

Marketing of Information Products and Services for Special Libraries in Bangladesh

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Abstract

Marketing approach aims at determining the needs, wants and demands of the target clients through designing and delivering appropriate products and services more effectively for the purpose of achieving organizational goals and objectives. This paper is an attempt to conceptualize the strategic approaches of marketing mix to library and information centers. Has also been drawn up a model plan of marketing for special library systems of Bangladesh. Finally, it recognizes some benefits of proposed marketing plan.

Keywords : Libraries in Bangladesh, Marketing, Information Products, Services

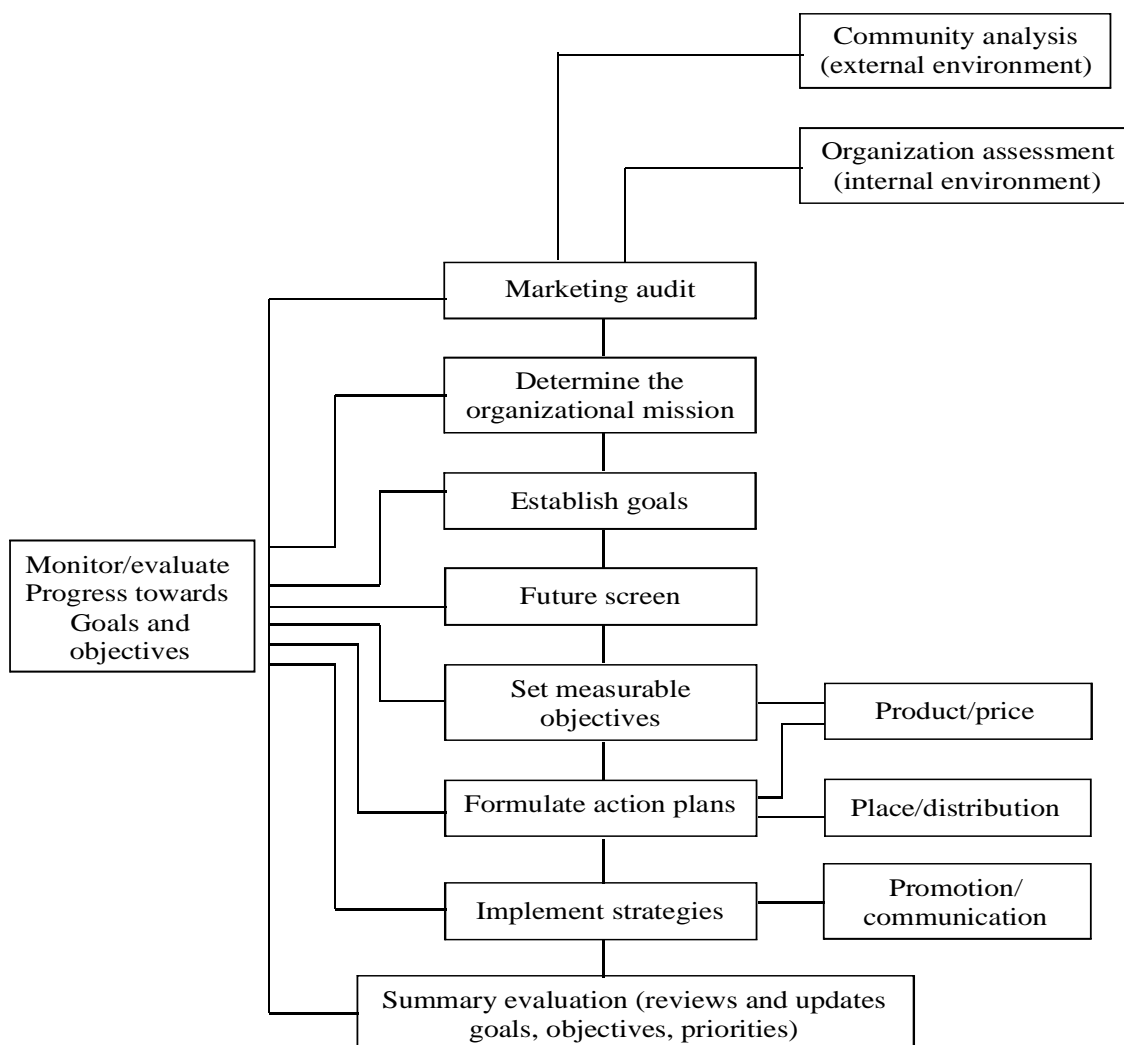
1. Introduction

Marketing is a means of ensuring that libraries, librarians and librarianship are integrated into both today's and tomorrow's emerging global culture. Marketing is not separate from good practice (Smith, 1995). Marketing offers both a theory and a process by which libraries can link products, results, and roles. Marketing can assist libraries in determining their future and in identifying quality products – services, programs and materials. A marketing audit and the resulting plan can contribute to a library's ability to find a niche in the present as well as in the future and to fill that niche by an optimal allocation of resources. A marketing orientation can assist libraries in defining their role and in guaranteeing their future. Marketing provides a theoretical framework within which to address the specific library and information science questions facing public, school, special and academic libraries in both the public and private sectors. What the library will look like and what it will offer as products can be determined through the use of modern marketing theory and practice (Bushing, 1995).

2. The Marketing Approach

Marketing approach can be used to make the existing planning process of a library more accurate. D. E. Weingand indicates the following fusion of planning and processes of marketing (Weingand, 1995).

Figure – 1: Elements of Planning and Marketing Process



Source: Planning and Marketing Processes by D. E. Weingand

Once this fusion of planning and marketing takes place, a time would come when the annual reports of libraries and information centres would look like that of any business organization indicating the targets set at the beginning of the year and the performance achieved rather than, a mere indication of how many books have been acquired, how many have been catalogued, and how many new members came into the fold. Moreover, organizational planning and performance evaluation will lead to individual staff planning and performance evaluation which, in turn, would lead to the much needed vitality in the information profession and management.

