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Marketing of Library and Information Products and Services

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The librarians should understand the nature of information, needs of users, the transfer process between people and information. Understanding of this new dimension of library and information services will help concerned policy makers in formulating appropriate plans and programs to make the library and information services most effective, and long sustainable.

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I. Introduction

Marketing of library and information products and services is an area which is now beginning to attract the attention of research scholars, market researchers, and the business people. Marketing in the broadest sense ranks as one of the most popular topics of the day. Marketing basically starts with the market research, identifying the consumer needs and demands, their pricing and promoting them to the appropriate consumers. The main purpose in marketing is attracting and retaining a growing base of satisfied customers.

Libraries are relatively new to the marketing area. Marketing of library and information products and services is a new concept in India. It is not too old as a compared to the developed countries also. The above said concept has emerged during the early 1970s. Since then, it has gained much attention in the USA and is considered as most important profession. Information institutions have grown into information industries which are providing free web based information services. These information industries have employed more then 50% of human resources.

Marketing approach is mainly useful to academic libraries to improve their image and to attract more and more users. It helps the library staff to upgrade their innovative knowledge both within their organizations and as a profession within the society. It is the need of the hour to adopt this concept. But, there is reluctance on the part of the university libraries in India to employ marketing principles. There is residual feeling that marketing is somehow inappropriate for public service institution such as library. In India, the universities are being funded by the UGC and State governments. This may be the main reason that the information providers in the university libraries are not seriously thinking in terms of marketing their products and services.

Acquisition of knowledge in learning resources, processing, storage, retrieval and utilization are activities which like any other human endeavor engender cost. The problems of information acquisition are certainly not without their economic ramifications. It has been established that information is an economic resource. It has been recognized as a powerful saleable commodity. The present day society is rapidly changing. Information plays an effective role in the transformation of the society. This is an information era. It is almost identified as the fifth need of man ranking after air, water, food and shelter.

Most of the librarians view that marketing of products and services is not possible in the profession of librarianship. But, Authors such as Philip Kotler (Marketing Guru) is of the view that marketing is not limited to large corporations seeking profits only. It is equally applicable to non-profit organizations as well as colleges, universities, charitable institutions, libraries, information centers and services organizations also.

II. Marketing Mix for Library & Information Center

There are four key business concepts that provide the basis for marketing thought and action in the nonprofit environment which are considered (Shapiro, 1981):

The core of marketing is considered to be the marketing mix. Neil H. Borden's concept of marketing mix has given due recognition in the marketing theory and the concept of marketing mix which was accepted as the set of marketing tools. It was McCarthy who summed up twelve elements of Borden's marketing mix into 4Ps – Product, Price, Place and Promotion.

1. Product: It is anything which is offered to the market for exchange of consumption. It is tangible (which can be seen and touched). Service is intangible. Product is the most important thing in the marketing system.

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2. Price: Pricing is another variable of the marketing mix. It is the most difficult issue. Lot of things are to be kept in mind while fixing the price. Three types of pricing are suggested (i) Cost recovery, by which the libraries cover only budgeted cost. (ii) Commercial pricing, where the libraries make a profit. (iii) Premium pricing, for a service which is in demand or of such high quality that the libraries are justified in asking customers to pay more.
3. Place: Place is the process of getting the goods or services from the producer to the consumer. In this business it is a matter of access. It is the channel that links product and consumer.
4. Promotion: It is yet another important factor in marketing. It can only be successful if the other factors of the mix have been considered. Kotler points out, promotion, in general, involves one or more, or all, of the following methods to reach the client:

- Direct marketing
- Public relations;
- Advertising;
- Sales promotion
- Personal selling

Marketing approach to library and information services is an endeavor to accelerate the services to provide the academic community. The budget cuts and the advent of ICT in the university libraries have opened up new vistas for marketing of library and Information products and services. It is warned that if the libraries in India fail to catch hold of the opportunites, the scene will be captured by the commercial vendors.

III. Analysis the Current Performance

The performance of the library or any other organization should be measured with regard to the objectives or the target identified. For a large proportion of libraries and information centre, the specific objectives and targets may not be recognized. However, it is difficult to develop specific targets/goals so as to not only measure the performance of the information centre but also set out the available resources in the best possible manner.

The parameters, used for evaluating performance of any library information centre as a whole or of its products and services in specific segments, may be:

Number/proportion of total users served;

Number of units of product or service provided;

Total revenue generated, net of costs Image of the library information centre and its products in target segments.

IV. Conduct of Marketing Audit

Marketing audit is a critical assessment of the external and the internal environment of the information centre. It provides significant insights into the opportunities and the threats faced the by centre, and its strengths weaknesses, and competition. The following steps help in conducting marketing audit:

a) Identifying Organizational Goals

The most important step in conducting the marketing audit is to determine the marketing goals and policy of the parent organization. The information centre's programs must therefore, conform to the overall policy and direction of the parent organization. Specifically, the following information needs to be assessed:

The target sectors for the institution and the information unit.

The corporate image which the organization is seeking to build.

The corresponding actions, which will lead to the development of the image.

