

21ST Century Librarians Marketing Strategies: Costing, Pricing and Effective Information Delivery

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Abstract:

Purpose: This paper discusses marketing strategies with regards to costing, pricing and effective information delivery in the 21st century as against traditional concept of marketing as well as attempted to correlate marketing strategies as a concept to the provision of library services.

Design/Methodology/Approach: This study takes on exploratory approach through review of related literature. The study discusses from the traditional realm of marketing concept more vibrant and dynamic marketing strategies in terms of costing and pricing for effective information delivery.

Findings: This paper found out that the social economic and technological changes in the 21st Century work environment has forced the library and information centres to begin to adopt marketing of information products and services as integral component of administration.

Practical Implications: The emergence of ICT has revolutionized librarianship, resulting in a paradigm shift for academic libraries/Librarians such as to reposition themselves as information specialist thereby extricate themselves from the clutches of arm-chair librarianship of the 19th century; otherwise relapsed into extinction like the dinosaurs.

Originality/Value: In order not to relapse into extinction, it is recommended that the librarians of the 21st century in the face of dwindling budgetary cuts should adopt marketing strategies, be knowledgeable in the use of ICT, acquire information literacy skills, coupled with training and retraining – all these will make him ever relevant in the scheme of things.

Keywords: Librarians, Marketing strategies, costing and Pricing, Information delivery.

Paper type: Conceptual

INTRODUCTION

Librarians and information specialists have debated the idea of marketing for the information sector. Several things have compelled them to learn about marketing and its application. Librarianship is experiencing rapid change. Information technology has created a new gateway for information services. Information products and services in a multiplicity of formats have made libraries and information centres more competitive and has put them on alert. Libraries are being subjected to significant pressures from the information revolution. So the challenges of budget cuts, increased user base, the rapid growth of material, rising costs, networking demands, competition by database vendors, and complexity in information requirements are forcing the professionals to adopt marketing to improve the management of library and information centres. Marketing aims to identify the client base needs, to determine and fill these needs, wants and demands by designing and delivering appropriate products and services. The main focus of the concept is the client, while the goal is client satisfaction. Rowley (2001) calls marketing, the management process

which identifies, anticipates, and supplies customer requirements efficiently and profitably.

Kotler (1999) opines, that marketing is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of goods, services and ideas to create exchanges with target groups that satisfy customers and organizational objectives.

Nature of the 21st century knowledge evolution:

The 21st Century as the millennium of information has been seen as the era of explosion of information output and information sources. It is known as the beginning of knowledge age. Knowledge is no longer what is stored in the minds of experts, represented in books and classified in disciplines. Knowledge age workers need to be able to locate, assess and represent new information quickly. They need to communicate this to others, to be adaptable-creative and innovative and be able to understand things as a system at big picture level. In the 21st century academic library, the emergence of ICT has redefined the library's role. Print materials are no longer sufficient to store information. CD-ROM database, electronic document delivery, automated cataloguing, circulation systems and online

information retrieval (OPAC) have become the order of the day. Ramzan (2004), asserts that developments like expert systems wireless networks virtual collections, interactive Web interfaces, Virtual reference services and personal Web portals have brought about greater changes since the start of the new millennium; Nigerian academic libraries in the 21st century are therefore adapting gradually to fit into their clients information seeking patterns. This is evident in the attempt to digitize library resources to cater for the information needs of new generation users that is, the 21st century library users who exhibit much dexterity in using new sources and new technologies.

The 21st century librarian:

As the traditional custodian of information, librarians in the 21st century need to be aware of these significant changes and as such employ their technological knowhow and intellectual masterpiece in order to retain the leading role of the academic libraries in supporting teaching, learning and research. This means that the 21st century librarian will have to be armed with competent skills that will enhance the provision of effective library services to meet client's changing information needs. Also, some of the 21st century skills according to Krishnan (2011) include communication and collaboration, creativity and innovation, critical thinking and problem solving, media literacy, ICT literacy, flexibility and adaptability.

21st century librarians and effective information service delivery:

The human resource is a vital aspect of any organization. The success or failure of any organization depends to a large extent on the human capacity. The Librarian of the 21st century is changing with the changing environment which is a consequent of ICT. Moghaddam (2009) notes that one of the vital elements of success and dynamism is specialized human resources viz librarians. LaRue (2012) firmly believes that the library's most powerful asset is its professional staff. From the foregoing, the librarian of the 21st century is no longer one that sits behind the reference desk answering mere reference questions but rather an active marketer who sells the library's products and services to his community at every opportunity. He packages current information sources and delivers on point. The 21st Century Librarian is an information warehouse, one with a desperate zeal to impact positively on his environment. He is at home with modern technological infrastructure. According to Ikhemueh (2005), if librarians are to continue to make substantial contributions as

information disseminators, they will have to understand and exploit ICT infrastructure and emerging technologies in delivering services to their clientele.