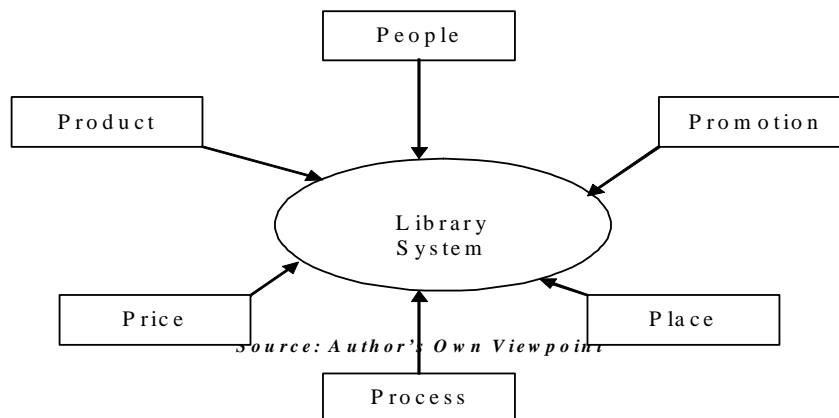
This synthesis of planning and marketing and its positive aftereffects would lead to the organic and dynamic sustenance, and growth of libraries and information centres. At least, a map of the organizational functioning would be available to guide the information managers to monitor and interfere as and when needed.

2.1 Marketing Mix for Library & Information Center

There are four key business concepts that provide the basis for marketing thought and action in the nonprofit environment which are considered (Shapiro, 1981):

1. The self-interest aspect of the transaction or exchange, in which both the buyer and the seller believe they are receiving greater value than they are giving up;
2. The marketing task, which stresses the importance of satisfying customer needs. However, the typical non-profit organization operates in a more complex manner than a profit-oriented organization. The non-profit organization has two constituencies: a client to whom to provide goods or services, and donors from whom it receives resources.
3. The marketing mix, the elements or tasks used in marketing, usually referred to as the four P's identified by McCarthy (Webber, 1999), i.e. product, price, promotion and place. Shapiro re-categorizes the four Ps for the purposes of a non-profit organization as advertising and product policies.

Figure – 2: Marketing Mix as Applied to Library & Information Center



Source: Author's Own Viewpoint

- ◆ **Product (service):** Defining the characteristics (quality, design, reputation, credibility, authority) of library product or service to meet the needs of the customers (users).

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- ◆ **Price:** Deciding on a pricing strategy. If the library decides not to charge for a given service, it is useful to realize that this is still a pricing strategy. Identifying the total cost of the user is a part of the price element.
 - ◆ **Promotion:** This includes advertising, personal selling (e.g. attending exhibitions), sales promotions (e.g. special offers), and atmospherics (creating the right impression through the working environment). Public Relation is included within promotion by many marketing people.
 - ◆ **Place:** Looking at the location (e.g. library), distribution channel (where a service is delivered), geographical coverage, telecommunications, travels, etc.

