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Online Marketing of Academic Library Products and Services

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Abstract:

The dynamism of the higher education continues to have a catalytic effect on the Institutions of Higher Education, both public and private. The competition between and among these institutions is immense. There is an inevitable push by most institutions to reform, to improve and to set and establish higher standards in all fields of Endeavour. The demand for quality services from the public, university students, academic staff and management is driving academic institutions to change and change for the better. This same demand is being felt by academic libraries for increased, relevant, useful and sophisticated library services. Academic libraries in India particularly from the public institutions continue to remain competitive and relevant to their clientele. The paper discusses and emphasizes the need for the adoption of marketing approach in academic libraries to augment their financial resources and exploit new information technology to provide better information support to the users. Highlights the marketing concept, 4 Ps of marketing mix and discusses various methods of marketing library products and services.

Keywords: Marketing, Academic Library, Marketing Mix, Methods of Marketing, library products, library services

1. Introduction

A society that consumes and generates the most knowledge and information is the strongest society. The information industry has grown dramatically in services, revenue, and coherence over the last decade. Though the marketing of information services is a concept of comparatively recent origin, it has now emerged as an important area for libraries and information centers. Marketing of information means transference of information to the potential user/customer.

2. Definition

“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 the target market’s needs and desires and on using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate and serve the markets.” - Philip Kotler

3. Marketing the Library – What is involved?

In spite of books and articles on the marketing of library and information services, the concept of marketing is still not fully understood by many librarians. In order to appreciate online marketing of library services, acknowledge of what library marketing entails would be useful. In essence marketing encompasses the following:

- Know the purpose of the library.
- Identify the core business of the library.
- Understand the changing relationship between the library and its immediate and broader environment.
- Know enough about library customers to establish meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship with them.
- Assess and monitor the information needs of library customers periodically.
- Determine the products and services that would best meet the information needs of customers.
- Plan and design identified products and services within the limits of available resources.
- Create awareness among the customers on the existence and availability of products and services.
- Monitor the use of products and services.
- Evaluate products and services periodically.

4. Need of Information Marketing in Academic Libraries

Marketing approach aims at determining the needs, wants and demands of the target clients through designing and delivering appropriate products and or services, more effectively than the competitors, so as to active the organizational goal. Librarianship is experiencing rapid change. Information technology has created a new gateway for information services.

5. Four Ps of Marketing Mix

All marketing decision-making can be classified into four strategy elements, referred to as the marketing mix or the four P's: - Product, Price, Place, and Promotion (Dhiman & Sharma, 2009) .

6. Change in Relation between Libraries and Users Due to Web 2.0

- **Web 2.0:** The term web 2.0 was first used in January 1999 by Darcy DiNucci, a consultant on electronic information design in her article, "Fragmented Future", but the term was made more popular by Time O'Reilly the founder of the company, then followed up discussion with a famous paper, "*What is Web 2.0: Design Patterns and Business Models for the Next Generation of Software*", outlining in detail what the company thought they meant by the term. Web 2.0 offers a means by which data and services previously locked into individual web pages for reading by humans can be liberated and then reused, in ways sometimes referred to as 'mashing up' or 'mixing'. Importantly, it also introduces the notion of a 'platform', meaning that others can build applications on pre-existing foundations and thus benefit from economic scale without reinvention

7. Best Practices Adopted by Libraries to Attract Users Using Web 2.0 Tools

- **Blogs:** Many academic libraries are using blogs to attract the users to the library. Blogs are nothing but personal diaries which contains the entries in a reverse chronological order. With blogs libraries can disseminate various types of information to their users.
- **Social Networking:** The entire higher educational system is in a transitional stage, and academic libraries are involved with this evolutionary step (Mathews, 2007). Landis (2010) suggests that libraries can get out of the dark ages of the pre-Internet era by using social networking sites. Every library has a group of users who never visits the library; also they serve to a group of users who occasionally pops in and who is not a regular user. The job of librarian is to convert the non-library users to be regular users of the library and in present context the social networking sites can prove to be very useful in converting the non-library users into regular users.
- **Podcast and vodcast:** Podcasting is a "software and hardware combination that permits automatic downloading of audio files (most commonly in MP3 format) for listening at the user's convenience". With increasing bandwidth, the availability of easy-to-use video-editing tools, and the introduction of the video iPod, many Podcasters are now offering video Podcasts, also known as vodcasts. A vodcast combines audio and video to create an entire episode. It takes podcasting one step farther (as television did for radio) and adds the visual element to an otherwise auditory only experience.

7.1. Uses of blogs in Libraries

- Library blogs provide up-to-date information on local events.
- To announce New Acquisitions in library.
- To provide current awareness service.
- To provide Selection Dissemination of Information.
- To link recommended other web-sites.
- To providing library news, advocating for the importance of library support.