What is marketing/marketing strategy?

Marketing is not only for publicity or promotion; publicity and promotion are just one aspect of the marketing process; it also includes product creation, pricing and distribution. Marketing is very important in any business venture since production and distribution largely depend on marketing and thus contributes greatly to the success of information brokerage. According to Smith (2004), marketing is a stance and an attitude that focuses on meeting the needs of users.

It is a means of ensuring that libraries, librarians and librarianship are integrated into both today's and tomorrow's emerging global culture. Marketing being a good practice has now emerged as an increasing important area for libraries and information Centres. It covers those activities that connect the organization to those parts of its outside world that use, buy, sell or influence the output it produces and the benefits and services it offers.

Marketing strategies/techniques are effectively being used by most of the present fee-based information services. Marketing "embraces an entire suite of management activities which include determining market niches, defining marketing niches, defining products and services, setting prices, promoting services, and building good public relations". In the information brokering business, there are several marketing techniques and tools which are used. The most important ones are: promotional techniques such as direct mail and telephone listing, advertisements and promotional brochures.

As a result, information brokers provide their clients with information for a fee, they use various resources including the internet, online services that specialize in databases, public libraries, books and CD-ROMs. They also set up telephone call centres, by providing research and other information services. As an information broker, it is advisable to package yourself well, (i.e.) dress properly because you would ultimately be addressed and prized by the way you dress. As a professional in this field, it is expected that your English construct should be captivating, inviting and convincing, possession of some degree of oratory, is of utmost importance.

Determining the value of information:

This is a critical aspect of marketing of information services. As a librarian, you must be careful not to under value yourself or the product at hand. This also leads to the customer value based pricing which involves the librarian by first assessing importance of information. Information is an indispensable factor for promoting the development of society. Kemp (1976) observes, that information has been called, the fifth need of man, ranking after air, water, food and shelter. Luck, et al (n.d) added that information is the life blood of planning, directing and controlling any enterprise (Luck et al, 1981). It makes the satisfaction of the demands of the population possible in an efficient way. The present age is rightly characterized as the age of information, where its success in any activity is based on the amount and accuracy of information available. Information is a commodity or economic good of worldwide significance, which contributes to the national economy. It has also become a commodity that people buy. Countries with adequate information infrastructure and information technology can create artificial demand for superfluous products and use it as a weapon against the economy of other countries. Information is an indispensable input for technological and economic development. It is a negotiable product that moves about in international markets. In today's international developing economies, a country that is incapable of providing information to its citizens will lose autonomy and be at the mercy of developed countries for information.

Price:

Price is important in marketing in the world of information as it is elsewhere. Kotler (1983), describes the 4 Ps of marketing: product, place, pricing and promotion. He argued that the 4 Ps are a seller's paradigm and should be replaced with the 4Cs of the buyer: customer value, user convenience, user cost and user communication. Price can be expressed in currency; however it can use goods or services. In the library, price can be used to express the value of information services; a physical product like a CD-ROM or a fee for a service or costing of information products and services.

The primary goal of most businesses is to make a profit. There are many factors that affect the profitability of a business, such as management, location, cost of labor, quality of product or services, market demand and competition. Market demand controls the response to a product or service U. S. small Business Administration (n.d.) emphasized that:

"You must understand the market for your service, the channels of distribution and the competition before you establish prices. You must know all costs and carefully analyze them. The market place responds rapidly to technological advances, international competition and a knowledgeable buying public. You must constantly keep abreast of all factors that will affect pricing, and be ready to make necessary changes.

Costing is the process by which an organization obtains estimates of the cost or monetary values for producing a product, providing a service, performing a function, or operating a department Popoola (2000). Writing on the costs and cost-effectiveness in library service, Popoola (2005) avers that the identification of cost is often the first task in the process of valuing an information service or activity. He further noted that what the library manager is concerned with is a working costs the total cost of the service, unit costs, average cost and costs of a particular operations. Ifidon and Nwalo (2003) quoting Edeka (1991), listed cost elements to include running cost, equipment maintenance cost, equipment and staff time, and expected profit. The value (both real and perceived) of your offer to the specific customer/target group. You could decide to charge a price which is either equal to or lower than the value (perceived) realized by the customer group. For example, if library users value selective dissemination of information service so much, much price will be added to the service because they will still come for the service whether the cost is high or low.

