

Challenges in the Library Marketing Effort in a Knowledge Society

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Abstrak

Artikel ini menggariskan cabaran perpustakaan dalam usaha pemasaran masakini. Tidak kira apa jua jenis perpustakaan, inisiatif pemasaran perlu diberi lebih penekanan. Perpustakaan merupakan pusat pengumpulan maklumat dan ilmu pengetahuan di mana ia boleh dicapai dan disebar. Adalah tidak wajar sekiranya maklumat yang dikumpul ini tidak dapat digunakan apabila ia diperlukan, bukan kerana kekurangan maklumat, tetapi kerana ia tidak diketahui. Walaupun pengguna mengetahui peranan perpustakaan tetapi pendedahan tentang penyediaan maklumat yang cepat dan tepat tidak diberikan perhatian. Oleh itu, golongan profesional perpustakaan iaitu pustakawan bertanggungjawab mempromosi dan memaklumkan kepada pengguna. Ini hanya boleh dilakukan melalui inisiatif pemasaran, bukan hanya untuk menyebarkan maklumat, tetapi untuk mendidik dan menggalakkan pengguna menggunakan perpustakaan dengan berkesan. Cabaran dalam proses pemasaran perpustakaan dan cadangan untuk mengurangkan jurang maklumat menggunakan perubahan minda, perancangan strategik, pendekatan proses kejuruteraan semula dan pembangunan kepimpinan dibincangkan.

Abstract

This paper outlines the challenges in the marketing effort that libraries are facing nowadays. Regardless of library categories, the marketing initiative needs to be considered with great care. The library is known to be a central avenue where information and knowledge are housed which later can be retrieved and disseminated for fair use. It is unsatisfactory if the assembled resources could not be used when needed; not because of inadequate information but because it is not made known to the interested community. Although people know what a library normally possess, the knowledge has never been extensive in providing matched and timely information. The library professional personnel who are librarians or knowledge workers, are therefore responsible for promoting and informing the library patrons. This can only be done via marketing initiatives not only to inform but to educate and encourage patrons to use the library effectively. Challenges in the library marketing process and suggestions to reduce the information gap using mind set change, strategic planning, business process reengineering approach, and leadership development are discussed.

Introduction

Efforts in library marketing has to be taken seriously. In today's knowledge society environment, this could spark a threatening situation to libraries regardless of the nature of service they offer. This is brought about by the rapid change in information keeping and seeking which grows along with the advancement of technology.

Marketing library services can be said to be a must especially in the current society which is known as the 'Net Generation'. Jia, Nesta and Fialkoff (2006) noted that the majority of people prefer using search engines to library resources. This has alarmed librarians who see libraries in danger of losing their place as the primary information provider to academics and the general public. They blamed failures in marketing strategy as the main cause.

Library customers are individuals and each person's or organization's needs may be different (Rowley, 2003). As such, libraries need to know their customers' profiles well before any marketing effort can be taken. Different categories of library services serve different clientele and may need different approach of marketing strategy. An academic library may focus mainly on its academia requirements whereas a special library will concentrate on services that are in line with its organizational culture. But in both cases, efforts to make known what libraries can offer to the customers is paramount.

Therefore, what is marketing? Do libraries really need it?. Burrow (2006) categorized business use marketing as directly involving major marketing activities or with limited marketing role. Libraries indirectly falls under the last category. Nevertheless, marketing is very much in need as only through marketing, satisfaction exchange between business and consumers is created. Marketing is said to be the creation and maintenance of satisfying exchange relationships. Robert Wientzen, CEO of the Direct Marketing Association stated that "the center of the marketing universe is the customer. It's the customer who sets the rules and the marketer who responds".

The role of library marketing is in great demand although libraries may not be profit making orientated. Certain special libraries or information centers may sell their information as commodities depending on the nature of business or service offered to their customers.

Marketing the Library

The library is known to be the central avenue for storing primary resources, information and knowledge. Depending on its nature of service, the collection varies depending on the size and policy of the organization. Kumar (2006) mentioned that the main function of a library is the collection and preservation of knowledge for its dissemination to all.

a. Libraries in an alarming stage

Libraries nowadays are competing with search engines like Google whereby people prefer to use the latter in terms of getting quick information. A study by Xiaoying Dong reported by Jia and Nesta (2006) has shown that 77% of academic users in China use an Internet search engine. The same study also reported that even Google Scholar brings over seven times more visitors to the *British Medical Journal* than does PubMed (Giustini, 2005; Jia and Nesta, 2006). Although it is unique to the Internet, conference proceedings, scholarly repositories and government data can be obtained via the Internet now.

