

# A conceptual study of Marketing Strategies and Practices by Libraries in Information Age: Need of the Hour

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## ABSTRACT

Libraries have been considered essential to educational and research endeavors and have relied on institutional financial support for their continuing operations. The value of the library is also being called into question with increasing "googleisation" and new generations of users are making new demands on library service provision. Directors of libraries are competing with multiple demands for funding on their campuses. They must understand client needs, plan service provision, promote the available services, deliver them efficiently and effectively and fight for financial and other support. Marketing has become an essential tool in justifying fund requirements. Using various market research techniques including surveys, focus groups and analysis of suggestions, libraries can understand the needs and design appropriate services and facilities. As librarians we should be actively marketing and promoting our library services. This paper aims to demystify marketing for librarians. Practical solutions are provided on how to implement a marketing strategy, with particular emphasis on the value of using electronic information resources.

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## 1. Introduction

The challenges to library services from changes in educational approaches, the impact of technology, new methods for information provision and declining budgets have meant that marketing is now so essential that it cannot be considered a separate function. Many libraries have come to appreciate the contribution and application that marketing concepts can make. In designing the marketing mix and developing the marketing plan, the so-called 7Ps have become central to libraries - product, price, place, promotion, participants, physical evidence, and process. Marketing is frequently viewed as a set of strategies and techniques that belong to administrators other than librarians. However librarians are involved in the process of marketing. Marketing is the management process which identifies, anticipates and supplies customer requirements efficiently. Thus the essence of marketing involves finding out what the users want, then setting out to meet those needs. Librarians are participating in this process of assessing their users' needs and trying to fulfill them. Thus, we are already marketing our library information skills. However, in order to do this effectively librarians need to embrace the total marketing function involving market research and analysis, service planning and promotion.

## 2. Definition

Marketing is a process which carries goods from producers to ultimate consumers. Marketing, in its broader sense, is the social instrument through which the material goods and culture of a society are transmitted to its members. Marketing, in the library context, refers to those instrument through which information (both raw and processed) are transmitted to its members.

According to Kotler, "Marketing is the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational

objectives. It relies heavily on designing the organization's offering in terms of target markets needs and desires, and on using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and service the markets."

Similarly Stanton has opined, "Marketing is a total system of interacting business activities to plan, price, promote and distribute want satisfying products and services, and present to potential customers."

The above definitions call for various activities in marketing. They are:

1. Market research and customers' analysis
2. Development of products and services
3. Pricing
4. Distribution
5. Promotion
6. Evaluation of products and services.

All the above mentioned activities of marketing as applied to other industrial sectors are equally applicable in the area of information products and services. Whether it is for profit or non-profit sector, methods remain the same while the policy varies.

## 3. Objectives and Marketing Goals

Once users' needs, future trends and resources available have been established the librarian is in a position to plan the marketing objectives, the resources to be used, the place and the time scale of the operation and the strategies required achieving them. The process of setting aims and objectives will serve a number of purposes. It will provide a focused overview of the library service and give direction and guidance in achieving the objectives. If any of the objectives change over time then the market plan will need to be updated.

## 4. Why Marketing of Libraries?

Information professionals must understand that it is essential to actively market their services. Library marketing is

critical for any information professional in order to spread the word about their library. It doesn't matter what library type, it doesn't matter how large or small the library is - you need to draw attention to your library, your services, your worth to your community, your administration, your staff, and your users.

It is important to understand the organization's mission to produce effective marketing material that builds the library's brand and image, drives traffic to your web site, and differentiates your library from its competitors. That's why in this highly competitive industry marketing plays a very important role.

**4.1 What products and services is the library marketing?**

The library has many products and services that it can market. Each library needs to identify what it wishes to market and how. Marketing is not just about developing and promoting new services and products but also about bringing awareness to clients of existing services and products and determining their appropriateness. Marketing plan needs to be developed and implemented with ongoing enhancement of the services and products should follow.

When the library is marketing its collections, in particular, the availability of new acquisitions like a new online patent database or a set of electronic journals, must be communicated to clients who need them. Donations of large research collections of potential use to particular disciplinary areas must be publicized. There is an enormous responsibility to ensure that value is received for the significant resource expenditure being made on many of these areas. New services like online versions of examination papers, the development of an e-print archive of institutional research papers, the use of plagiarism detection software and online thesis submission must all be publicized to potential users. For new products or services, part of the planning must involve the creation of a marketing and promotional strategy and the allocation of responsibility to library staff to ensure that the plan is carried through.

Marketing is directly linked to the planning process. Having a formalized plan and direction of where the library is going as opposed to being reactive to change and problems that arise, enables managers to successfully develop marketing strategies and successfully identify new services and products. Part of the planning is development of a suitable mission statement for both internal and external use.

**4.2 Market Plan**

In the light of information gathered from the market research the conclusions should be summarized and stated as the basis upon which the market plan is based. The market plan is the actual process which will establish the library's business goals and objectives and figure out how to achieve them. Katz (1988) calls marketing action most effective when the relevant activities are planned and co-ordinate. The marketing plan is a tool which will ensure that the library services and products are viewed in a focused and clear way.

