STOP EXISTING, START LIVING :
A CASE FOR RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

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ABSTRACT

Emphasises the need for mobilization of existing resources of libraries in order to generate new resources through marketing of Databases and services to user community. Discusses the expectations and urgency based on current and future developments, and examines marketable information services along with marketing strategy with suitable examples.

INTRODUCTION

India is fast emerging as a big player in the global IT market, but a large number of our libraries, including a lot many university and college libraries are still Existing-Simply Existing. They have not yet started Living. They do not have a service culture. The users are still unaware of the reasources they can benefit from, and the libraries have not yet geared-up to provide competitive services. The main problem is mentioned as the decreasing grants, and the increasing cost of materials, but the solution is resource generation, a better work culture, and a lots of efforts required on the part of LIS professionals. We need to mobilize our resources if we have to survive or else it will be too late for the LIS community to fight a loosing battle, hence the title "STOP EXISTING, START LIVING".

RESOURCE MOBILIZATION

Resources

For the libraries and information centres the term "resources" includes Documentary, Financial, Physical and Human Resources. These in turn includes many more terms, like documentary resources includes all types of information sources, and non book materials. The financial resources covers grants,donations, funds etc. The physical resources includes building, available space, furniture and equipments and the human resources include staff of all the levels.

Since many years all the libraries of our country have built up their resources and at the same time they complain about their under utilization. Now is the time to think for a while, as to what are we gaining from them ? Are they used to an optimum level ? Unfortunately the academic library resources are not used to an optimum level. The reason is because there resources are not mobilized in a desired way. Let as first have a look at what the term mobilization could convey in a broader sence.

MOBILIZATION

The progressive English Dictionary defines the word "Mobilization" as follows :

"To collect together, forces, materials, and prepare for service and use, esp in war". I have included the words "esp in war" to emphasise the current situation. We are fighting against all the odds of the information explosion and increasing costs. Hence we have to collect all our materials and forces, make them usable, and provide the much needed services to the user community. We need to make the optimum use of the resources at our command, be it the documentary resource, the financial or the human resources.

NEED FOR MOBILIZATION

We are in the midst of the "third wave" which is the information revolution, leading to a service based information society, based on the knowledge industries..... People around us are busy talking about Networks, Internet, Supercomputers, E-mail and many more such technological advances. Let us take a break from the hype about cyberspace and high technology to think about what are we going to do when the information age throws us out of the employments ?....

It is hard to accept the comment of Dr. A.Lahiri, but the unsavoury fact is that the LIS community is now endangered and still we continue to behave like the proverbial hare, close eyes and

conclude that the danger is not real after all :

WHAT IS EXPECTED

Clearly we cannot turn our backs or close our eyes towards the new technology, more over the survival of the information profession requires a positive attitude towards new technology. The best we can do is to ask ourselves what are the particular skills which we can bring to bear.

The principle skills which a trained information professional can contribute are the understanding of information and a knowledge of users needs. But this alone is not enough we will have to operate within an environment increasingly dominated by computers and communication technology. We will have to understand, in some detail how they operate and how they can be integrated into an information system. We need to understand the technology involved and be capable of taking the lead in developing cost effective information systems. If we will fail to meet the challenge, we may find ourselves reporting to the man from the computer, or telecommunications field.

WHAT IS AHEAD

The 1.5 trillion dollars global information industry, growing at a rate of 8 to 10% per annum today, will double in size in the new century with networking becoming a vital tool in managing all aspects of people's personal and business lives.

In the post-Sam Pitroda and Post-Liberalisation scenario the IT industry and the Telecom sector have evolved and India is swept by a tidal sea-change. The multinational are also here and worlds third largest pool of trained man power has become the hunting and market-place for them. Beware our information resources are also becoming a hunting ground for them. If we will not mobilize our resources, the day is not far away when Indian databases will have to be accessed through foreign agencies.

Hence the need of the hour is to generate new resources through effective mobilization of current resources and market indeginous databases and services to the users in India and abroad. Let us now see how this could be achieved.

HOW TO MOBILIZE

The existing resources could be mobilized by creating a healthy atmosphere at the work place, i.e. the library. The key factor here is the "Personal

Stock" and remember "the used key is always bright". The chief librarian or the information officer has to motivate his staff to put in their best. The organisation has to provide enough opportunities for in-service staff training and development of skills.

Various organisations and systems like INSDOC, DESIDOC, DRTC, NISSAT, INFLIBNET, etc are conducting specialised courses to train the LIS professional with new technology. During these courses the participants are exposed to moder information technology. Hence the human resources which handles other resources like documentary, physical and Financial resources needs to be trained properly. They have to learn the interpersonnel skills, computing skills and marketing skills to generate new resource. And the point to remember is that more than 68% customers quit because of an attitude of indifference towards the customer by some employees !

RESOURCE GENERATION

CONCEPT OF RESOURCE GENERATION

The generation of resources is to be broadly understood in the terms of the resources which LIS professionals are able to generate but are not used to do so. It is that activity which leads smaller units of an organization to become self dependent, i.e. they no longer depend for financial and technical support from their funding agencies. They earn financial gains by optimum utilization of their own resources in order to recover the part of investment being made on them and on the long run they might become the profit making ventures, if not, they are atleast able to run their current show on their own.

