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Harnessing Users, Products and Services Using Marketing Strategy in Nigerian Libraries

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Abstract

This paper examines the relationship between the users, products and services of the libraries in respect of marketing strategy. It further argues that an effective marketing strategy is a major instrument that keeps both the users of library product and a librarian who is the marketer or entrepreneur abreast of what each demands and what the other supplies for efficient operations in the entire library. More so, it seeks to bring together the three key issues in the library using marketing tips ranging from the concept of marketing, benefit of effective marketing, marketing mechanism or strategies as regards t the library client and barriers to the effective marketing. Finally, the paper highlights various ways to revitalize effective marketing of products and services in Nigerian libraries. Such as training and retraining even short-term courses on marketing; funds should be raise to offset the cost materials that will promote publicity and e-mail could also be used.

Keywords: Users, Products, Services, Marketing, Librarians and Libraries.

Introduction

The major aim of marketing of information is to make it available to the prospective consumers or consumers of a particular product or service in order to facilitate use by the user. And this has to take place in a persuasive attitude so that the consumer will deem it fit to buy the product or ask for the services being marketed or take the product as something important. This supports the saying that “if you do not say here I am, no one will say where you are.” On the other hand, marketing can be taken as an approach to identify, attract, serve and gain supports. It is also important that libraries first create

a clear vision of their values, and of their contributions to the university, its faculty, staff and students, and to society as a whole. To do this, libraries must first define their customer focus and provide quality management and effective and efficient service (Nkange, 1999). The word entrepreneurship is associated with marketing and it involves buying and selling of product but in librarianship, we talk about services. The way a prospective client perceives his/her services determines whether he or she will use the library or not, if well served, will even help to market the library products to others.

Pinchot (1985) stated in his work that entrepreneurs are "People who have a deep need for achievement, who take calculated, moderate risk, who use analytical skills in their work and who insist on honesty and integrity in their work." Going by the above statement, with the advancement in certain areas in our society such as sciences, agriculture, technology and so on, the entrepreneur who is a librarian in this context, should brace up to face these challenges so as not to be found irrelevant in any organization. This supports what Uhegbu (2007) argued, "In the society today, people are faced with all kinds of problem, and these problems require information to locate their where about as there are varied information users, so also are varied information need. Sometimes, information appears in a language form and written format alien to a prospective users, it is the duty of the librarian to package and market that information in such a way as to meet the desired target.

Holistically, marketing is a tool which the librarians use in lobbying for changes, to build strengths and to eliminate weakness in the library operations and services the librarian should not lose focus of this obvious reason. This supports what Kotler (1975) said in his work that "Librarians should be involved in a formalized effort of this nature "marketing" to improve the satisfaction of the potential library patrons."

The Concept of Marketing-Library Products and Services

The literature on marketing does not provide a single definition of the concept. This is in part due to the differences in background and perceptive of the author, ranging from business to information. Nevertheless, the definitions also have various traits. According to the American Marketing Association (1988), "Marketing is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain offers and exchange of products of value with others." In this definition, the concepts of needs, wants, demands, products and values have been captured. Marketing is to create a series of

exchange. Olson & Meseman (1997) & Okogwu (2006) posit that marketing includes determining marketing niches, defining products and services, setting prices, promoting services and building good public relations. The library exchange customer satisfaction for support, encouragement and probably funds. The term marketing according to Laudon & Laudon (2006) refers to the “Effective management of personnel and services by an organization for the purpose of service delivery to different publics. The UK Chartered Institute of Marketing (1988) defines marketing as “The management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirement and profitability.” The marketing process begins at the library’s core, namely, the library’s mission should reflect the values of the library and explicitly state the service philosophy. Ifidon & Ifidon (2007) outline the major objectives of university libraries as: provision of material in support of the learning process; provision of material for research for students and faculty; provision of material to help library users; their personal self development; co-operation with other libraries to broaden access to materials for the benefit of users; meeting the specialized information needs of the university community.

However, librarians somehow are involved in the processes of marketing consciously or unconsciously. Thus, the essence of marketing involves finding out what to meet those needs. Librarians participate in this somehow process of assessing users’ needs and trying to fulfill them by applying various skills to attract patrons or clients through that means. They supply virtually all the demand such as reference queries, loan services, inter library loan services, current awareness services and such other services that require librarian-client relationships.