**4.3 Marketing strategies**

To market a library's resources and information services is not difficult. Wolfe's (2005) observation, "Library public relations, promotions, and communications: a how-to-do-it manual" is a very useful guide for library marketing. Here are a few suggestions for marketing the library services to the readers:

- Create a library web page for the users. A web page is a good way of promoting library information services and resources.
- Emails containing new library resources and tips on finding information are of great value at the critical stage.
- Use library wall space. The library can display different language study tools such as bilingual dictionaries, English thesaurus, dictionary of synonyms and antonyms, subject-related dictionaries and encyclopedias.
- Attend academic lectures if the department you are responsible for has a prominent number of users. Librarians can meet users to discuss and gather information about their needs as well as to promote the offered information services.
- Links to "Help" services from all appropriate library web pages, where assistance may be needed.

**4.4 7Ps of Marketing Strategies of libraries**

We applied the 7Ps (Koontz and Rockwood's 4Ps plus Rafiq and Ahmed's 3Ps) of marketing mix which is defined in Table 1. Koontz and Rockwood (2001) suggested that marketing strategy is a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated plan that combines four marketing elements, commonly called the '4Ps' they are: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion and 3Ps of the marketing mix are: Participants, Physical evidence, and Process.

7 Ps	Definition
<b>Product</b>	Products or services of the general reference and information service department. This is, of course, the information, reference, and ancillary services that add value such as personal assistance, referral services, online database searches, document delivery, and interlibrary loan.
<b>Price</b>	Pricing of use of the library is usually that of the time and effort the user spends traveling to the library, as well as the time and effort spent
<b>Place</b>	Place of service, based upon knowledge of the market of a library, is essential in order to identify users and their discrete information needs and wants. To expand the service area, the library may have branches, bookmobiles, or electronic access, etc.
<b>Promotion</b>	Promotion includes utilizing persuasive information about general information services, and communicating this information to target market segments that are potential users. Five kinds of promotion include: publicity, public relations, personal representatives, advertising, and sales promotion.
<b>Participants</b>	All human actors who play a part in reference and information services delivery, namely the library's personnel.
<b>Physical Evidence</b>	The environment in which the reference and information services are delivered that facilitates the performance and communication of the service.
<b>Process</b>	The procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities by which the reference and information services are acquired.

#### 4.5 Promotion

Promotion is essentially the means of informing to users what you do and what you can do. The benefits for those who promote their library services include: increased usage, increased value in the organization, education of users and changed perceptions.

The promotional plan emerges from the marketing plan. It is to do with how to achieve the objectives that have been forecast. It involves:

- A description of the service requiring publicity;
- Description of the audience at which publicity is targeted;
- Details of the campaign method to be employed including type of publicity to be used and method(s) of distribution;
- Execution of campaign;
- Analysis of campaign performance.

The setting of clear promotional objectives will also ensure that the success of the advertising campaign can be evaluated. From time to time it should be accepted that promotional activities have not met their objectives.

#### 4.6 The Medium

Promotional activities can take many forms and the promotional media will depend on the nature of the target audience and on promotional objectives.

##### 4.6.1 Personal Skills

Your manner, whether in person or on the telephone, will affect your users' rating for the library. You need to be professional and use quality procedures but you also need to smile and establish a personal relationship with as many of your users as possible. If you react positively to complaints, people will be encouraged to tell you about other things they would like to be changed. Instead of defending your position think about their suggestions.

##### 4.6.2 E-Mail

Where a large proportion of the users are on e-mail it is an easy way of reaching them, quickly and cheaply. It can be targeted more precisely than most other methods and so are effective at reaching specific audiences. The staff responds quicker to e-mails than any other medium. By maintaining up-to-date address lists different user groups can be targeted with different versions of the advertising 'message'.

##### 4.6.3 The Internet

The Internet has the power to improve the library's image and to allow the library to offer enhanced services. Although it takes time to set up and maintain services on the Internet,

it can reap rewards in terms of user satisfaction and recognition. A library Web home page serves as a promotional tool advertising in-house library services and electronic information resources on the web. The pages should include an e-mail link to the library making it easy to the librarian contact.

##### 4.6.4 Newsletters and Leaflets

Newsletters and leaflets are both a means of delivering information. A newsletter can be used to list interesting new

web sites, new journals and online services, and perhaps more general science news of interest. It does not have to be long but should be produced on a regular basis. Leaflets and guides can be handed out, and displayed on notice boards. The library notice board should be in a prominent place.

##### 4.6.5 Challenges faced by Librarians

There are, of course, challenges and difficulties faced by users, but it is also very important to consider the challenges to information librarians. Here are some of the major challenges:

###### ☞ Create a positive image

One of the biggest challenges faced by information librarians is to create a positive image as most users hold negative attitudes towards librarians. For decades, people thought of librarians as "trained" or "skilled" but not necessarily as "professionals" and have no idea about the qualifications or training requirements (Ajileye-laogun, 2004). In some Asian countries, librarians are simply retrieval clerks or have low social status, so users may consider themselves more competent and more knowledgeable than library staff and regard it unnecessary to approach a librarian for help. Therefore, the librarians need to demonstrate that they have got both qualifications and a variety of skills.