The fact is alarming to professional workers or librarians as people choose the credibility and accuracy of the search engines which offer speed, convenience, ease of use, cost effectiveness and reliability (OCLC Study, 2005; Jia and Nesta, 2006). Many people and organizations seem to be convinced that most answers needed are available online via Google without questioning the authority or validity of the information retrieved (Pantry and Griffiths, 2005). This is very much in line with the OCLC 2005 study where people ignore the credibility and accuracy of the information versus the speed and ease.

The fast changing technology has made people impatient in waiting to get information at the time it is needed. Thus, libraries may have to shift themselves from collection development to content management, implying that libraries should offer more direct access to non-owned resources (Budd and Harole, 1997; Jia and Nesta, 2006). Otherwise, libraries may be left behind as their existence may be irrelevant to the customers' needs. Since the market has changed, the library's function should also change from that of collection holder to that of an information gateway. If customers find libraries of no help, whatever resources at the library might be wasted. Although good indexing terms and catalogues are provided, information can only be circulated slowly and narrowly. Millions of pages of full-text resources can now be easily accessed electronically and remotely without the customers' physical presence at the library. This is a great challenge to libraries as they cannot hold the customers' retention and loyalty.

b. Libraries have constraints

Although the changing technology has affected libraries very much, not all libraries can accommodate to the changes instantaneously. Many things need to be considered which again depend on the type of organization climate. Academic libraries may adapt accordingly as to suit the needs of their academia. Public libraries may

also change depending on the government policies. However, special libraries depend on their company's vision and mission.

A good example which can be highlighted is in the context of academic libraries per se. Studies show that students prefer to use the Internet for searching rather than the library resources like online databases for journal articles. In several local universities, there is still a limitation in use of online databases from remote areas. Students can only access within the campus area. This has inconvenienced students especially when they need to search information during the semester break. If they are given access from remote areas, they can easily login to the library's website from home as they are usually not residing in the campus. Students therefore, turn away from using library online databases no matter how well they are indexed. The only fast and easy way to access information anywhere anytime is through the search engines.

In this case, the universities may need to purchase an Easy Proxy with a connecting system and access privacy outside the campus. In the long run, the cost of providing such a service is much more lower when compared to students having to look through the unreliable Internet resources. In the lifelong learning process, students should be given alternatives. The current Net Generation, people who are positive thinkers, are confident in their search abilities. Their world is the Internet, relies on multimedia, convenient, visual, immediate and non-linear. This is very much in contrast with the library world which is organized, hierarchical, factual, time-consuming and structured (Harley et al., 2001; Jia and Nesta, 2006). Thus, libraries have become unpopular.

A special library may have an opposite view. They are much more dependent on the company's overall strategy. Certain special libraries are very active in providing information to their clients, for example bank libraries. Resources kept are very much tailored to the needs of the staff and clients of the bank. As they are special in their own content, there is no doubt that the library management is more focused on the content rather than the collection itself. However, their marketing strategy may be limited to their own community unless they are aware of shouldering some social responsibilities like what the Petroleum Resource Centre does. By organizing the Special Libraries Conference, Petronas managed to gather resources of people and materials to be used, circulated and shared within the community.

Library Marketing in the Information/ Knowledge Society

According to Wallis (2003), an information society is a situation where information and communication technologies are of increasing importance in many aspects of our lives and where the ability to access and comprehend information are valuable skills. A significant feature of the information society is the growth of the Internet and the World Wide Web.

Information seekers today have far greater opportunities to carry out research on their own. Individual libraries cater to the unique needs of their own patrons, the particular strengths and mission of their parent institutions, and the constraints of local staffing, budget and space configurations (Sowards, 2003). Sowards also mentioned that the complexity of satisfying patron needs is only made more complicated by the ability of these patrons to tap a widening range of public and commercial sources on the World Wide Web.

a. Library marketing effort

In order to be parallel with the technology advancement, serious marketing efforts must be strategically outlined in libraries. Regardless of the nature of service, libraries must not be ignorant about what marketing is all about. Libraries are discouraged to be complacent and think that customers or users will visit their brick and mortar building to acquire information. This is not always the case as competition with the Internet is very much stiffer. The libraries can attract their users to return back using new strategies over the Internet. Turning libraries to click and mortar institutions accessible 24 x 7 x 365 would be great.

b. Who are responsible for marketing?