8. Marketing Challenges in the Twenty First Century

The pace of development and change has had the effect on libraries of coming to terms with a new environment. There is therefore a need to change and to adapt to the new environment or be left behind. Marketing as well is no exception. It has to change and indeed is changing (Tapscott, 1999). Regardless of the change, the result of the marketing effort should add value that is demanded by the organization with economics of scale and scope, more efficient processes and effective utilization of resources. To keep ahead of competitors, organizations should create and push products and services successfully through innovation and knowledge management. In doing this those involved in marketing should learn new skills as given below:

- To build knowledge and focus.
- To develop interpersonal skills.
- To manage relationship with customers.
- To measure and track work performance of various processes.
- To be more customers focused.
- To know how to make processes more market driven.
- To learn project management skills

9. Marketing on the Internet

Many books and articles abound on internet marketing. Many views have been expressed by those who have gone through the experience. As the web continuously changes with new tools being constantly developed approaches to marketing on the internet will have to be adjusted accordingly. Some views are expressed below.

9.1. Nature of the Internet for Marketing

It is fast, changes rapidly with new tools being developed quickly. All kinds of new users join in. It is always changing. To keep track internet statistics and growth websites such as *Global Reach* (www.gkreach.com), *CyberAtlas* (cyberatlas.internet.com) and *Internet World Stats* (www.internetworldstats.com) provide interesting information.

9.2. Internet Culture

People who use the internet often are also known as Interanets. They expect a lot of information in the websites they visit. They generally want to receive free information. They expect websites to have good content. They do not appreciate unsolicited mail.

9.3. Concepts Regarding Content and Users

Everyone can be a publisher on the internet. To ensure that a site is visited frequently the content and design should be given due attention. There has to be the realization that the internet is a one to one medium and not a one to many as in radio and TV i.e narrow casting as against broadcasting. Marketing on the internet is essentially a pull activity.

9.4. Some Do's for Internet Marketing

- Determine web strategy by thorough marketing and competitive assessment.
- Prepare for the speed and reach of the internet.
- Screen design should suit web users. Avoid duplication of design used on print and on TV.
- Have one person who manages internet marketing rather than a group of persons.
- Know and use the tools available that can enhance internet marketing.
- Management involvement is essential.
- Promote the internet together with other media.
- Promote on line as well as offline.

9.5. The internet can be used effectively for the following:

- Public relation exercises
- Building a good public image
- As a tool for communication
- For promotional purposes
- To keep people well informed
- To carry out market research
- To make known customer services
- For information delivery
- To receive feedback
- As a point of contact
- To conduct surveys
- To receive online orders
- To reduce cost of advertising
- To sell directly to intended parties

9.6. Maintaining a Dynamic Homepage

The normal customer reaction to a static homepage is that he will not visit it again. Homepages must be kept current. The layout must be attractive. Some of the content should be updated regularly. Information alerts, interesting new books, the introduction of new services and various items of customer interest will keep them coming back for more. Interaction of this nature will develop a healthy relationship between the customers and the library.

9.7. Make Available Book Talks and Other Lecturers

Digital recording of book talks, special lecturers by well known scholars and other such multimedia presentations which have no copyright may be made available for viewing.

9.8. Managing and Advertising Events

If a library is active and engages itself in the organization of regular events then the use of online messaging and communication will enhance the awareness process.

9.9. Online Library Tours

Creative online library tours have made their appearance on many library home pages (Hickok, 2002; Yi, 2000). This has to effect of saving on staff time to conduct guided tours around the library particularly in a university library. Visitors and guests would be impressed with such a tour without having to actually go around the building.

9.10. Institutional Electronic Conferences

Since chats are popular on the internet, the possibility of being host to electronic conferences on topics of mutual interest to groups is a distinct possibility. Such a facility will promote the sharing of information and the development of new approaches and ideas on the subjects being discussed. As a host the library could establish terms and conditions on the conduct of such conferences.

9.11. Managing Institutional Knowledge Resources

For far too long libraries and librarians have limited their functions to published information resources. This is indeed a limitation that has affected their impact on the communities they serve. The organization of knowledge containers differs from the organization of knowledge itself. Libraries should begin to participate actively in the management and organization of the information resources of their parent institutions co-operatively with the creators or owners of the information resources concerned. Such a symbiotic relationship will be mutually beneficial and satisfying.

10. Conclusion

Libraries can be more effective if they incorporate marketing as part of their management philosophy. All staff should be involved in the marketing process. Libraries should resort to mixing traditional and online marketing to reinforce each approach. The survival of the library of the future depends very much on the marketing that is practiced by it. There is a social cause for which libraries are established. Librarians must be strongly motivated by the commitment to the cause to raise libraries to the level of being recognized as key institutions to impact on social upliftment and a better quality of life.

The impact of the information technology and the adoption of the marketing approach will help to improve services for users and enhance the reputation of library. Library acquisition, organization and dissemination must be based on the modern concept of marketing to achieve reader's satisfaction. Adapting modern management techniques in the library helps in designing effective and efficient library system. It helps to project the library among its users. It helps basically all stakeholders in a way of value addition. It helps smooth functioning of day-today activities as all users are aware of the library system.

Web 2.0 are offering number of tools for promoting library and its services, if used properly and strategically it can attract users to the libraries. Libraries of the west are making optimum utilization of the web 2.0 tools now time has come for the Indian libraries to explore all possible utilities of web 2.0 tools in attracting the users back to the libraries. Although there are some examples from India using web 2.0 tools but are very few.

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