Benefits of Effective Marketing-Library Products

Marketing can be said to be essential component of any organizational plan and it also adds to the value of the library or information centre in the organization especially in terms of what its services can provide for potential users who have not previously been aware of the library or the organization. Williamson (1982) made it clear by saying that users became aware of new or different services which can aid them in their work, and even those people who do not have to use the library occasionally become part of the marketing effort, as they tell other people about what the library officers. Marketing brings change of behaviour, attitude, manner and perception to the intending users towards the library or organization. It also creates opportunities for both the librarian and the intending users to educate and understand each other. This will not only enable

you to understand what they want, it will create good “chemistry” between you and your users. One of the benefits of effective marketing is that it makes librarian to still remain relevance in the society especially now that the information service industries are highly competitive among other competitors. The Internet has proven to be a vibrant medium of communication which in modern times is capable of performing more than the role of the sit-tight librarians and even mega bookstores, online book dealers, consultants and individual customers who feel they can do it alone.

More so, librarianship is a profession where people learn their living, and effective marketing of holdings and services renders in the library will help to keep one’s feet strongly on the job. Effective marketing sometimes attracts more funds to the library, if the marketer, the librarian is able to prove to the parent organization and the user. Again if the library is situated in an institution of higher learning and acquisition of past examination papers may attract users to the library thereby, photocopying of such document will in turn attract funds to the library as well as exposing them to other products and services of the library.

Marketing Strategies Effective Products and Services

Marketing minded librarians should continuously ask themselves fundamental questions about users of their products and services, such questions as “Who are the users? “What do they need”? “Why do they need it? In what way do they need it”? Why they choose this service and not the other? Marketing is more than a printed word. LeBoeuf (1988) in his write-up talks about the customers services, by making a strong case for what he calls “first impression”. Williamson (1982) further adopted his ideas about marketing of library products as follows:

1. As soon as you see the user politely acknowledge his/her presence.
2. Be equally prompt and polite when answering his questions.
3. If a user has a scheduled appointment, make it your business to be one time.
4. Prepare for a user’s questions by having the answers or at least a general idea about the user and his/her work, beforehand.
5. Ask the right questions.
6. Listen for total meaning – never underestimate the value of listening to a use, match your solution to each of them.
7. Make the user feel good about using your library.

Furthermore, the American Marketing Association (1988) has its set guideline on how to deal with its customers and this might be applicable to librarians in various libraries. These are as follows:

8. Be friendly and willing to help;
9. Treat each user as you would like to be treated;
10. Handle complaints quickly and professionally;
11. Be approachable;
12. Make it easy on the user;
13. Ask the user for his/her opinions;
14. Build a relationship with your users;
15. Never argue with a user;
16. If you don't know the answer to a user's question, immediately find someone who does;
17. Always try to do a little extra for the user;
18. Always be reliable – keep the service promise.

One can see from the above, that a librarian working in any library is selling himself as well as the quality of the service provided; the services must be client or user-oriented and reflect basically the needs of the user. The librarian should make sure that the quality of services he or she is giving is accurate and reliable; no wrong answers should be given to the user. He should work hard to be abreast with the librarianship of the time. He should always be out to embrace and impress the users' need, and should not have interference when on duty so as to make him/her available, accessible and approachable above all know that user is always right. All these make the librarian an effective and efficient marketer with a vision.

Notwithstanding all these librarians should sometimes and memorandum to other units as the case may be departments the products – new arrivals and the services they render in the library. The memos which are sent by the librarians serve the purpose of keeping management or parent organization informed when a personal briefing is not possible. It also ensures that the information is conveyed. In the same vein, the librarian should also share with the management or the authority some of the complimentary letters and reports he receives from the users in the course of marketing the library products and services.

Newsletter, magazine fliers, annual reports and library guide are also effective tools to market library products and services which will in turn bring users to library if these

items are well constructed and attractively presented. Librarians in the bid to get customers should have a good sense of public relations. Bibliographies, abstracts, reading lists and bulletin board can also serve as marketing tips. An ideal library guide helps user to plan hours of library operations and any other information concerning the library.

Basically, booklist or monthly acquisition lists are valuable because they keep the picture of the library before clients and give them a feeling of knowing what is offered in the library even if they are not immediately going to use it.

Barrier to Effective Marketing of Library Products and Services

In marketing of library products, the librarians or library managers should study the target market needs, then design appropriate products and services to meet these needs. Once this has been accomplished, the library can design a programme to educate, inform, motivate and serve the market. But in spite of all these, it is not so easy to come by, given various challenges which occur in and outside the library. Some of these challenges are marshaled out by Sass, Riykahk & Shamel, Cynthia (2002) as follows:-

Old models – they state that some librarians work on the old model of existence by mandate for instance children being brought to library to learn about books, middle managers should tap into the corporate library for information.