Knowledge workers are the people who will be responsible in handling the marketing effort and are librarians or any information/knowledge managers. As Peter Drucker, a famous management guru had coined the term in his book entitled "*Landmarks of Tomorrow*" way back in 1959, where he had foreseen how knowledge workers can be a great human asset in an organization. Without their role and expertise, any intelligent business decision of an organization can be jeopardized. Therefore, librarians have to move on.

Reducing the Information Gap

Librarians need to take one step ahead and get rid of their complacency. Kalan (2002) focused on the image that libraries and librarians portray which have been sabotaging themselves with their own 'professional' image. She brought in Kotler's view of 'what is a customer' as follows to name a few:

"A Customer is the most important person ever in this office... in person or by mail."

"A Customer is not dependent on us... we are dependent on him."

"A Customer is not an interruption of our work... he is the purpose of it. We are not doing a favor by serving him..., he is doing us a favor by giving us the opportunity to do so."

"A Customer is not someone to argue or match wits with. Nobody ever won an argument with a Customer"

"A Customer is a person who brings us his wants. It is our job to handle them profitably to him and to ourselves."

Are librarians ready for the change? It is necessary as Bundy (2003) has quoted from Kirkpatrick (2001) that new learning technologies suggest new groupings, new communications patterns, new interactions and newer structures. Changing the way of thinking therefore is paramount.

Strategic planning

Strategic planning could be done in various ways using the most suitable approach affordable by the organizations. For example, the European Union has decided that some kind of quality management system should be established in its higher education institutions. The quality management system has been used as a tool for leadership within the library whereby it improves the library's processes and markets the library within the university (Juntunen et al., 2005).

Other local examples can be taken from the Tun Hussein Onn Library at the Sunway University College which implemented the QMS with the system called Integrated Quality Management (IQM) for its ISO documentation. While many other established academic libraries in Malaysia, including Universiti Malaysia Terengganu, use the library management systems as an essential tool to support effective customer service and stock management.

The focus of such system is on maintenance, development and control of the documents in the collection (Rowley, 1998). No matter how good the system is, without the cooperation of the knowledge workers to effectively inform users what they possess, it will be of no use. In other words, communication with library users is crucial and libraries can only feel elated if they have done a good marketing job.

Other strategic planning to be considered for libraries could also be the business process re-engineering approach, Kaizen (which is more people oriented), change management, leadership development or any other business strategies suitable to the organization/library's vision and mission. The president of the US Notre Dame University, Thomas Hesburg, observed that:

"The very essence of leadership is that you have to have a vision. It's got to be a vision you articulate profoundly on every occasion. You can't blow an uncertain trumpet" (Bundy, 2003).

Libraries do have visions and so do librarians. The only question is how good do they blow the trumpet to be aligned with the current music being played.

Customers' profiling

Various ways of customers' profiling such as library surveys, public relations activities or going out from the library's territory and zooming directly on customers could help any library to identify what users really want. In an information or knowledge society, nothing can be done without knowing its end purpose. It is always good to serve what is being requested within the time frame. Any information will be of no value once it is given not in a timely manner. The user may be unable to add value into his/her life because information sought is obtained after its due time.

In academic libraries, proper marketing battles need to be chosen carefully to promote resources. It is also important that services should be promoted only when the library is prepared to support demands for increased services or when the demand for a service is clearly diminishing (Neuhaus and Snowden, 2003). The same can be applied to special libraries prior to eliciting any marketing strategy within their own vicinity of users. They should coin up the strategy along with their goal as the market segment is very specific. In the end, the profit margin need to be looked at.

Conclusion

Although most libraries are non-profit organizations, the value of the resources is worthy and can afford to give value added service to their customers. However, being in competition with other medium of information such as the Internet and search engines, libraries must be more pro-active in working out the best strategy to minimize the gap. This can only be done through the awareness of their own staff; knowledge workers or librarians who play a vital role in ensuring that marketing effort is done successfully. Nobody works alone, therefore it has to be a team effort. Understanding the whole scenario is important to get a clear picture of where libraries are heading to. The existing and future generations may not wait a single second unoccupied with ever changing technologies. Libraries and librarians have to encounter these challenges upfront to keep them moving with the time and stay relevant. More importantly, libraries need to survive for the future.

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