NEED FOR RESOURCE GENERATION

The era of free of cost information products and services is also becoming a past story, and the trend is towards fee based information services. The reasons being the increasing cost of documentary resources, the decreasing library budgets and the increasing operational cost of the libraries.

Some Government Organisation in India, like C.S.I.R., have issued directions that atleast one-third of the expenditure on the upkeep of the libraries in the national laboratories should be earned through fee-based services. We the LIS professionals, who are the care takers of the vast information resources, are at the advantage

position to generate further resources by treating current; existing information as "Resource" and a "Salable Commodity".

HOW TO GENERATE RESOURCES

The resources could be generated through marketing of information products and services, as their demand is increasing manifold. We have a vast potential target population in the form of the user community in India and abroad. Every library or information centre has some kind of information to offer commercially. The need is to understand the user community, their needs, and design such products and services which could be marketed to generate financial resources. And for this we have to understand the ABC of marketing.

MARKETING OF DATABASES AND SERVICES

MARKETING + GENERAL VIEW

In a broad sence marketing in the context of LIS may be defined as a concept of sensitively serving and satisfying the information needs of the user community.... In the management context it is the performance of all activities required in order to create, promote and distribute products in accordance with the present or potential customer's demand and the Firm's ability to produce. This involves a whole series of activities like developing a marketing plan, conducting market research, positioning the product applying marketing strategies via 5 ps of marketing i.e. product/price/place/promotion/ processing and finally evaluation of the market plan at periodic intervals.

MARKETABLE DATABASES

There are a number of information products and indegenous databases which do have a vast potential to be marketed both to the users in India and abroad.

Universities and R & D institution have very good library collections which are now gradually converted into various databases. The number of records in the union catalogue of Database at INFLIBNET in 1994-95 was 20,000 serials, 35,000 Theses and 4 Lacs Books, comprising of the data received from more than 50 universities.....

An estimated number of databases available in Indian libraries and Information centres is at present 118 and Indexing Abstracting services are 175. Thus a total number of 293 databases

and I & A services are ready for marketing.....

Similarly, there are a number of colleges having very good collections, which could develop their own databases with the financial assistance from various government agencies like U.G.C., D.O.E. etc. The databases and products thus developed could be made available to users identified through market research studies. User groups like academics, industrialists, managers, consultants, journalists, lawyers etc. needs to be identified for every marketable database and product. These databases could be marketed through Access fees, institutional membership, coupon schemes, on line searches etc.

MARKETABLE INFORMATION SERVICES

There are a number of information services which could be successfully marketed like Document circulation service, Inter library loan service, Reference, Referral, Literature search, Bibliographic, Indexing, Abstracting, CAS, SDI, Newspaper clippings, Database services, Online access and searching, Document Delivery service etc. Depending on the query, urgency of the need and availability of the information these services should be marketed to the user community on reasonable fees, with a broader view to serve and satisfy information needs. Remember that the cost is long forgotton but the quality is remembered forever. So emphasis on Quality of the services.

MARKETING STRATEGY

As pointed out earlier LIS community needs to develop a positive attitude towards marketing concept and master the marketing skills. Marketing involves developing a marketing plan, conducting market research, positioning the product or service through marketing strategy, and evaluation of the plan periodically. It is not possible to go into all the details in the limited scope of this paper, but a few important points are discussed below.

To be successful in such ventures the most important point is developing a winning attitude because if one can dream it he can do it. Other equally important areas are 5 ps of marketing. The product of the service should be perfect, reliable, outlasting, decent, having utility and tested OK for the best quality, then only it could be marketed in this age of competition.

The price should be user oriented, reasonable, competitive and earning ofcourse. For the

placement of these products due planning should be done, agency or network should be choosen, and it should be easily available to the users.

The promotion should include publicity, advertising, formal and informed contacts, demonstration, exhibitions, brochures, posters, sample mailing, discount membership, on line availability on concession rates for some time, user education programmes etc. And remember that a satisfied customer is the best advertisement for a product. The processing involves data preparation, inputting, error correction, validation, sorting and retrieving according to set criteria and getting the output, according to user's needs.

A FEW EXAMPLES

All said and done the Theory should be applicable in practice and give good results. We have a number of libraries and information centres in our country who could act as models for implementing the marketing plans. To list a few we can look up to INSDOC, DESIDOC, SENDOC, NASSDOC, NISSAT. Its sectoral information centres like NICTAS, Ahmedabad, NICHEM, NCL. Pune, NAL, Banglore, TIFR, Bombay, IITS, CFTRI, Mysore, CLRI,Madras, UGC information centres like NCSI, Banglore, SNDT womens university centre, Bombay and many more.... They have done it, why can't other libraries do it ?

And lastly the choice before LIS professionals is not whether to market their products and services or not, but how to perform this function well and successfully. Because "If you are not busy meeting competition, you are creating it !"

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