

UNDERSTANDING MARKETING APPROACH FOR LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

The need to serve more and diverse functions has often brought pressure upon libraries and librarians to become more efficient to find additional resource. It could be attempted through fund raising or by adopting marketing strategies. It is necessary to understand that the resources generated should be used to supplement the existing resources. In the US, there are a number of centres contributing to the study and research. Fund raising is a well developed function in a number of research libraries. It calls for commitment and highly professional skills to make the programme successful. However, instances of fund raising are rare here. The concept is successful in the US but it may not take off in the developing countries and also may not be sustainable over a period of time. It is an age of competition and free market economy where enterprise, innovativeness, and creativity are essential elements to forge ahead. The libraries would better take a dispassionate look at their functioning.

The information processing, retrieving, and dissemination has undergone a revolutionary change. CD-ROM technology has come. The electronic library is round the corner. Due to development of communication networks, increasing volume of scholarly information, technology-based forms of knowledge, the scholarly communication has undergone a change.

Libraries, today, are confronted with :

- rapid growth rate of information
- increasing costs of materials and services
- shrinking government support (budgets) putting hindrances to the growth.

But at the same time enormous opportunities available. There are a large number of academic institutions, teachers, researchers, and students (Market). The information technology has opened up many possibilities for libraries to deliver information in ways that were not possible before. Quite significant developments are taking place for improvements by using technology. Information sources originate mostly in developed world and available at unaffordable prices. Services like indexing, abstracting etc., are also available mostly from foreign suppliers. These sources have paid scant attention to the research output of the academics in India/Developing Countries. The limitation of coverage is a great handicap for locating right and relevant

information. Some of our libraries have extremely valuable information sources available. All the libraries taken together would have a very large number of books, journals, dissertations, reports etc. Considerable research in the form of projects might be taking place in Indian academic organisations. Opportunities for publishing as well as providing access to such output need to be improved significantly.

For exploiting the positional advantage, significant improvements are needed in : building expertise for designing and marketing products and services and computing and networking infrastructure.

This paper focusses on application of marketing concepts to the libraries.

WHY MARKETING

As discussed above, the environmental changes and technological developments are exerting pressure on libraries to introduce newer methods of management and services. Information assumes significance when it is available and utilized for the overall development of a country. It is power only if made available for use and not for storing. The people have increasingly realized role of information. The demand for information is fast growing and also the expectations.

Satisfying this growing need would require a thorough understanding of its size and nature before products and services could be offered to help the users in different sectors.

So far majority of libraries have been traditionally serving their internal users. They have little experience of assessing needs of users, devising strategies for enrolling members for the libraries and/or specific products/services, or promoting/distributing their services. Any investments required for equipments, manpower and training would be ill advised if they ultimately do not serve the requirements of intended users. Therefore, the first task is to assess viability and sustainability of such services and products through marketing approach.

In marketing there is a perception of mutual benefit on which stands the partnership between the members and the library. To nurture this partnership, marketing strategies could be an effective tool.

MARKETING APPROACH

Marketing concept can be defined as

- determining needs, wants, and demands of selected target market(s)
- designing and delivering appropriate offers more effectively than competitors
- so as to achieve organisational goals

The four important elements of this concept are market focus, customer orientation, coordinated marketing and organisational goals.

The market focus implies that an organisation should choose a focus within a broad market as hardly any organisation is likely to have large enough resources to satisfy all demands of a market.

The organisation should be thoroughly customer oriented meaning thereby defining customer needs, wants, demands and satisfaction from the customer's point of view so as to constantly devise an improved customer offer which would be better than the competitors, for achieving organisational goals.

Delivery of actual offer efficiently would require a co-ordinated approach on the part of all the functionaries and departments within marketing division as well as among marketing and other divisions of the organisation.

