
Strategic Marketing Plan For Enhancing Information Service In Academic Libraries

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Abstract

The fundamental purpose of a library is to acquire, store, organize, disseminate, or otherwise provide access to the vast bodies of knowledge already produced. The Library being the information centre is an integral part of a community especially in an academic environment which plays an important role for students, scholars, and researchers. In view of this, different marketing concepts provide libraries with the tools for collecting and analyzing useful data about information needs of customers, which assist in designing, developing and delivering appropriate services. Against this background, this paper focused on strategic marketing plan for enhancing information services in academic libraries. Based on this, the study examined important marketing tools such as products and services, target group, means of promotion, budget for the expenditure, and the expected constraints.

The main objectives of libraries today are to obtain self-sufficiency in their resources and to provide an optimum level of services to reach more potential users and encourage the use of library resources. This naturally requires a shift from product or service orientation to customer or need orientation (Kavulya, 2004). Different marketing concepts provide libraries with the tools for collecting and analyzing useful

data about information needs of users, which assists in designing, developing and delivering appropriate services. Irrespective of the type of the library, the need to develop customer-centered and strategic market planning has now become part of effective library management. Marketing concept holds that the key to achieving organizational goals consists in determining the need and wants of target market and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors. In general words, marketing is a planned approach to identify and gain the support of users and develop appropriate services in a manner which benefits the users. Marketing includes selling, advertising, physical distribution, sales promotion, etc. The main function of academic libraries is to provide right information to right user at the right time, and this function can be done through marketing. For marketing, the first thing is an appropriate marketing plan, which is the main part of successful marketing because under marketing plan, we discuss what users need, plan information products and services, price information product and services, how to promote information product and services, etc.

Marketing is the process of planning, pricing, promoting, and distributing goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy the library and the customer. Marketing is an ongoing and dynamic strategy because customer needs and library products change with time. Marketing concepts and techniques play a vital role in academic libraries because library and information centre and marketing both have same goal; the right service to the right person at the right time. Marketing is the process through which we assess the need of market/customer/user, and we provide those services which satisfy the needs profitably. Marketing is a means of ensuring that libraries, librarians, and librarianship are integrated into both today's and tomorrow's emerging global culture.

Marketing of library services is a planned approach to identifying, attracting, serving and gaining support of specific user groups in a manner that furthers the goals of the library and the organization that supports it. Marketing library and information services is a responsibility of everyone in an organization. It is the service that the user receives from all of the staff who help them perceive the value of the academic libraries. So marketing is related to management, because management is the key to successful marketing. The real value of marketing is to ensure the survival and growth of the library and information services, which exist to enhance the communities they serve, adding value to the lives of the people and organizations that are their users, customers and clients.

Academic libraries are facing a time of unprecedented change and challenges. Recent technological developments are creating new forms of information, new sources of information and new ways of providing information. There has been an increasing

pressure on information centres to mobilize resources and become self-reliant. Information centre users are transforming into customers with rising expectations, diverse needs and wants and choices. Now, the real challenge for information professionals is not to manage the collection, staff and technology but to turn these resources into services. Some of the reasons why we need to market our information centres include; to promote an updated image, visibility, to maintain relevance, to stop being taken for granted, rising expectations, understanding clients, competition for resources, survival, and beneficial to information centre's image.

Marketing Strategy

Marketing strategy is a process that can allow an organization to concentrate its limited resources to grab the greatest opportunities to increase sales and achieve a sustainable competitive advantage. A marketing strategy should be centred on the key purpose that in academic libraries user/customer satisfaction is the main goal. A marketing strategy is a written plan which combines the efforts to plan information product and product development, and the ways to promote information products and services, how to price information product and services, and their distribution. It identifies the academic libraries marketing goals, and explains how they will be achieved within a stated timeframe. Marketing strategy determines the choice of target market segment, positioning, marketing mix, and allocation of resources. It is most effective when it makes an integral component of academic libraries; it defines how the academic libraries will successfully engage customers, prospects, and competitors in the market arena. Marketing plan covers all the functions of marketing from beginning to end. The plan helps the librarian to determine where the information services would be in the future, what is the current situation regarding the academic libraries, the product or the services, and how does the information service get there to realize specific targets? Preparation of the plan and the implementation of activities encourage and motivate information staff to develop a proactive stance in the target market.

Purpose of Marketing in Academic Libraries

There are two main purposes of marketing in academic libraries, (i) Achieving objective/goals of the academic libraries, and (ii) Satisfying user needs and wants. Main objective of academic libraries is to provide right information to right user at right time, and to put it in simple words satisfying user/customer needs, The second purpose is related to first purpose, if we provide product/services at right time to right user and fulfil the users need then we complete the purpose of marketing.

Main purpose of marketing in academic libraries is to encounter a four-pronged challenge: Increase in clientele, their variety, their demands, and their expectations.

Increase in the initial or capital cost of information and information technology, and their need to leverage the technology and find new levels of economies of scale to serve the increasing potential clientele.

