Application of Customer Relationship Management in Libraries

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Abstract

CRM (Customer Relationship Management) is inevitable in a competitive business world. The customer is a king in the service sector and any failures to understand his/her demand would shake the sustainability in the market. The purpose of the paper is to understand the application of CRM in libraries and why librarian should implement the marketing concept of CRM in the library. Library automation, internet and World Wide Web has enhanced the expectations of users for providing the better services by acquiring and making the e-resources accessible within their library and having hyperlinks on their library web pages. The goal of CRM is to optimize management of customer information needs and interests to increase customer satisfaction and loyalty. Application of CRM in libraries can improve customer data and process management, customer loyalty, retention and satisfaction. CRM refers to the methods and tools which helps an organization to manage its relationship with its customer in an organized way. Relationships between the staff and the users are explored using CRM framework.

1. Introduction

Libraries are service centers with the ultimate aim of providing quality service to its customers— readers. In an era marked by profusion of information resources and services, library readers have become more knowledgeable and demanding. Like any other service industry, libraries too face challenges to meet the customer expectations, attract potential and retain present customers, with ever rising competitions. Due to constantly updating ICT gadgets and changing forms of resources, libraries always experience shortfall of budget. To keep up with budget constraints and diversity of resources, library and Information centers have to look forward to value their resources and apply business marketing strategies for better services.

In the changing pattern of economy and working environment of the institutions and organizations, keeping better relationship with internal and external clients, is vital. Customer relation is crucial for the service sector like library and information centre, which requires maximum customer care. Cut-throat competition of retaining the existing customers and adding new ones has become a challenge for all kinds of service sectors. A librarian exercises all practices to maximize utilization of existing information resources and add variety of new resources, to develop and maintain good relationship with customers. In the library and information centers, customers are at the centre place. Most of good old libraries face lack of optimum utilization of existing resources and shortage of staff, resulting into the unsuitable arrangement and poor customer-friendly services. To overcome this situation and make library as the most happening place for its users, and to build up an excellent relationship with them is the need of the time.

2.   What is CRM?

Customer Relationship Management, popularly known as CRM is a process or methodology or strategy used to learn more about customer's requirements and behaviors to develop stronger relationship with them. CRM is a strategy for studying, analyzing and learning about the customer's needs and expectations. Alternatively it can be defined as....

" A business, strategy that aims to understand, anticipates and manages the needs of an organization's current and potential customers"

" a generic term to describe processes that seek to join up a company's customer-focused information systems and to track dealings with individual customers throughout the relationship life cycle to meet individual customer's needs more effectively and efficiently" (Palmer,2005)

"CRM is an information industry term for methodologies, software, and usually internet capabilities that help an enterprise manage customer relationships in an organized way" – Digital Dictionary

 CRM essentially focuses on

1. Creating value for the customer and the organization over the longer term.

2. Giving optimum priority to customer satisfaction.

3. Measuring the overall Return on Investment (ROI) on the customer services rendered.

3.   Why CRM in Libraries?

As like any other service industries, libraries too face growing challenges in continuously meeting customer expectations and attracting and retaining the users, in light of overflowing competitions. Moreover, with the explosion of information and advancement of technologies, readers have too many choices to get information rather than visiting a library. Everything is available at the click of a mouse. With this explosion of information in every field of knowledge and choice in selection of services, satisfying user has become a challenge for librarians nowadays.

Collection, services, information products and clients of libraries varies according to its parent organization or categories, such as public, academic or research libraries. While reading habit among the students is decreasing, demands and requirements of every library user has to be satisfied and taken care of, because only satisfied reader will come again and influence potential customers of an academic library. Accordingly, libraries have to build good relationship with its users by adopting CRM, as it offers an integrated approach to achieve this through anticipating and satisfying needs of customer quickly and effectively.

4.   Application of CRM in Libraries

CRM can help libraries to materialize their goals of obtaining increased number of satisfied customers, building customer loyalty and leading to overall productivity by addressing customers need directly, improving

service quality and adding value for library customers. Implementing CRM in libraries is not just a software package installation, but building better and deeper relationships with the library customers. It requires technology oriented library process management approaches, new analytics and new strategies to enable library personnel to work harder and smarter to capture customer information. Steps of implementing CRM in libraries are;

1. Access CRM needs.

2. Understand user value, needs requirements and behaviors

3. Involve all staff affected

4. Motivate the staff willing to participate.

5. Communicate continually with interested customers

6. Avoid over specialized solutions

7. Be critical in choice of methods, tools, equipment's etc.

5. Selection of a CRM Solution

Flexibility, interactivity, product reliability, information security, economy and user friendliness are some common factors to be considered while selecting a CRM solution. Some major players in CRM software are Microsoft Dynamites CRM 3.0, SAP CRM, RightNow, Onyx software CRM, Oracle/Siebel, Salesforce.com, Amdocs, Pivotal CRM, Sage CRM Solutions , e-Synergy, Entellus CRM, Net-Suite CRM+ , Maximizer Enterprise 9 CRM , Infusion CRM etc.

Till today, most of the established CRM solutions are mainly meant for profit seeking business organizations. Besides, they are highly expensive and require high level technical expertise for customization. In this context, open source CRM solutions that are designed to cater to the needs of non-profit seeking organization can be better alternatives for services sectors like library and information centers. The following are some well known open source CRM software which allow easy to customization and can be applied in library sector too.

