzed in terms of funding sources, the contribution the library makes to the mission of the parent organization, resources available and the needs of **the** users. There are two basic functions of market research: (i) To reduce the uncertainty of the decision-making process of marketing (ii) To monitor and control the performance of marketing activities. The information gathered through market research will provide the basis for making marketing decisions (Nicholas, 1998).

Market Plan

The market plan is the actual process which will establish the library's business goals and objectives and figure out how to achieve them (Nicholas, 1998). In the light of the information gathered from the market research, the conclusion should be summarized and stated as the basis upon which the market plan is based. The marketing plan is the tool which will ensure that the library services and products are viewed in a focused and clear way.

Service Planning

Once users' needs, future trends and resources available have been established, the librarian is in a position to plan the marketing objectives, the resources to be used, the place and the time scale of the operation and the strategies required to achieve them. The process of setting aims and objectives will serve a number of purposes. It will provide a focused overview of the library service and give direction and guidance in achieving the objectives. If possible, objectives should be quantifiable in order to ensure effective evaluation. Once objectives have been set, the strategies necessary to achieve them can be planned. If any of the objectives change over time then the market plan will need to be updated (Nicholas, 1998).

Promotion

Essentially promotion is the means of informing your users what you do and what you can do. The benefits for those who promote their library services include: increased usage, increased value in the organization; education of users; and changed perceptions (Nicholas, 1998). The promotional plan emerges from the marketing plan. It has to do with how to achieve the objectives that have been forecasted. It involves a description of the service requiring publicity; description of the audience at which publicity is targeted; details of the campaign method to be employed including type of publicity to

be used and method(s) of distribution; execution of campaign; and analysis of campaign performance.

The setting of clear promotional objectives will also ensure that the success of the advertising campaign can be evaluated. From time to time it should be accepted that promotional activities have not met their objectives. At this point the marketing strategies need to be re-evaluated in the context of the feedback received (Nicholas, 1998).

The Medium

Promotional activities can take many forms and the promotional media will depend on the nature of the target audience and/or promotional objectives.

Personal Skills: The manner whether in person or on the telephone, will affect your users' rating of the library. The librarian needs to be professional and use quality procedures and also need to smile and establish a personal relationship with as many of his/her users as possible. If the librarian reacts positively to complaints, people will be encouraged to tell him/her about other things they would like changed. Instead of defending his/her position, think about their' suggestions. The librarians should make themselves highly visible, visit the staff room, memorize names, and learn research interests of staff, establish the key players and the people who can and want to help (Nicholas, 1998),

E-Mail: Where a large proportion of the users are on e-mail it is an easy way of reaching them, quickly and cheaply. It can be targeted more precisely than most other methods and so it is effective at reaching specific audience. Staff respond quicker to e-mails than any other medium. By maintaining up-to-date address lists different user groups can be targeted with different versions of the advertising message (Nicholas, 1998).

The Internet: The Internet has the power to improve the library's image and to allow the library to offer enhanced services. Although it takes time to set up and maintain services on the Internet, it can reap rewards in terms of user satisfaction and recognition. A Library Web home page serves as a promotional tool advertising in-house library services and electronic information resources on the web. The pages should include an e-mail link to the library, making the librarian easy to contact (Nicholas, 1998).

Newsletters and Leaflets: Newsletters and leaflets are both means of delivering information. A newsletter can be used to list interesting new web sites, new journals and online services, and perhaps more general science news of interest, it does not have to be long but should be produced on a regular basis. Leaflets and glides can be handed out and displayed on notice boards. The library notice board should be in a prominent place (Nicholas, 1998).

The Message

Nicholas (1998) opined that once you have decided upon the advertising medium, one needs to consider how to convey the message you want to get across. The wording and layout of the advertisement are critical.

1. The advertisement should be uncluttered with the text printed against a pale or white background making it easier to read. White "space" is powerful.
2. Use good quality print.
3. Do not print texts in capitals as it is harder to read.
4. Use illustrations and pictures.
5. Keeps the layout interesting, with bullet points, sub-headings and so on.
6. Use bold colours and catchy headlines and large print.
7. Express the service/product in terms of readers' interests.
8. Use short sentences, short paragraphs, and avoid long words. Avoid jargon.
9. Give examples.
10. Look at other people's advertisements and judge for yourself what attention grabbing.

Nicholas further noted that a good advertisement attracts *attention*, arouses *interest*, creates *desire* and stimulates *action*, known as the A-I-D-A sequence.

1. Attention

You need to get a reader's attention. Within two seconds most readers give up and move on so your job is to grab their attention in those two seconds, and keep them reading. The most important thing about a headline is that it should emphasise the benefit of the service to the reader. The headline's job is to answer the reader's question "what's in it for me?"