###### ☞ Be proactive

Language problems may hinder users from seeking assistance offered by the library (Patton, 2002). Some users have to rely on friends rather than librarians for information or instruction. All professional librarians have got to communicate with users about their services because exchanges between the service agent (librarians) and the customer (users) can elicit information about customer requirements, and also permit the services agent to explain the organization's products and how these can meet the customer needs (Rowley, 1998).

###### ☞ Build good relationship

There is no real shortcut to providing good information services to users. According to (Curry & Copeman 2005), quality reference service involves a relationship between the user and librarian within a "Cycle of Dimension of Service": willingness to assist user; knowledge (how to assist user); assessment (of user's need), and action (physically moving with the user).

###### ☞ Create a welcoming environment

Librarian needs to develop the ability to create a welcoming environment, be patient, and build confidence with the users. When librarians are friendly, and welcoming and helpful, users are encouraged into the library, whereas, in a library where the librarians are unfriendly and lazy, users are driven away. It is reported the personality of the librarian determines the rate of utilization of the library by its users. If she/ he is friendly and professional, the user will be convinced that there is an approachable and reliable information expert in that library. If they are drawn to the library by the mien of the librarian, they will then be able to browse through the books and thus become aware of the availability of materials relevant to their studies and research, and the use of the collections increases (Ajileye-Laogun, 2004).

### ☞ Understand Cross Culture Communication

Information librarians need to learn ways of styles because the way people communicate varies widely between one aspects of communication style is language usage. Across cultures, some words and phrases are used in different ways (DuPraw, 2002). For instance, one user who had huge fines for a book he borrowed because he misunderstood the concept of returning a book. To him, "return" a book means putting it back on the shelf. Don't assume that the way you are behaving is the "right" way of doing things. Consider a variety of approaches to a procedure.

### ☞ Respect for cultural differences

One of the significant barriers in cross-cultural communication is the use of language. Librarians are not changing their style because of users communication difficulties; they are unaware of the language used and of the need to provide definitions or demonstrations of "peer reviewed", "call number" " full-text", "subject heading" or "Boolean search". (Wang & Frank 2002) recommend that information services in libraries that are sensitive to and encompass differences in culturally influenced styles are more likely to be responsive to the information needs and interests of users. As information librarians become more aware of cultural differences, they will become better listeners and communicators and could communicate better with users from different cultural background.

## 5. Indian Scenario

The developments taking place the world over have influenced the Indian librarianship as well. There have been a number of developments in marketing of library and information services in the country and some of these are mentioned below:

The beginning of publication of literature on marketing of library dates back to 1980. The Indian Library and Information Science Abstract (ILSA) started abstracting in this area in early 80s. IIM, Ahmedabad, has developed a database on marketing of library services which is very helpful for researchers in many ways. It is an area that is being widely discussed in professional meetings; there is an increasing interest of the national professional associations and organizations, like Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centers

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(IASLIC), Indian Library Association (ILA), Society for Information Science (SIS), Medical Library Association of India (MLAI) and Management Libraries Network (MANLIBNET). In 1988, the first national conference was organized by IASLIC in 1988 (Kapoor & Chaterjee, 1988). SIS also selected the theme Information Marketing for its conference in 1995 (Kuldip Chand, 1996). During recent years it can be observed that marketing of library services has been included as sub-theme in quite a good number of conferences and seminars. *DESIDOC Bulletin of Information Technology* has brought out special issues on marketing of library and information services twice in 1998 and 2002 besides covering articles regularly in volumes of the journal.

There has been increasing interest among researchers in this area. The topic of Marketing of Information and Library Services has been included in the syllabi of some universities in the country. The Indian National Scientific Documentation Centre's (INSDOC) MLIS programme of the Indira Gandhi National Open University (IGNOU) has a blog on Marketing of Information Products and Services. Some other universities also give emphasis on this area in the syllabi, but only to a limited extent. Besides, associations, various agencies and institutions are organizing training programmes.

## 6. Conclusion

Marketing approaches are proving to be effective in assisting academic libraries to adjust to changes in its client base and will ensure that services delivered continue to fit the needs. The products and services provided by libraries range from knowledge access and research support to printing services and the provision of information skills, supported by one on one assistance and advice. Strategies examining the distribution and delivery of services and their successful promotion will ensure that those who need information are provided it.

The budget cuts and the advent of sophisticated technology in the libraries have opened up the new vistas for marketing information products and services. If the libraries fail to catch hold of the opportunities, the scene will be captured by the commercial vendors. We know that the users do not mind paying for the services if they are useful and available at reasonable price. Therefore, the marketing policy of the libraries needs 'careful planning, structuring, execution and evaluation with regular review'.

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