We can extend the number of P's – the two, which are usually seen as useful additions for services (including information services) are:

- ◆ **People:** The essential ingredient (staff/personnel) for providing effective information services among users. Good information services are not likely to be delivered by people who are unskilled or de motivated.
 - ◆ **Process:** The way in which the user gets hold of the service (e.g. the way in which a document or a search can be ordered). The library or information centre should get ready to provide information services for users in a convenient way (e.g. the help of information technology may be taken if need).
4. The idea of distinctive competence: an organization concentrates on what it does best because doing so maximizes profits. For non-profit organizations, this means evaluating their roles in terms of the consumers they serve, the product they offer, and their own distinctive competence – those things that they do better than anyone else.

These four marketing concepts are closely related. Self-interest forces the consumer to search out the best way to fulfill his needs and the organization to search out the most efficient way to satisfy the consumer.

3. Marketing of Information Products and Services for Special Libraries in Bangladesh

Marketing of information products and services is a new concept for libraries and information centres of Bangladesh. Most of the special libraries here are confined to their activities and services as nonprofit nature. In a practical viewpoint, they need to be dynamic, income generating and profit-making service organizations for collecting any kind of resources and providing effective information services to users. Unfortunately, a large number of special libraries have seriously been suffering with shortage of finance. They have also been neglected by the higher/decision making authority of the country. Some of them are not getting any financial budget from the government for purchasing

reading resources and other related materials. Because of that the special libraries and information centres of Bangladesh essentially need to create their own income generating funds for maintaining library functions and activities effectively. For performing these activities a library needs to be equipped with all kinds of electronic and IT facilities, trained manpower, and proper maintenance. By this process, a special library or information centre will be able to earn a large amount of money at the end of the year.

However, the special libraries of Bangladesh should be prepared themselves as soon as possible to set up a full-fledged division of marketing and customers services to keep the users community constantly with the latest information on new services by publicity and advertising materials and participating in various exhibitions, fairs, etc. Otherwise, they will not come out from their traditional nature of information systems and services.

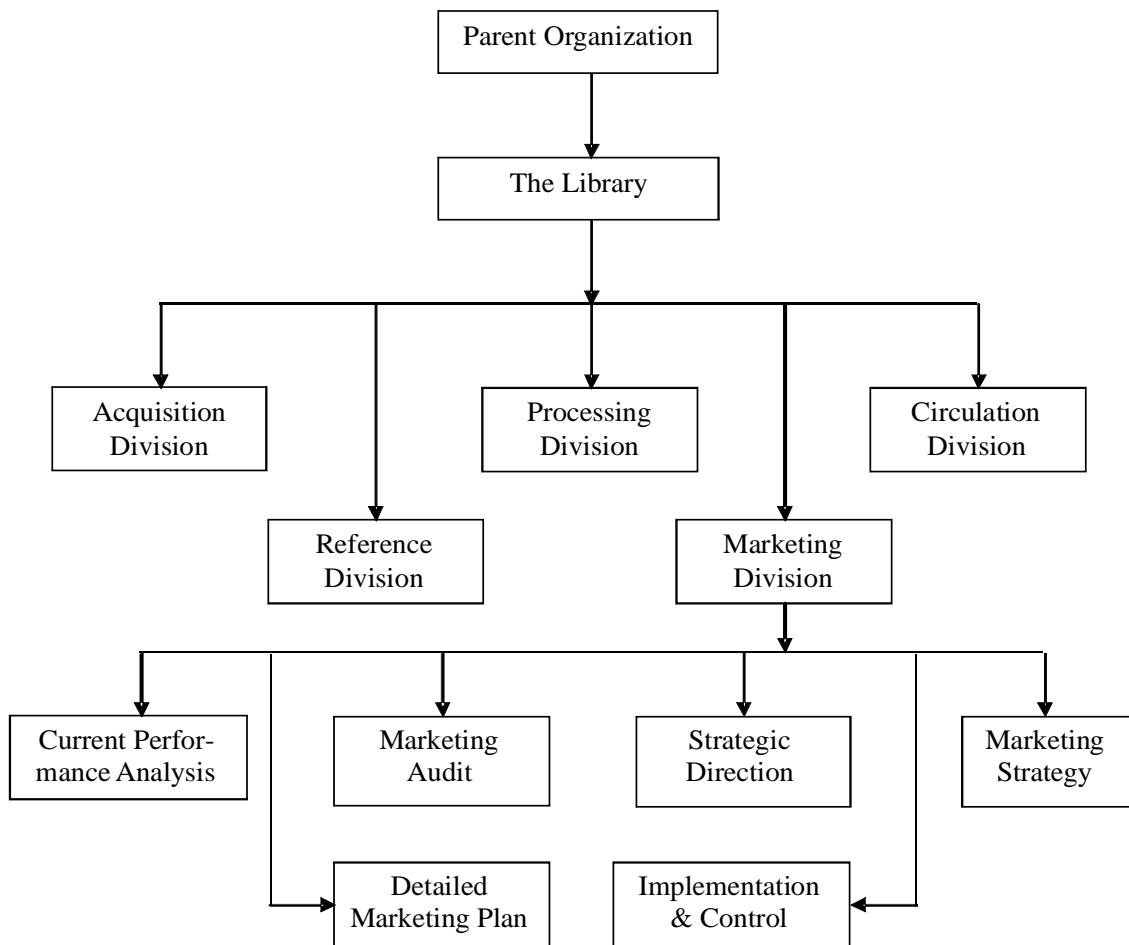
4. Proposed Plan for Special Libraries in Bangladesh

