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Academic Library Websites as Marketing Tools

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Introduction

Every institution and organization needs a website. The same is true for libraries and information centers. Since the 1990s, most libraries and information centers has been offering services via websites[1]-[2]. At the same time, many libraries have found that they can achieve their goals better by means of using marketing principles and techniques; in addition, they can have more successful communication with their users and understanding of their needs. Each library's website is a window opened on that library; also it can work as a good guide in the Internet for users.

What Is Library Marketing?

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[3].

According to Folk[4] and Lancaster[5], marketing is a systematic process which is a combination of planning, concentrating on customer needs and her satisfaction.

Kaur[6] Sarita state that marketing is concerned with customers and the satisfaction of their needs with appropriate products and services.

Libraries and information centers have begun to see that marketing of information products and services is essential to improve user satisfaction and promote the use of services by current and potential users[7].

Marketing takes service from the library to the customer. It involves market research, analyzing programs and services, setting goals and objectives, and using persuasive communication.[8].

Marketing in Academic Libraries

The concept of marketing has been transferred from business to public service organizations. Since 1970, it has

been seen that marketing principles can be applied to non-profit organizations[9].

In recent years,marketing has been important for reasons like self protection, the existence ofcompetitors, an increase in customers' expectations, and wide access to information.

Kotler and Fox[10] provide the following definition of marketing in relation to higher education:

"Marketing is the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets to achieve institutional objectives".

Dodsworth[11] believes that the changes in society have lead to creation of opportunities and threats for libraries. Other surveys that show a majority of people using search engines in preference to library resources has beenthe cause of alarm among librarians who see libraries in danger of losing their place as an information provider[12].

Academic libraries have found that users are unsatisfied with their collections and are at the same time unaware of library programs and services.

Williams[13] believes academic libraries spend millions of dollars a year on electronic resources, yet many of them are underused and unknown to users.

Ewers and Austen[14] claim that if libraries want to be client-oriented, they should understand their clients' needs, their environment, their resources and strengths, and the social factors that influence users. Libraries should also identify their strength as a competitive business, employ and train staff in client relations and marketing[15].

Marketing is useful to university libraries to improve their image and to attract more users. Marketing helps librarians improve their reputation within their organizations and as a profession within society[16].

Schmidt[17] believes the products and services provided by libraries have changed considerably, due to changes in education, the impact of technology, new methods for information provision, and declining budgets[18].

University libraries in the digital age are eager to be current in information technology and tools for conducting research and providing current information. This has led them to focus on marketing their services[19].

Marketing in libraries can lead to a better understanding of users and their requirements. Effective marketing can increase the use of services, can help train customers and non-customers, can change user perceptions and ideas, and promote the reputation of the library and its staff[20]

In such environments, libraries must identify the requirements of their users. This puts the customer at the center of library activities[21].

Academic Library Clientele

Consumer loyalty is essential for service organizations. In order to achieve it, many organizations try to go beyond customer expectations. Libraries must categorize their customers to provide each group with its desired and required services. Information technology, including the use of websites, can help provide better service. Academic library users need the resources that the library provides. It is up to the library to make sure the resources are findable and usable. If they are not, the library has wasted funds and the users are discontented.

User expectations will be higher when libraries use websites and electronic resources, which provide:

- 24/7 access
- high speed
- high quality

The Role of the Library Website

Users have less reason to visit the library, since they can access resources without going to the library. How can librarians interact with users and guide them, when a majority of users does not go to the library? How can users be sure they are accessing high-quality information? Fialkoff [12] says that librarians are poor at

marketing and still have not figured out how to tell people what librarieshave to offer in a way that resonates.

Attracting attention to a virtual environment is difficulty, because there is no mutual communication between users and librarians. The only way to attract users' attention and trust is through words, sentences, pictures, pages, information, timely responses to emails, moderating the delivery process, and emergency delivery.

Lancaster talked about a paperless society several decades ago. In today's electronic environment, the value of having access to information is greater than having access to physical space. This brings up two important issues: the diverse needs of academic users for library resources and the importance of user awareness of library resources. Timeliness and accuracy are also important. One of the tools in achieving these things is the library website.

As libraries shift services to the Internet, the library website becomes a service in its own right. It becomes an importanttool in marketing other products of the library[22]. Websites are a key way to advertise. This principle should be applied to market electronic resources from the library's homepage[23] Academic librarians can help cater to the needs of different groups in the academic community, including students, teachers, and research scholars[24] Libraries do not work in isolation. They collaborate with consortia, vendors, other libraries, and their users. In academic libraries, it is possible to design a website with the help of advanced technologies and computers which can be a powerful marketing tool. However, libraries must be familiar with their customers and know their needs in advance.

A user comes to a physical library where the material is openly and clearly displayed with good signs and items are easy to find. This user sees a librarian and asks questions. A website cannot interact with users as easily.

An effective website can lead to mutual satisfaction in for customer and librarian:

A: The benefits of marketing to library users

1. Convenience

2. Ability to control information and technology

3. Increased ability to select information

4. Increased ability to analyze

5. Increased time of access

6. Increased sense of certainty

7. Decreased human error

8. Decreased need for interaction

B:The benefits of marketing for specialist (librarians)

1. Facilitating tasks

2. Saving time and reducing communication gap

3. Diminished time to reply

4. Fulfilling individual requests

5. Offering services at any time

6. Ability to perform several tasks simultaneously

7. Creating positive image of library in people's minds

Thus, marketing helps ensure that users:

- Know what information exists
- Know how this information will look in the interface
- Know where to find this information on the site and on the page,
- Know how to use information

Use website as a navigator for all users.

Finally, academic libraries can use the website to help fulfill Ranganathan's laws. According to Crawford and Gorman[25] these five laws can be adapted to the present and future libraries:

- Libraries serve humanity
- Respect all forms by which knowledge is communicated
- Use technology intelligently to enhance service
- Protect free access to knowledge; and
- Honor the past and create the future

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