CiviCRM   (http:/www.civicrm.org)

MPower   (www.mpoweropen.com)

Ubercart   (http:/www.ubercart.org)

Like any other ideal services the aim to implement CRM initiative in libraries should be "Helping others succeed is a good service."

6. How CRM is useful for libraries?

 CRM can be helpful for libraries in following ways:

1. It increases the usage of library and improves capacity utilization.

2. It helps to match the tastes, preference and requirements of users with the library collection.

3. Improve loyalty and contribution of library's customer community.

4. Increase compliance and cooperation between the users and the library staff.

5. Encourage suggestions and feedback from the users for the up gradation and expansion of library services.

6. It provides superior quality services to users.

7. Get more financial benefits from management.

8. It helps libraries to gain trust and loyalty from the valued customers and helps in brand image building.

The British library's executives decided that they need a CRM system that would help record information on interactions with customers and help the organization gain a transparent view of those interactions. The team members of 5 year CRM project reveals and reflect how CRM proved beneficial to libraries.

"Streamlining all systems into one single point of customer contact has made a huge difference. We are now able to tailor our service provision in order to achieve our aims of delighting end users and reducing internal costs"

The library has strived to "delight the customer, not just go through the mechanics of responding to the customer"

"As a result of these system improvements, the customer service employees spend less time retrieving files, and can access the history of each customer every time they call. Library workers have a better understanding of the customer, because all information is in one place."

This also helps the British Library meet its objective of delivering a better level of service to customers, as queries are handled faster and more efficiently.

"The system will evolve and improve, as will our processes and understanding of what we need to do to deliver systems which helps the business progress while keeping the customer happy."

"It is vital, especially in the current climate, that we help keep our existing customer base. And with our current CRM system, we have a tool which helps facilitate that."

7.   Modes of CRM in Libraries

7.1. Value Added Services

To be a value added services provider, librarians need to offer information. They also need to add value to the reader/user contact by

♦ asking questions to understand thoroughly the user's inquiry, situation or problem before providing their services.

- determining if there is more service you can offer

- asking if the user/reader is satisfied with the services.

7.2 Quality Services

Make every effort to deliver consistent quality throughout the library. Raise the satisfaction level of your readers by offering good services consistently. Use creativity in developing attractive displays and exhibits. Promote your collection. Make sure library is clean and inviting. Keep common areas neat.

7.3 Leadership

Be seen as a friendly partner. The user should like to come to librarian for any piece of information required and librarian must be ready to satisfy any queries from any user or ensure user to make available the required information.

7.4 Perceived value

Promote what makes library special. An information service, reference services, Ask librarian services etc. and answer for any queries is to be there in the library.

7.5 Personality

Hard working, pleasant, communicative, soft spoken, respect others, updated should be the qualities in personality of a librarian.

7.6 Organizational issues

Value characteristics of trust, reliability, and great service within your library's value system. When you cannot help the customer let him/her know what else library can do for them.

8. Levels of CRM

After implementation of the CRM in library it is essential to measure and monitor the efforts done by the library towards CRM. These will certainly help librarian to improve CRM. These measures need to be followed at various levels and by various people as under:

Measuring reader/user Satisfaction

To measure user satisfaction the library staff should repeatedly think   upon the following questions

- Did I completely understand what the reader/user wanted?

- Did I present the information in a clear manner?

- Did the reader/user receive quality service?

- Is the reader/user satisfied?

Steps to measure user satisfaction:

The following statistics will help in measuring user satisfaction

♦ Number of new Readers/User per month

♦ Reader/user lost per year

♦ Average frequency of library usage year on year

♦ Cost per reader/ per user

♦ Reader/user testimonials and endorsements

♦ Reader/user satisfaction survey score

Rules to follow by Library Staff:

♦ We are here to help

♦ Fulfilling expectations

♦ Interaction= Profitability

♦ Put the book in the hand

♦ Collect information needs from user and build library collection accordingly.

♦ Try to get into the inter library sharing network

♦ Think first before saying no to user.

Questions to think about the services offered to user:

♦ What are user's needs, Expectation?

♦ How do you define an ideal service interaction?

♦ How can you Personalize interactions to foster relationship building?

♦ Do you Resolve Problems efficiently and courteously?

♦ How do we create services signals that can set us apart as caring about quality and caring about users?

♦ How do w*e get feedback from our users?*

10. Conclusion

Libraries are now operating in an ex*tremely fast-moving competitive* environment. In order to maintain their relevance to their customers, they need to actively seek to build good and sustained relationships with all kinds of users in any type of library. The librarians should try to apply CRM as a frame work for developing local services to meet local needs. The extent to which the detail of their service provision is similar or dissimilar is not the issue. Key significance is the extent to which building strong relationship with their customers led to improvements in the quality of service provision in their libraries as perceived by their core customers. It is to the right time for the libraries to adopt CRM concept and applications to secure user satisfaction in the challenging time which have been brought by proliferated information service channels, information explosion and users' higher expectation.

No other profession has faced the threat of emerging technologies as of librarian. The question of their existence has arrived; employers think that when all information is available on the internet and user has directly access to it what role librarian will play. New generation of librarians must embrace new technology and allow it to be our catalyst and not our eclipse. With the advent of commercial internet based information service libraries are coming under pressure to rethink their relationship with their users. Application of CRM could *prove one* of the *ways* out.

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