The special libraries and information centres have been reflected as social and non-profit service oriented organizations providing information to their members from a long time before. Their traditional functions include selection, acquisition, storage, processing, circulation as well as referral and reference functions and activities. Over a period of time, due to change in the nature of demands by users, libraries have extended their functions to include documentation and document delivery systems. The libraries have also been initiated to make them as profit making organizations providing effective information products and services to users. It may be noted that many functions in a library or information centre are back office functions. Only limited members of the staff interact with customers and that too, mostly at the initiative of the customers themselves. There would be hardly any library/information centre in Bangladesh where there is a function/section called marketing.

In the recent time, the cost-effective information is to be provided by the special and some academic libraries as a service for application of modern principles of marketing management. However, the concept of marketing of information products and services in Bangladesh can be said to be still in infancy. Few months before, we have conducted a survey on 40 leading special libraries in Bangladesh on their present status of marketing activities of information products and services. The most important findings of the study are that about one-fourth of the surveyed libraries have gradually been developing annual marketing plan. In fact, the ultimate numbers of libraries do not perform any marketing functions and activities. Recently, a few number of special libraries (BANSDOC, DISC of ICDDR,B, CIRDAP Library, CDL, BIDS-LDC, SAIC, AIC, etc.) have started a slight marketing activities in their operations and services.

A model of modern special library systems has been shown below:

Figure – 3: Plan for Modern Special Library Systems



Source: Author's Own Viewpoint

A marketing plan provides the librarian or information manager with a blue print for identifying and targeting opportunities and user groups and for the cost effective supply of specific information products and services to the identified user groups. Marketing plan may be prepared for specific product(s) or service(s) as well as for the library or information centre as a whole. In preparing a marketing plan for a product or service, or for the library or information centre as an entity, the library staff must be prepared to go through several steps and processes which are (Gumbs, 1999):

1. Analyze the Current Performance: The first step in developing a marketing plan is to analyze the current performance of the information centre.

2. Marketing Audit: Having understood the current situation, the next step is to conduct a marketing audit.
3. Strategic Direction: The findings of the marketing audit are used in the third step to decide the strategic direction for the information unit.
4. Marketing Strategy: Development of a marketing strategy follows as the fourth step.
5. Detailed Marketing Plan: A detailed marketing plan is then prepared in this step.
6. Implementation and Control: This is the last and final step follows for developing a marketing plan.

The steps, in developing a marketing plan, are applicable to all libraries and information centres – whether or not the centre is fully supported or partially supported by government funding. Similarly, these steps are applicable where the clients being served are academics, industrialists or any other professionals or members of the general public. Depending on the particular environment in which the centre functions, marketing objectives may include increasing the size of the clientele or user group, expanding the information services offered and recovering full or partial costs for operational expenses. Finally, how to execute the steps have been shown below:

4.1 Analyze the Current Performance

The performance of the special library or any other organization should be measured with regard to the objectives or the target identified. For a large proportion of libraries and information centres, the specific objectives and targets may not be recognized. However, it is difficult to develop specific targets/goals so as to not only measure the performance of the information centre but also set out the available resources in the best possible manner.