2. Interest

Once you have got the readers' attention the next thing is to turn that attention into genuine interest. The first paragraph should encourage further reading. The advertisement should stress how the users will positively gain from the new service or product.

3. Desire

The next crucial ingredient in your advertisement is desire. As you have been writing the advertisement you should have been cultivating a desire in your reader to own the product or take advantage of your service. However, be honest and do not exaggerate. Continue expressing the service in terms of reader's interest.

4. Action

The desire needs to be converted into action. Tell the reader what to do now that you have persuaded them to use the service - "Phone this number", "Put date in your diary", "Act now". Encourage action and involvement. The easier you make the process of contacting you the more likely they are to do so. The time and cost involved in advertising need to be considered. Whatever you do to promote your services will entail costs, even if it is only the cost of your time, therefore you need to make sure that you get full benefit for the cost incurred. It is also important to advertise at the right time and with the right frequency.

Impact of Customer-Oriented Marketing Strategy on the Library Products and Services

Customer-oriented marketing strategy in libraries can be achieved through the following (Amangala & Amangala, 2013; Das & Karn, 2008):

1. Satisfying customer's needs is one of the smartest financial decision any institution can make because it is better to retain old satisfied customers as these people will recommend such library or information centre to others around them (Das & Karn, 2008). Mack (2015) explained that focusing on meeting a customer's needs rather than just making the sales can increase one's profits. When your customers are happy, they will keep buying from you.
2. Libraries/information centres are being funded by parent organization. Therefore, satisfying customers also means satisfying library stakeholders

because it is only the satisfied customer that will recommend the library/information centre to the management of any organization which will boost the image of the library and the librarians with their stakeholders.

3. Most customers do not see the demanding information management responsibilities of the librarians. With customer oriented marketing, the reputation and image of the library and the librarian can be redeemed.
4. Nevertheless, customer-oriented marketing can also be a means of generating fund internally. This is because customer's satisfaction has a direct link with the support we get for the library and information service. Increased customer satisfaction will result in the willingness to use and pay for the services offered (Das & Karn, 2008).

Libraries and information centres of all types and sizes are faced with the need to market. Librarians and information professionals must learn to effectively market and advertise their services. Librarians market their products and services for the following reasons (Steadley, 2003; Kumbar, 2004):

1. **Competition for customers** - Libraries are part of a highly competitive service industry. Competition comes from mega-bookstores, online book dealers, consultants, the Internet, and individuals who feel they can do it alone. Free web access to information is here to stay and non-library and free access information providers won't hesitate to market to library customers (Kumbar, 2004).
2. **Competition for resources** - Libraries of all types have to compete with other organizations or departments for funds. Public libraries have to vie for public monies that provide for their existence. Special libraries find their funding is frequently targeted during parent organization budget cuts. Marketing library services benefits the bottom line (Kumbar, 2004).
3. **Maintain your relevance** - Libraries need to market themselves to remain connected with their communities and have some bearing on real-world issues and present-day events (Kumbar, 2004).
4. **Stop being taken for granted** - Libraries need to convey what is unique about the access and services they provide. Both customers and librarians cannot assume that libraries will always be available (Kumbar, 2004).

5. **Promote an updated image** - Librarians are not perceived as well-trained, technologically savvy information experts. Most customers do not see the demanding information management responsibilities of a librarian (Kumbar, 2004).
6. **Visibility** - Librarians are not on the radar screens of many people who think of themselves as information literate. People who are in positions to employ librarians are not reading much in their professional literature about a librarian's value (Kumbar, 2004).
7. **Valuable community resource** - Libraries_ are and should be viewed as essential and valuable community resources. People need to be made aware of the services and products that are provided and their comparative value. Librarians should be the resource that the local power structure goes to for information (Kumbar, 2004).
8. **Rising expectations** -Library users expect recognition, attention, and appreciation for their individual information needs. Customers also have ever-changing needs and wants, which makes the library market as dynamic as retail markets. Marketing helps to create an environment in libraries that fosters customer consciousness among employees (Kumbar, 2004).
9. **Survival** - Libraries depend on the support of others for their existence. A library must communicate and work with its customers and governing/funding entities to provide information about what the library is doing and to enable the library to learn about the community it serves (Kumbar, 2004).
10. **Beneficial to library image** - Effective marketing can among other things increase library funds, increase usage of services, educate customers and non-customers, change perceptions, and enhance the clout and reputation of the library and its staff (Steadley, 2003).

Qualities Expected of Customer-oriented Librarians

Jestin and Parameswari (2002) opined that library personnel require the following professional knowledge and skills for marketing information and library services. They are:

- 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

Librarians should display some qualities of customer-oriented marketing irrespective of the type of library they are attached to so as to be able to satisfy their customers' expectations.

