

Problems and Prospects of Marketing Library and Information Products and Services by Librarians

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Abstract

This research work considered the problems and prospects of marketing library services and products in the world of library and information science. Marketing has become a household name in the 21st century business as virtually all strata of business are now involved in it. The study looked into what marketing is and what it is not. What constitutes library products and services were highlighted and the reason why marketing should be at the forefront for librarians. Problems of marketing library products and services include: inadequate and shrinking funds, librarians' unwillingness to step out and market library and information services and products, poor image of the libraries, lack of marketing skills on the part of librarians amongst others. Prospects of library services and products were also discussed stating that the invention of Information Communication and Technology (ICT) has broadened the horizon for librarians who desire to soar unto greater heights. Solutions were also proffered, encouraging librarians to develop themselves further in order to compete favourably with other information providers.

Keywords: Problems, Prospects, Marketing, Information Products, Information Services.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing in the world of librarianship today is gradually becoming a popular trend in Nigeria. There is no doubt however, that the term 'marketing' is relatively new in the field. Gupta and Savard (2010) in Posigha (2016) supported this claim, stating that marketing formally came into librarianship only in the 1970s.

Posigha (2016) defined marketing as planning and managing an organization's exchange relation with its clientele. For effective marketing, the marketer must take into consideration the needs of the market, appropriate products and services that will be disseminated to the market, pricing, improved communication skills as well as distribution channels. Adekunmisi (2013) strengthened that marketing means exchanging goods or services for items of value.

The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) defines marketing as the management process which identifies and also supplies requirements efficiently and also profitably. American Marketing Association (AMA, 2004) defines marketing as "the process of planning

and executing the conception, pricing, promoting, and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchange and satisfy individual and organisational objectives”.

Marketing indeed goes through a management series of events to produce a result geared towards satisfaction. Jobber (2003) sees marketing as series of organisational goals through meeting and surpassing the needs of customers better than the competition. Marketing should be geared towards customer needs (library user) rather than those other stake holders.

Marketing has become a house hold name in the business of the 21st Century as virtually every stratum of business is now in involved in it. Marketing can be formal or informal and this concept and the action of marketing affect every sphere of business today. Marketing entails meeting the needs of customers wherever they may be. Marketing can also be defined as a set of process for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders (Kotler & Keller, 2009)

Marketing as Kotler and Keller (2009) explained is not just selling products as many people will think. It is only a part of it and entails even much more. Drawing from Drucker (1995) in Kotler and Keller (2009), they argued that the need for selling will always be but the aim of marketing unnecessary. The essence of marketing at the long run is to know and have a proper understanding of the customer so well, so that the product or service soothes him and sells itself. When this is achieved, the product or service should be made fully available.

Library Services and Products

The professional jobs that the librarians carry out are enormous. According to Obi (2010), librarians render the following services: abstracting, guidance-counselling, editing, indexing, internet sourcing, recreational, reprographic, user education and consulting services.

Posigha (2012) added that the services librarians offer also include: current awareness services (CAS), selected dissemination of information (SDI), reference services, notification about conferences/seminars/workshops, translation services, inter library loan, packaging and repackaging of information, newspaper clippings, and patent information.

Information products that librarians also indulge in are the production of current awareness bulletins, results of literature search, new additions list, bibliographic lists, information lists, information bulletins, directories, abstracts, indexes (Posigha, 2016).

Why Marketing?

The need has arisen to market library and information products and services due to: High level of competition with other ‘rivals’ and information counterparts which has made it expedient for libraries to come out from their various comfort zones to market their products and services. There has to be buyers if selling and making profit must be recorded and so, libraries for this cogent reason have seen the need to market and advertise what they do to gain credence, remain relevant and be commended by it users. Adekunmisi (2013) bluntly stated that libraries are no longer the only information service providers that they used to be some centuries ago.

Promotion of the use of library and information products is not an option. It should be compulsory for every librarian who has an unwavering passion for the profession to blow his or her trumpet in the place of marketing and adverts. Libraries have to market their products and services because of budgetary cut. Funds are limited and various units and departments are all craving to get more allocations in their organisation and companies (Posigha, 2012).