The parameters, used for evaluating performance of any library or information centre as a whole or of its products and services in specific segments, may be:

- ◆ Number/proportion of total users served;
- ◆ Number of units of product or service provided;
- ◆ Total revenue generated;
- ◆ Total revenue generated, net of costs; and
- ◆ Image of the library or information centre and its products in target segments.

4.2 Conduct Marketing Audit

Marketing audit is a critical assessment of the external and the internal environment of the information centre. It provides significant insights into the opportunities and the threats facing the centre, and its

strengths and weaknesses vis-à-vis competition. The following steps help in conducting marketing audit:

(a) Identifying Organizational Goals

The most important step in conducting the marketing audit is to determine the marketing goals and policy of the parent organization. The information centre's programs must therefore, conform to the overall policy and direction of the parent organization. Specifically, the following information needs to be assessed:

- ◆ The target sectors for the institution and the information unit.
- ◆ The corporate image which the organization is seeking to build.
- ◆ The corresponding actions, which will lead to the development of the image, e.g. promotional mechanisms, pricing strategies.
- ◆ The goals, which should be attainable within a given timeframe.

(b) Analysis of Institution/Library and Users

The major purpose of the institution/library and user analysis is to ultimately decide on (i) which set of segments to focus on, and (ii) which set of products/services to offer to them. The output of this analysis is a two-by-two grid where one dimension represents the different groups of users; the other dimension represents the different sets of products and services.

(c) Analysis of Business Climate

An analysis of the business climate must take into consideration those factors, which together, create and influence the level of investment by clients, by the parent organization itself and the competitors. These include socio-economic, cultural, political, regulatory and technological factors. At all times, these factors should be examined only in terms of the influence they can apply on the marketing of information products/services. This analysis can provide an initial indication of possible opportunities for the development of new products and services.

(d) Analysis of Competitions

Competitor behaviour profoundly influences any marketing plan. The competitor analysis helps the information unit to assess its own strengths and weaknesses against those of the competing products/services. Information on competitors should include, the types of products/services being offered, the level of fees being asked, the location of these services, customer access to them, major target groups for these products/services, the mechanisms used in the promotion of these services and any perceived strengths which the competitors possess.

(e) Analysis of Internal Environment

An analysis of the internal environment requires an objective review of the systems and procedures used to support the marketing initiative, examination of the performance of products/services and an assessment of the availability of resources to the unit. This assessment must be done taking into consideration the characteristics of the external environment and the resources and strategies in use by the centre's competitors.

4.3 Select Strategic Direction

This section deals with the selection of a strategic direction for a library or information centre. The steps involved are:

- ◆ Develop objectives
- ◆ Generate strategic options
- ◆ Identify critical success factors for achieving the objectives through the selected strategies.

(a) Develop Marketing Objectives

Marketing objectives give direction for the formulation of marketing strategies and the marketing plan. Marketing objectives for the library or information centre must be determined with reference to the marketing objectives of the parent organization, the SWOT analysis and the opportunities assessed. In addition to setting marketing objectives for the information unit as a whole, objectives must also be set for each product and service in turn. To establish accountability, marketing objectives must be stated in such terms, that a quantifiable comparison can be made based on the original objectives and actual implementation.

(b) Generate Strategic Options

Portfolio analysis is a useful tool to generate strategic options for any organization and its products and services. Portfolio analysis is an examination of the group of products and services offered by the library or information centre. Each product or service must stand objective scrutiny to determine its performance against competing products. A portfolio analysis usually results in a revision of the 'basket' of services and products provided, when there are volatile changes either within the organization itself or in the external environment.

(c) Identify Critical Success Factors

The process of identifying CSFs (Critical Success Factors) assists the head of the library or information centre and their staff in defining inputs, which are critical to the achievement of marketing objectives. Within the context of a marketing plan, CSFs can be defined as resources, which have a direct influence on the successful implementation of the plan. The CSFs could be different for each strategic

option generated for every product/service/market of the library/information service. These could be in the areas of base resources, technology resources, human resources, systems and processes of generating products/services, delivery as well as specific elements of marketing plan (like product, price, promotion and distribution).