1. **Appearance/outlook of the librarian concerned:** Here, the way an officer dresses to work will determine how he/she will be addressed. Librarians are expected to dress modestly at all times. Job Tips (2013) opined that those who dress professionally, will behave in the same manner.
2. **Mastery of librarianship;** This is necessary because the librarians have to convince the library users that there is more in librarianship than dusting and arranging materials on the shelves as most people believed in most cases. The Librarians should educate the library users on how they can assist them in solving if not all their information needs, but at least most of their needs (Sharma & Bhardwaj, 2009).
3. **Good command of language:** This is necessary in understanding the users' needs and informing them of the available information products and services that can satisfy their needs. Sharma and Bhardwaj (2009) stated the importance of language is that all professional librarians have to communicate with users about their services because exchange between the services agents (librarians) and the customer (users) can elicit information about customer requirements, and also permit the services agent to explain the organization's products and services and how these can meet the customer's needs.
4. **The librarians should always be honest and straight forward in their dealings:** Also, they have to go extra miles in satisfying their customers. No wonder Talpau and Boscor (2011) opined that they should never promise more than they can offer and never offer only what they promised. If the perceived quality gets to be higher than the quality expected by the customer, the customer will be satisfied with his/her choice. The University of Nottingham added that as a professional, it is expected for one to keep to promises, but where there is the possibility for the thing to take longer than expected, the customer should be informed.
5. **Nevertheless:** it is also expected that a customer-oriented marketing librarian should be friendly and create a welcoming environment for its extreme customers. Sharma and Bhardwaj (2009) asserted that

librarian needs to develop the ability to create a welcoming environment, be patient, and build confidence with the users. When librarians are friendly, welcoming and helpful, users are encouraged into the library. Whereas, in a library where the librarians are unfriendly and lazy, users are driven away. It is reported the personality of the librarian determines the rate of utilization of the library by its users.

Difficulties to Marketing Library and Information Services

Kumbar (2004) noted that most librarians do not market their libraries, do not know how to market, or do not know how to do it well. Librarians may encounter difficulties in marketing library and information services because of the following:

1. **Old models:** Many librarians work on the old model of existence by mandate.
 - i. Students should use library databases to locate quality information for their papers,
 - ii. Faculty should send their students to librarians for assistance.
 - iii. Children should be brought to the library to learn about books.
 - iii. Middle managers should tap into the corporate library for information.
2. **Humility:** Too often librarians wait for others to notice that they are doing a good job. Librarians may be reluctant to capitalize on their strengths and knowledge, while the general public often do not see the value that information professionals could bring to sophisticated information challenges.
3. **Myth:** There is a belief that libraries do not need to be promoted in any special way because their importance to society should be apparent to all.
4. **Old expectations:** Librarians and libraries are limited by their traditional image; that libraries offer books for lending and provide programming for children, but do not contribute to more sophisticated information needs.
5. **Lack of training and education:** Often, librarians do not promote library services well due to inadequate training and knowledge of marketing tools and techniques. Although marketing is more widely discussed and accepted professionally than in the past, this acceptance has not necessarily resulted in more marketing classes in library schools' curricula. Despite the growing literature on library marketing, there remains an inadequacy of familiarity with the total marketing concept among librarians.
6. **Confusion:** There is confusion about what the term marketing means. Much of this has to do with the interchangeability of terms such as 'promotion', 'public relations', 'publicity'¹, and 'marketing'. There is also

confusion about marketing libraries; the perception is that marketing is a business tool and not applicable to library settings.

7. **Fear:** Librarians are often reluctant to borrow from the private sector. They have a fear of commercial publicity and see marketing as manipulative, a waste of time and resources, and unprofessional.
8. **Passive versus active stance:** Rather than selling the library on its value and letting people know what the Library and Information Centre offers, librarians often wait for customers to come to them. Rather than pushing out responses to anticipated information needs to customers, librarians wait for customers to stop by the facility or stumble across the library web site.
9. **Complex and complicated task:** Marketing is a complicated problem for libraries because of their wide range of products and services, from books to Internet access, and an extremely diverse audience that ranges from children to seniors, public officials to business people, and students to faculty, etc.
10. **Money and attitude:** Lack of funds is often used as a reason or excuse not to market. However, marketing library services is not simply a matter of spending dollars on promotion and advertising. Marketing is also a matter of improving the customer's experience of library services. The attitude of the library director and the staff as they interact with customers is what shapes customers' experiences and 'markets' the library to those customers.

Conclusion

In this era of information overload where users are confronted with a lot of information at their disposal, librarians should be proactive by actively marketing and promoting their products and services so that the users will view what the library and the librarian has as a necessity. This can only be achieved when the users' information needs are identified and the library is taken to the door step of the users.

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