In the event of drying up of the public sponsorship and subsidy, the need to find alternative sources of revenue. Complexity in ways of identifying clients and their requirements, and servicing them. (Singh & Shukla, 2009: 642) Every service the library wants to introduce or to improve has to be planned with marketing instruments. Done properly, your marketing plan will be the roadmap you follow to get unlimited customers and dramatically improve the success of your organization. To help you succeed, below details are the key sections you will consider in your marketing plan.

Making a Start in Marketing

Meeting with management is the first step in beginning a marketing plan. Nothing influences academic libraries as much as the mission and beliefs of an organization's management. Primarily, management influences the resources and services offered, as well as customers targeted. Libraries must be in line with parent institution's goals before planning formal marketing strategies.

Product

These are information resources and research Services that are offered to clients. The design of information products, how information might be customized, packaged and delivered is now a concern for all information professionals. The academic library's products may include e-reference service, library pages on the college website, reference materials including CD-ROMs and use of the internet, interlibrary loan services, loans of subject-specific books and study aids including how to study materials etc. They can be physically demonstrated at open days or evenings, seminars, induction courses and teach-ins, and at the launch of new services. You can also demonstrate the added value you provide for customers by showing how your knowledge of information resources and subject expertise can enhance their search for information, how you help identify and specify their needs more accurately and cogently, how recognition of their objectives helps you provide better more useful information, and how you make a direct contribution to the achievement of their objectives.

Every product has got characteristics. Services can be cheap, expensive, tangible or intangible, high or low in quality. Much depends on the library's preferences and mission, but also on the users' needs and wants.

Target Group

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 he/she 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. It is likely that the Information Center will have different target audiences, with different expectations, information needs and perceptions. These should be segmented into identifiable groups so you can communicate more effectively with them. The primary customer is always the user of your products and services or the potential users. For the university, college, and polytechnic library settings, the following are the general list of customers:

Staff; segmented into teaching staff or faculty, and non-teaching or management staff.

Students; segmented into undergraduate and postgraduate. Thus:

Teaching staff: They use library and library resources primarily to locate information for course development and their own research.

Non-teaching staff: Use the library collections and research services to assist them in institutional tasks.

Undergraduate students: Use the library resources primarily to locate course materials, to complete assignments, to locate information about campus activities and for personal entertainment.

Graduate students: Use the library resources primarily to locate course materials, to complete course assignments, to undertake research for thesis or dissertation and to locate rare and unique materials.

Being able to more clearly identify your target customers will help you both pinpoint your advertising and better speak the language of prospective customers.

Means of Promotion

Now that you know who your customers are and the messages you want to convey to them, you are ready to communicate with them, or in other words, to use marketing communications. Promotion requires careful attention if marketing plan is to be successful. Aggressive marketing of information services is required if the significance of the centre's contribution to the development of the intellectual world in particular and economic in general is ever to be acknowledge, appreciated and reciprocated. Internal bulletins, e-mails, the company intranet, the library web site, newsletters, posters, and campaigns are all effective promotional vehicles for

highlighting new tools and advertising events. Communicating with your customers and potential customers using various media, conveying the images and text that best describe how you can meet their needs, is just as vital for a service provider as for the company selling products.

There are numerous promotional tactics, such as television ads, trade show marketing, press releases, online advertising, and event marketing. In order to make use of advertisement more effective, academic libraries must adopt marketing tools. Important promotion tools include:

Posters/Banners: Posters and banners offer good visual communication. They can draw attention when displayed at prominent locations and provide brief information about an event, service, etc. Posters and banners would be pasted and placed around for the whole period to draw users' attention.

Text Messages: This implies the use of mobile/cell phone to build awareness among clientele. A message is sent via this medium to attract the attention of the users, gain their interest so they desire your products and services, and take some action towards achieving their desire.

Seminar: A seminar may be organized to promote the library services. While in a seminar, users can be prompted to ask questions and find out more about new activities, products, and services.

Leaflets: Include guides to the library and its special collections, Web guides, reading list on IT, and so on. Other brochures can be kept in the library at a location which is placed so that anyone who enters the library is attracted to that corner.

Newsletters: The library can convey information about new acquisitions, new services, events and activities, fee changes, etc. Information regarding library can be included to convey a message to readers about the alertness of the library in updating and communicating small but important pieces of information. In fact, they are an excellent marketing tool because they list all the activities of a library. With ICT facilities in the library, an e-newsletter can be produced. The text of the newsletter can also be included on the library website.

Extension Activities: Activities such as book displays, lectures, quiz, debates, competitions, exhibitions, etc., can have a positive impact on the image of the library and can motivate users especially students to come to the library and promote the use of its products and services.

Library Tour: Library tour for new and existing members can be used to promote the library services. While on a library tour, users can be prompted to ask questions and find out more about new activities, products, and services.

Electronic Mail/Mailshots: According to Natarajan (2002), e-mail is the most universal application on the internet and it can be used for direct communication with potential users. There are many benefits to using email as a promotional tool. Mailshots are an effective medium that create personalized services, with information about library activities and events, membership renewal (Singh and Krishan Kumar, 2005).