4.4 Select Marketing Strategies

Marketing strategy can be defined as the means of achieving the marketing objectives. It must be within the broad strategic direction determined, while ensuring that the CSFs are taken care of by the organization. The strategy can be devised for both, the library/ information centre as a whole and for each product or service.

4.5 Detailed Marketing Plan

A marketing plan must be prepared for each product/service. After a review of the situational analysis, objectives for the product/service need to be set and a marketing plan developed. The marketing plan should contain details, which will allow it to become a blueprint for launching the product/service in its market, i. e. the position to be achieved in the specific target groups, for which it was prepared. The marketing plan should not contain information only about the product, price, place and promotion. More details should be given on other elements, e.g. specific clientele for the product, the benefits or unique attributes of the product, competitors and their perceived advantages/disadvantages, marketing strategy for positioning the product within the target group and criteria for evaluating results. The marketing plan should include the following: (a) Executive Summary; (b) Current Marketing Situation; (c) SWOT Analysis; (d) Marketing Objectives; (e) Description of Market, Product and Promotional Options; (f) Action Plan; (g) Revenue and Expense Statement and (h) Controls.

4.6 Implementation and Control

The implementation of the marketing plan must be evaluated and adjusted as necessary, in order to achieve the objectives of the organization. After the marketing mix and the promotional mix have been defined, it will be necessary to:

- (a) Prepare operational budgets
- (b) Prepare action plans to accomplish targets
- (c) Develop measures for evaluating performance

(a) Prepare Operational Budgets

Budgeting is a process in which plans are made for the future and expressed in the form of income and cash flow statements. Operational budgets provide advance information on goals for income

and the costs or expenses, which must be incurred to attain these goals. These operational goals, in themselves, provide a yardstick against which actual performance can be compared and where necessary, remedial action taken.

(b) Prepare Action Plan to Accomplish Targets

Each product or services will require an implementation plan, which must take into account each step, which is necessary for realization of the marketing targets. The more details expressed in the plan, the smoother the implementation process will be both in terms of staff performance and management expectations.

(c) Develop Measures for Evaluating Performance

When the marketing plan is completed, an executive summary should be prepared. The executive summary of the marketing plan for the information centre will follow the same approach, paying attention to the corporate targets set for the information centre, the strategies for achieving them and the evaluation mechanisms for assessing performances. The principles of developing a marketing plan can be adopted by information managers/librarians in academic, industrial, public sector institutions or non-governmental organizations.

5. Benefits

Successful marketing includes the art of deciding that strategy/ technique is used in different situation. As non-profit-making organizations, library and information centers cannot avoid marketing practices. Although libraries/information centers as non-profit organizations have three constituencies, e.g., clients to whom they provide services, the parent institution from whom they receive funds and donor agencies; but they should market their services for the following reasons:

- a. Marketing enables librarian or information manager to understand the real needs of users for taking good management decisions, which will in turn help in providing maximum information services to users more efficiently and effectively.
- b. Librarian or information manager is not only interested for the people who do use the services regularly. He is also interested in non-user groups. Marketing play a vital role to identify the information needs of non-users and helps to provide them with necessary information.
- c. Librarians and information managers need to present their services as an indispensable part of the organization and try to justify the claim that their clients/users cannot do their job efficiently or effectively without a library service. In this way, marketing techniques will help libraries and information services receive more funding from their patrons.
- d. Marketing may help to improve the image of the library and information profession through collection of revenue performing different services to users.

A well developed marketing library and information services program will bring the following benefits (Kumar & Lohia, 1998):

- a. Improved satisfaction of the users/customers;
- b. Extension of service to potential users and thereby enlargement of the customer circle;
- c. Efficient use of marketing resources;
- d. Improved resource attraction to the organization;
- e. Development of overall image of the library;
- f. Detailed knowledge of library services including details of cost-benefit relationship, and other pertinent information.

6. Conclusion

Application of marketing techniques is very important in improving the capabilities of library's information services towards attaining satisfaction of users. And the market philosophy also requires that library management focuses on the identification of users' needs rather than library needs. Librarians and information managers seem to be reluctant to become fully involved in marketing their information products and services and when they attempt to market their information services they neglect or fail to understand the behavior of the user. The librarians should understand the nature of information, information needs of human beings, the transfer process between people and information. Understanding of this new dimension of library and information services will help concerned policy makers in formulating appropriate plans and programs to make the library and information services most effective.

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