The goals, which should be attainable within a given time frame.

b) Analysis of Institution/Library and Users

The major purpose of the institution/library and user analysis is to ultimately decide on (i) which set of segments to focus on, and (ii) which set of products/services to offer to them. The output of this analysis is a two-by-two grid where one dimension represents the different groups of users; the other dimension represents the different sets of products and services.

c) Analysis of Business Climate

An analysis of the business climate must take into consideration those factors, which together, create and influence the level of investment by clients, by the parent organization itself and the competitors. These include socio-economic, cultural, political, regulatory and technological factors. At all times, these factors should be examined only in terms of the influence they can apply on the marketing of information products/services. This analysis can provide an initial indication of possible opportunities for the development of new products and services.

d) Analysis of Competitions

Competitor behaviour profoundly influences any marketing plan. The competitor analysis helps the information unit to assess its own strengths and weaknesses against those of the competing products/services. Information on competitors should include, the types of products/services being offered, the level of fees being asked, the location of these services, customer access to them, major target groups

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for these products/services, the mechanisms used in the promotion of these services and any perceived strengths which the competitors possess.

e) Analysis of Internal Environment

An analysis of the internal environment requires an objective to review all of the systems and procedures used to support the marketing initiative, examination of the performance of products/services and an assessment of the availability of resources. This assessment must be done taking into consideration the characteristics of the external environment and the resources and strategies by the centre's competitors.

V. Select Strategic Direction

This section deals with the selection of a strategic direction for a library or information centre. The steps involved are:

Develop objectives

Generate strategic options

Identify critical success factors for achieving the objectives through the selected strategies.

VI. Develop Marketing Objectives

Marketing objectives give direction for the formulation of marketing strategies and the plan. Marketing objectives for the library information centre must be determined with reference to the marketing objectives of the parent organization, the SWOT analysis and the opportunities assessed. In addition to setting marketing objectives for the information unit as a whole, objectives must also be set for each product and service in turn. Also to establish accountability, marketing objectives must be stated in such terms, that a quantifiable comparison can be made based on the original objectives and actual implementation.

VII. Generate Strategic Options

Portfolio analysis is a useful tool to generate strategic options for any organization and its products and services. It is an examination of the group of products and services offered by the library or information centre. Each product or service must stand objective scrutiny to determine its performance against competing products. A portfolio analysis usually results in a revision of the 'basket' of services and products provided, when there are volatile changes either within the organization itself or in the external environment.

VIII. Identify Critical Success Factors

The process of identifying CSFs (Critical Success Factors) assists the head of the library or information centre and their staff in defining inputs, which are critical to the achievement of marketing objectives. Within the context of a marketing plan, CSFs can be defined as resources, which have a direct influence on the successful implementation of the plan. The CSFs could be different for each strategic option generated for every product/service/market of the library/information service. These could be in the areas of base resources, technology resources, human resources, systems and processes of generating products/services, delivery as well as specific elements of marketing plan.

IX. Select Marketing Strategies

Marketing strategy can be defined as the means of achieving the marketing objectives. It must be within the broad strategic direction determined, while ensuring that the CSFs are taken care of by the organization. The strategy can be devised for both, the library/ information centre as a whole and for each product or service.

X. Prepare Action Plan to Accomplish Targets

Each product or services will require an implementation plan, which must be taken into account each step, which is necessary for realization of the marketing targets. The more details expressed in the plan, the smoother the implementation process will be both in terms of staff appraisal and management expectations.

When the marketing plan is completed, an executive summary should be prepared. The executive summary of the marketing plan for the information centre will follow the same approach, paying attention to the corporate targets set for the information centre, the strategies for achieving them and the evaluation mechanisms for assessing performances. The principles of developing a marketing plan can be adopted by information managers/librarians in academic, industrial, public sector institutions or non-governmental organizations.

XI. Benefits

Successful marketing includes the art of deciding that strategy/ technique used in different situation. As non-profit-making organizations, library and information centers cannot avoid marketing practices. Although libraries/information centers as non-profit organizations have three constituencies, e.g., clients to whom they provide services, the parent institution from whom they receive funds and donor agencies; but they should market their services for the following reasons:

a. Marketing enables librarian or information manager to understand the real needs of users for taking good management decisions, which will in turn help in providing maximum information services to users more efficiently and effectively.
b. Librarian or information manager is not only interested for the people who do use the services regularly. He is

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also interested in non-user groups. Marketing play a vital role to identify the information needs of non-users and helps to provide them with necessary information.

c. Librarians and information managers need to present their services as an indispensable part of the organization and try to justify the claim that their clients/users cannot do their job efficiently or effectively without a library service. In this way, marketing techniques will help libraries and information services receive more funding from their patrons.

d. Marketing may help to improve the image of the library and information profession through collection of revenue performing different services to users.

XII. Conclusion

Application of marketing techniques is very important in improving the capabilities of library's information services towards attaining satisfaction of users. And the market philosophy which also requires that library management focuses on the identification of users' needs rather than library needs. Librarians and information managers seem to be reluctant to become fully involved in marketing their information products and services and when they attempt to market their information services they neglect or fail to understand the behavior of the user. The librarians should understand the nature of information, needs of users, the transfer process between people and information. Understanding of this new dimension of library and information services will help concerned policy makers in formulating appropriate plans and programs to make the library and information services most effective, and long sustainable.

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