Information packaging:-

Packaging of information in various formats has become the norm in the digital era. This has created new opportunities for the library to provide value added services in the academic environment. Users of the 21st century are at home with electronic sources of information which permit multiple use of a material by different users at the same time. To exploit this advantage, the librarian can develop and preserve research output of his institution through digitizing projects, theses and dissertations. In collaboration with the university ICT center, an institutional repository can be created to host these projects on the universities website. While their visibility is guaranteed on the website, their access and retrieval remains the sole responsibility of the library. The added advantage of such initiative could be made manifest in the global webometric ranking of the University.

There is always a fee to be paid on an information service which is electronically packaged. The format

of information dealt with how the information is needed by the patrons, either it should be delivered manually, electronic format, or in form of a piece of paper. Each of the nature of package or format carries different charges or fees, in which the customer should be enlightened first. The packaging determines how durable it will last; this would also be backed-up with a good fee.

The Time Span of the Information:

As a librarian in the 21st century employs his in-depth knowledge and search strategy to meet user information needs, time is of essence. If information is being raised from the past centuries which involves a lot of searches from archives and sundry other platforms in this case, the information services searched for will determine the value or the level of price it will attract. There is no gain-saying the fact that when one has to dig into the creative past for information a lot of efforts, time and energy will be expended, therefore information sought for under this guise will have a corresponding price value attachment. As a professional in this field bargaining of price toward the information services should not therefore be trivialized but done in a manner that will convince the client that the price tags is worth it. As a librarian in the 21st century employs his ingenuity, knowledge and search strategy to meet user information needs by excavating the archive so will a piece of information retrieved from such depth of effort will attract corresponding fee charge. In doing this price should be constant or whatsoever was decided from the outset should stand. As a professional in the 21st century, do not allow the client to make you behave like an ordinary trader, business should be conducted with fashion and elegance. Also in this type of business staff working as a secretary should be employed to take care of some minor jobs in the office, the reason is that, it will enable you package yourself well in the public eye.

Location/place:

This represents the distribution channel through which a product/service is conveyed to the customer. It is usually associated with 'when' 'where' and how a particular service/product is made available to the users/customers. Dhiman and Sharma (2009) described when: as the time period, in which the service/product is provided. Whereas the location of the services and how as the type of distribution of the service or channels, which Jestin and Parameswari (2002) concluded could be through inter personal delivery, group personal delivery, in-house dissemination, mass media, broadcasting, mail, telephone, strategic placement.

Promotion:

This is the part of marketing where a professional in this field is trying to create and build up demand. Sometimes a distinction is made between push and the pull promotions. Advertising 'pulls' by making the potential buyer aware of the product or services and then, keep hoping, asking for it or at least for more information about it. This will be possible when there is a vibrant public relation practice in the library. This is also referred to as market communication according to Konya (2013), which is described as a mechanism through which target group (customers/users) are informed. The availability of resources, services and products offered by an organization; here promotion mix consists of different sub-components such as personal selling, sales promotion, direct marketing, internet marketing, sponsorship, trade fairs and exhibitions Konya (2013). Promotion moves the products toward the customer, and stimulates demand and also increases sales. It is a means of informing customers / users about what you do and what you can do.

Price:

This is an important factor in marketing which the customer considers before purchasing a particular product. It also refers to the dominant element that determines the revenue or profit or market share for the organization. Price for the product is usually set when the organization introduces or acquires a product. Price could be social or monetary, according to Dhiman and Sharma (2009). Social price refers to the additional effort that the customer must make in order to obtain access to a product while monetary price implies the payment of certain sum by the customer. That means, price is not always considered in monetary terms, but it is also associated with time, effort and psyche (Bell Ann Jo, 1985). Price is one of the most difficult aspect of marketing exercise.

Advocacy:

Users in the current dispensation are no longer seeking information in the library, but the reverse has become the case where the Library goes out to render information services to users. To achieve this, the librarian has to look out for opportunities to connect and interact with his varied users. He therefore employs his inter personal skills strategies to connect with administrators, faculty and students. During meetings, he can brief faculty on current publications and their terms of accessibility. By so doing, acts as a strong advocate for the library which is a vital organ of the university.