The libraries are not left out be it academic (university), school, public, national or special library. It is through marketing that library and information services and products can effectively reach every nook and cranny of any locality. A very good instance of marketing the library products and its services extensively to the downtown and hinterland is through mobile library services which also provide for face to face interaction and marketing.

Maruli and Kumar (2013) stressed that no matter the type of library whether small or big, marketing is absolutely necessary to draw attention and display your library's worth to the world out there.

The Concept of Marketing

The basic and fundamental idea behind marketing is that corporate breakthrough comes from satisfying customer needs. Marketing concept is all about placing customers (user) at the centre of everything that the library management does. Anderson, Fornell and Mazvancheryl (2004) revealed that there is a positive connection between customer satisfaction and shareholder value showing a clear vindication of the marketing concept.

Marketing is used as a coordinating mechanism to unite corporate activities for librarians, lawyers, accountants, engineers and others in so many other professions. Marketers (librarians) act as interface between the library and the customers (library users). Marketing has been wrongly and commonly associated with gimmicks and tricks and a group of people say it is all about persuading people to buy what they may not want to buy and dissuading people from buying the real thing they should have actually bought. This is not true as marketing is all about creating value (Blythe, 2009). Marketers (librarians seen as marketers of information) should market the library products and services in such a way that library users can come and use the library again and again.

The general notion that libraries are not-for-profit has caused the need for marketing its services and products. The need and awareness that library materials should be seen as commodities are quite gradual and slow. Some libraries are beginning to integrate marketing as part of their administration.

Jestin and Parameswari (2002) in Posigha (2016) state that the library profession has begun to develop a marketing approach due to information explosion, technology revolution and escalating cost. There is so much competition in the information industry today. Other information outfits like the Internet Service Providers (ISPs), the huge book vendors, online dealers, information brokers are all there competing with libraries today. This was not so initially. Nwosu (2017) explains that the library in the past owned exclusively everything it had from print to audio-visual materials and was in total control of the information materials it provided. Information in today's world is a commodity every sector is fighting to have full control of. This may not be unconnected to the financial profit that information pulls.

Relevance has to be maintained by the libraries the world over. This is an era where funds are dwindling so fast against the libraries. They must put up a gallant fight to maintain recognition in the information industry. The image of librarians is equally at stake. If the libraries go extinct, then librarians may have to scout for jobs elsewhere. The need for librarians to market the profession in every way they can has arisen. They ought to showcase the profession and be proud of what they do.

Target Customers (library users)

Ifijeh et al. (2016) opined that the library should have knowledge of needs of its target audience and design suitable products, services and means to inform, motivate and serve the

market. It is the duty of the library to identify the group of users that consume their kind of information. The university or academic library for instance should be able to meet the needs of its target audience effectively. Information provided for their target audience should cover information for students, lecturers and faculty members.

Libraries must define their users, the services the users appreciate most and make such services available, define their information needs and what their core values are. There are other competitive information providers like online vendors and Internet Service Providers (ISPs) and for this reason; libraries should realize that it is big business to have competitors that are ready to go the extra mile to throw libraries out of business. We are in the world of Information Technology and libraries just have to move with this trend by taking advantage of the existence of this technology in advancing their marketing force and ensure patronage by their target group.

Principles of Library Marketing

Ideally, there should be principles suitable to guide marketing and its management:

- The library personnel should have a strong zeal towards marketing especially now that library users have option and should be convinced why they should patronize library products and services.
- Marketing should be treated as equally important as other units are treated if the library must go far in recording patronage.
- Marketing of information products and services should be all encompassing.

PROBLEMS OF MARKETING LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Marketing is fundamental to the growth of any business and the library is not left out of this. Unfortunately, there are factors that hinder effective marketing of library and information services and products today which include the following but are not limited to only these points.