Bulletin Board: This is an offshoot of email and is a many-to-many email system. It is medium for messages of interest to a community of online users (Moorthy and Karisiddappa, 2000). This service can be used by libraries for disseminating information to online users.

Blogs: Blogs are continuously-updated websites, created by individuals or organizations. They are generally free. Academic libraries can use blogs to promote its products and services by making it appealing and informative (Mahajan and Chakravarty, 2007). Special alerts about new resources special services can be included in the blog entries. To get feedback, comments and suggestions can be invited from visitors.

The promotions section is one of the most important sections of your marketing plan and details how you will reach patrons. In this section of your marketing plan, consider each of these alternatives and decide which ones will most effectively allow you to reach your target customers.

The Budget for the Expenditure

It is very important to put your expenditure into consideration. In other words, how much will it really cost you? Should the service be offered for free or do you need user fees? Normally, all services in academic libraries are provided free of charge to users. However, if it makes sense for your library to make a profit by charging some categories of users for some services such as photocopying, lamination, printing and bindery services, then marketing will help do this. If, on the other hand, your service is dedicated to providing services completely free of charge, then marketing will help achieve this too.

There are many additional costs to be considered. These include price and non-monetary cost as time, energy and efforts in the process he/she interacts with the people, technology, methods, environment and the materials used to serve the customers. When you are organizing a seminar for instance, you should consider

catering if you are offering refreshments, display boards with the name/logo of your library, transport to/from seminar to set up and return your equipment, leaflets, as well as contingencies. How much will it really cost you to send text messages to patrons (staff and students), and what is the cost estimate for the production of posters and banners.

It is interesting to note that, price policy is very important in the field of electronic information services, where prices are high, but have to be reduced as much as possible in order to be able to offer them. Not to forget is the importance to ask the customer what he is willing to pay for a service.

Expected Constraints

Complex and Complicated Task: marketing is a complicated problem for information centres especially academic libraries because of their wide range of products and services from books to internet access, and an extremely diverse audience that ranges from students, faculty and management staff. With small number of staff, cannot keep up with demand at busy times, difficult to fit training courses. Promoting the information Centre to an internal audience is often left by the wayside. The pressures of daily work may mean there is little time to plan a campaign for advertising its services. As the academic library continues to play an increasingly strategic role in the organization's activities, helping users understand what the library can do for them is crucial.

Access Problem: The physical place of a library is still important, but more and more library services are offered online and therefore worldwide available. Problems occur with access to databases and e-journals, which are normally only available through the institution's network. Some e-journals are free, but most of them are so expensive, that libraries cannot afford to buy many licenses. For that reason it is difficult to use them outside the library or campus, except the possibility to log into the network from outside with special authorization.

Money: Lack of funds is often used as a reason or excuse not to market. However, marketing information services is not simply a matter of spending money on promotion and advertising. Marketing is also a matter of improving the customer's experience of the centre's service.

Attitude: Attitude of the information professionals and other staff as they interact with patrons is what shapes customers' experiences and markets the library to those customers. Also, some departments consider their own small collection to be adequate for their needs.

Conclusion

Marketing strategy is the key to the successful proliferation; under a strategy where we incorporate all the important points like identifying organizational goals; customer analysis; plan for specific product/services, etc. Finally, marketing is a strategic level activity; it needs senior management involvement at all the levels and it must be on all agendas. Information professionals must encourage and develop a marketing culture at their libraries and be prepared to market their own significant talents, experience and skills. Marketing needs resources, human as well as financial, and it needs teamwork for a successful implementation. Marketing is a recipe of success because through marketing academic libraries can increase the reach of their services and promote themselves. The investment needs to be serious, and the rewards are immense. So, marketing strategy is important for every library and information product manager and service provider for success in the market.

Recommendations

The institution should employ adequate library staff in both quantity and quality. No aspect of academic library management is as crucial and central to the development of academic libraries as the preparation and employment of appropriate personnel to promote quality teaching and learning. Systematic development of educational resources and their fruitful utilization to achieve the objectives of tertiary education calls for the availability of different categories of library staff, adequate in both quantity and quality. These categories of staff in the library are essential in ensuring that available resources and services are effectively utilized by readers.

The management needs to boost up the staff strength by providing opportunities for further training especially to non-professional and library assistants. As a result, the staff will be able to effectively and efficiently process and organize the resources. When the library staff are well trained, they will be able to provide the necessary enabling environment for easy accessibility and use of library resources. The importance of the library cannot be assumed, but must be weighed in relation to other critical needs like classroom and laboratory space, teaching and research staff, support services or repairing deteriorating classrooms. Thus, there is the need for the Librarians to justify why its management should allocate scarce funds to support library collections and services. There is also the need for the Library Managers to be aggressive in soliciting for funds from philanthropists, local and international organizations, schools, agencies, associations etc. for library support. Money and others derived from such solicitation efforts should be used only for improving library services.

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