Humility – too often, librarians wait for others to notice that they are doing a good job. Librarians may be reluctant to capitalize on their strength and knowledge, while the general public often does not see the value that information professionals could bring to sophisticated information challenges.

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.

Old expectation – 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 need.

Lack of training and education – often librarians do not promote library services well due to lack of training and knowledge of marketing tools and techniques. They often times, lack the zeal to organize seminars, workshop or programmes that will be of immense help to the operation of library.

Confusion – however, there is confusion about what the term marketing means. Much of this has to do with their interchangeability of terms such as ‘promotion’ ‘public relations’ and ‘marketing’. There is also confusion about marketing libraries, the perception is that marketing is a business tool and not applicable to library settings. Librarians are often reluctant to borrow from a private sector they have fear of commercial publicity and see marketing as manipulative and a waste of time and resources.

Passive vs. active stance – rather than selling the library on its value and letting people know about the library product and services, 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 website.

Complex and complicated task – Marketing is a complicated problem for the libraries because of a wide range of products and services from books to Internet access, and an extremely diverse audience the ranges from children to senior, public officials to business people, and students.

Money and attitude – lack of funds is often used as a reason or excuse not to market. However, marketing library products and services is not simply a matter of spending money on production and advertising. Marketing is also improving the customers’ experience of library services. The attitude of the librarians or staff working in the library is what matters, and the customer’s experiences when leaving the library, because it will go a long way to encourage other users.

Ways to Revitalize Effective Marketing in the Library

It is right to stress at this point that training plays both direct and indirect roles in marketing of library products. There is a saying that “one will only give what he/she has.” Odesanya & Ajiferuke (2000) state that “Personnel development is very important among librarians in order to maintain motivation.” Boredom is not a good motivator, librarians who fail to market their products to clients remain idle which might lead to low self-esteem concerning the job. Librarians who have the opportunities of attending to newsrooms or corporate meetings should do so. You may find out that understanding how management and users think, can help you to be a better marketer. But what’s more important the management and parent organization will find out that

library staff can make a contribution outside the library. The librarian should do anything to help break the isolation of the library. The librarian should organize library meetings, seminars, events in a conference hall that will involve other members of the parent organization and other users to enlighten them on the products and services rendered in the library. Create a library newsletter. Publicize your achievements in words, new acquisitions, new databases, library automation updates. New services introduced in the library are all good topics for the newsletter or if the parent organization has a magazine, they should write a column on it or at least get them mentioned in it occasionally.

More so, effective marketing of library products and services in Nigerian libraries should begin with each library implementing a library marketing plan or target. This plan should involve around a vision which is attracting users to the library, and which will in turn give the library staff or librarian sense of direction and purpose, especially if they are asked to contribute to the creation of such plan or policy that will guide or control the library target. The effect of marketing library products and services will be more pronounced if the librarians or library staff follow a predetermined marketing plan or target.

Publish subject bibliographies, list of databases available to target group. Publish some articles in the newspapers and even news-talk on the radio about the products and services of the library. The marketer of library products and services should put life into the profession by giving library awards to who is most library literate or user. This will thereby increase their interest in making use of library products. Keeping of aesthetic environment is very important. It should reorganize, restructure, move thing around, paint and rug if possible, to make the environment so conducive so as to attract users and protect the products from damage.

Recommendations

Librarians of various institutions should acquire strong marketing skills. This could be done through training either by taking short-term courses in marketing. As was Nigerian libraries need to include business and marketing courses in their curricula in order to equip students with marketing skills needed to excel at their workplaces. Funds should also be provided should in case they will opt for handbills and other cost-effective materials to carry out promotions and publicity. E-mail can also be used to publicize their services. In conclusion, librarians in the Nigerian libraries need to fully

embrace the concept of marketing though, libraries cannot claim monopoly on information, the advent of information and communication technology has brought about competition in the domain and primary functions of the library. Libraries should therefore, employ marketing as a tool in order to remain relevant to the overall objectives of their parent organization and users. Libraries should package their services so that users will value their services and even become willing to pay for some of them. And again, improving services delivery will require the library to ensure that greater effort is devoted to designing and implementing programmes and services that provide what users want from their libraries.

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