Application of the concept can be at different levels in an organisation. For example, the concept can be applied to an organisation as a whole, a division of an organisation, or a specific product/market. In either case, the marketing

management process would consist of :

1. Analyze market opportunities to identify possible market focus areas.
2. Research the market focus areas to choose target markets and understand their characteristics which help in devising a better offer to satisfy customer needs, wants, and demands in the light of organisation's strengths and weaknesses.
3. Devise appropriate strategies and plans to achieve organisational goals and satisfying customer needs, wants, and demands.
4. Design an organisation and information system for implementation and control of marketing strategy and plans.

Application of marketing approach for assessing the viability and sustainability of library or an information centre implied operationalisation of the above four steps.

ASSESSMENT OF MARKET OPPORTUNITIES

This is conducted by

- Analyzing the market and sub market for particular need in terms of volume and value.
- Analyzing buyers spotting market opportunity (ies)
- Analyzing the performance of different products in the market
- Analyzing the environment which influences the product market like economic, demographic, technological, social, legal/political, and ecological environments (marketing audit)
- Assessing current and likely competition (marketing audit)
- Assessing own organisations strength and weaknesses and identifying appropriate opportunities (marketing audit)

RESEARCHING THE MARKET FOCUS AREA AND SELECTING AND PROFILING THE TARGET SEGMENTS

It is a process by which detailed analysis of characteristics, needs and wants of the market is carried out (marketing audit). This helps in dividing the focus area into few groups each of which has customers who are homogeneous with regard to important characteristics, needs, wants within the group (segments) and different across different groups.

Analysis of the size, growth and buyer behaviour of each segment helps in assessment of its suitability as an opportunity for the organisation.

DEVISING AND DELIVERING THE OFFER

It constitutes the following steps :

- Positioning
- Design and testing of
- product(library's programmes & services)
- Price(Communication)
- distribution(place)

For most service organisations, distribution plays a less important role. Product, promotion, and price play a dominant role in determining the viability vis-a-vis market acceptance and sustainability vis-a-vis cost and resource requirements.

The last step in the marketing management process is the organisation and information systems for implementation and control.

Marketing audit should be followed by a look at the library's products. Weingand has described the product within the three dimensional structure of product mix, product line, and product item.

product Line # 1. collection

-Product Items : Books, Periodicals, Videos and Films, Audio Recording

Product Line # 2. Services

-Product Items : Circulation, Inter-library Loan, On-Line Searches, Reference Service

Product Line # 3. Programmes

-Product Items : Bibliographic Instruction, Displays, Lectures

Assessment of products in the light of needs is a continuous process. Assessment could be in terms of reliability, timeliness, convenience in use, effectiveness. There is a product life cycle and a time comes when a product lacks effectiveness. Evaluation of present and potential products, therefore, becomes crucial. It is followed by assessment in the context of cost and demand.

COST OF PRODUCT

Next factor is cost of producing each product. This includes

both the direct costs(attributable to specific product) and indirect costs(attributable to total operations). Cost and demand determine the offer. Cost effectiveness is not the lone criteria.

DISTRIBUTION

Establishing contact between the product and the target client or the process of providing access is distribution. The relationship between product and distribution is very important in terms of format, channel of access, nature of information etc. The cooperative arrangements with other agencies, number and location outlets etc. are the other issues in the distribution process.

PROMOTION

Having identified the needs, produced a service to meet the identified needs and decided on the method of distribution, promotion follows.

Promotion is communication. Appropriate promotion strategies could be selected for each product. Advertising in local news paper, news letters or journals (on the basis of payment or exchange), press releases, posters, exhibitions, incentives, public relations etc are some of the established methods for promotion and could be used singly or in combination to create impact, trust, and respect.

CONCLUSION

Customer is central to any marketing effort and for library its members are central. To survive the libraries will have to put the member first and reorient the staff to customer service.

Finally, Blaise Cronin says "the cornerstone of the marketing mentality is a user-oriented, as opposed to a product-oriented service", an attitude that puts the user before anything else.

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