Inadequate Funding

There has never been in the history of libraries where it is recorded that library has sufficient funds to run the library. Neither can the government boast of satisfying the financial needs of the library if compared to other sectors. When allocations come in the education sector, the allocation earmarked for libraries are so small that they barely can renovate or build new infrastructure as most of the funds are used up to pay salaries. For this reason, it is very difficult for academic libraries to compete favourably with other information providers that are readily available to disseminate information to information seekers that are ever ready to pay for their services (Horsfall, 2015).

Unwillingness of the Librarians to market library and Information services and products

It is very unacceptable that librarians are reluctant to market their information products and services. Information products and services go together and so, there is no way products can be marketed without marketing the image of the librarians through the services they render. Oyedidiran and Adebayo (2015) were of the view that marketing of information products and

services in any library should be very uppermost to librarians and other information professionals that are responsible for the use of their libraries.

Poor Image of the Libraries

A research carried out by MacArthur Foundation (2005) in Ifijeh et al. (2015) has its report that students and faculty members perceive the library as a weak unit of the university and unable to support research. This may not be unconnected with the fact there are so many obsolete materials in some libraries that should have been ideally archived, although a few libraries have gone digital. It also appears that most people see free information as lacking quality, they will have less regard especially from the source. This is typical of the Nigerian situation because they do not regard anything that is not paid for.

Most Librarians Lack Marketing Skills

In this time and age, Joseph and Parameswari (2002) express their disappointments as they claim that most librarians only know the traditional form of acquisition, cataloguing, classification, user education and shelving. Librarianship in the eyes of all should exceed all this in this era of information technology and revolution.

No Marketing Policy

It is rather embarrassing that most libraries in this heat of competition do not have a marketing plan that should contain how their products and services can be advertised. Marketing policies are meant to guide the management from present to future and also help them re-strategize when the need arises, but unfortunately most libraries are not guided by this policy.

Poor Access to Information Technology

Most libraries apart from university libraries and special libraries that benefit from intervention funds and grants do not have the funds to be automated. They do not also have internet facilities because accessing funding for this has become a Herculean task. Closely related to this is the lack of facilities to market library services which include media components like projectors and screen for advertising products and services.

Ineffective use of Marketing Tools

Marketing tools include face caps, t-shirts, key holders and every attractive item that depicts the image of the library. Bankers and other professionals use this as a strong marketing strategy to boost the image of their various organizations. Unfortunately, most libraries are yet to see the need why they should explore this medium of marketing to advertise the products and services. It is often said that what a man sees leaves a long lasting memory in his heart.

PROSPECTS OF MARKETING LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES AND PRODUCTS

There are marketing prospects as discovered in marketing the products and services of librarianship:

- Introduction to Information Communication and Technology (ICT) has opened more opportunities and broadened the scope for marketing of library and information services and products. This has encouraged more people to come into the profession and will equally give more opportunities for creativity on the part of intending librarians to market the products and their professional skills.
- The act of marketing library products and services is swiftly bringing librarians and what they do to the limelight.
- Librarianship is bringing a lot of professionals far and wide together through with the inventions of various bodies and association like Nigerian Library Association (NLA), West African Library Association WALA and International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA).

WAY FORWARD

There are many things that the profession can put in place to remedy the problems of the library today:

Libraries should create marketing plans and strategize

It has become undisputable that if libraries will move on with diverse competitions facing them, then they will have to strategize to include better marketing plan that can convince the discouraged library users and intending ones to see the need to use libraries. This plan should include a policy that will highlight a well-packaged vision and mission statement that will appear convincing to library users.

Staff Training

This is sine qua none to librarians. It is because most librarians are lacking in ICT skills, which explains why ICT firms and industries seem to be taking over their jobs. The library staff should agitate for training to enhance their competence and confidence in the field of ICT. It is time librarians acquired professional marketing skills. The curriculum of Library and Information Science should be reviewed to accommodate marketing courses. Librarians at this time cannot afford to wait for the government. They can take up some online training in the field and pay some fees to obtain these training. No knowledge is lost.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The study has revealed the problems and prospects of marketing library and information products and services. Despite the fact that the concept of marketing information products and services has not fully permeated librarianship as expected, it is hoped that the prospects recorded in this study will pave the way for more meaningful marketing that will take the profession to a higher dimension.

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