Through Reference Interview:

The quality of a good reference service depends on the competencies and skills of the reference librarian. The 21st century librarian employs his in-depth knowledge and search strategy to meet user information needs. He should also interview the customers to find out the level of his/her education, the type of job he/she is doing. So by taking cognizance of all these, the librarian will then know the quality of information services to render to such a customer. But if it is a rich man, the appearance, and the manner he/she presents his case, will make a librarian to comport him/herself. If the person or customer comes to meet the librarian in his office, a generous and friendly treatment should be shown to the customer, (showing hospitality). By welcoming him/her with something like a cold drink. As a 21st century librarian, the level of life you showcase at that particular scene will add value to your information services.

The Purpose of the Information Needed:-

As a professional librarian in the 21st century, you should be able to ask a good quality questions in order to get a reasonable answers from the customer or client. By knowing the purpose of the information, this will also assist you in determine the charges that you will place on the information sought. For instance, if the person or customer is a politician, perhaps the information needed from the librarian is to search for an information that will be used to blackmail his/her opponent in the political set up, charges will be so determined. So in this case, such price information will be high (i.e) the purpose of information service will determine a high value rate. From the foregoing, the librarian of the 21st century is no longer one that sits behind the reference desk answering mere reference questions in other words (the era of arm-chair librarianship is over) but rather an active marketer who sells the library's products and services to his community at every opportunity. In academic units, he does not just point to a row of shelves rather he involves himself in the search process. He is not satisfied until he has satisfied his client. By so doing, he improves his knowledge as well as the image of the library.

Use of Social Media

Library in the 21st century is in the business of connecting people with information. So web 2.0 technologies have brought new roles for library professionals. Web 2.0 tools such as facebook, twitter, blogs, online groups which are also known as social media have made it possible for people to actually connect to one another through the

internet. Khan and Bhatti R. (2012) posit thus; "social media provides more opportunities to reach your community, target specific audiences, and give them a chance to interact with your library. Also using social media, libraries can engage their clients on issues of interest and enable them make inputs especially as it affects library services. This can improve the library's image and service delivery.

Mobile phones:

The 21st century librarian can provide effective library service/information through mobile telephones line GSM (Global Systems for Mobile Communication).

This mobile device like cell phone have improved communication and enhanced the way information is created, delivered and accessed. In support of research and teaching, the use of SMS (short message services) can be employed to answer reference queries, and alert users on new arrivals and upcoming events in the university calendar e.g Public holidays, University Matriculation, lecture free week etc. this could be flashed through a facility called broadcast, where one text message is sent to all the library contacts listed in the address book on the mobile phone at once (Iwhiwhu, Ruteyan and Eghwubare, 2010).

Partnership:

In partnership with relevant units, the academic Library can create an activity center for users to acquire extra skills. Such skills include sewing, baking, hair dressing, decorations, poultry or fish farming. This has the advantage of adding value to the library. When users acquire the right knowledge, they are empowered to become useful citizens. Librarians in the 21st century can partner with academic units to teach their students information literacy skills so that they can become effective users of information. Information literacy is the set of skills needed to find, retrieve, analyze and use information. Information literacy equip student with the critical skills necessary to become independent lifelong learners. It includes the technological skills needed in the modern day library as a gateway to information. Libraries inform as well as empower users to become resourceful.

Conclusion

The emergence of information and communication technologies has brought a paradigm shift for academic libraries. ICT has enhanced access, research and communication. This means that it has become a very useful tool in academic libraries with a mission to support teaching, learning and

research. That being the case, professional librarians in the 21st Century is expected to exploit the opportunities brought about by ICT to ensure that academic libraries and librarians are repositioned to be 21st century information specialist thereby extricating themselves from the clutches of arm-chair librarianship of the 19th century. In the light of the foregoing, the following recommendations were made:

Recommendations:

In the face of dwindling budgetary cuts, librarians in the 21st century should make personal efforts to improve their skills in order to defend their profession. As information providers in the 21st century, they are expected to be competent and knowledgeable in the use of ICT. Therefore, it is recommended that computer literacy skills, metadata skills, information literacy skills etc should be acquired. These skills are needed to effectively serve users and remain at the top. To effectively achieve this, training and retraining of librarians is recommended especially owing to the dynamic nature of ICT. If this is done libraries will free itself from the threat of obsolescence as well as the librarians will continue to be relevant and irreplaceable in the business of information acquisition, processing and dissemination.

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