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Marketing of Information Products and Services for Libraries in India

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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 covers those activities that connect the organization to those parts of its outside world that use, buy, sell or influence the outputs it produces and the benefits and services it offers (O'Shaughnessy). As Kotler points out, organizations such as museums, universities, libraries, and charities need to market their causes and their products to gain political and social support as well as economic support. One of the major barriers to operating a profitable information business is the lack of business expertise among librarians and information scientists. Marketing is a comprehensive term that describes all the processes and interactions that result in satisfaction for users and revenue for the information firm.

Libraries and information centers have begun to realize that marketing of information products and services is an integral part of administration, especially as a means for improving user satisfaction and promoting the use of services by current and potential users. Three main factors, namely the information explosion, the technology revolution, and escalating library costs are responsible for encouraging the library profession to develop a marketing approach in its operations and services. Some information service managers feel that marketing is inimical to the nature of their activities. But with increased competition in the world of information, marketing is a factor for survival. At the same time, there is a common misconception that promotional activities alone constitute marketing.

Information Management (IM)

IM is managing the processes of selection, collection building, processing, controlling, and dissemination of information in an organization. IM can help an organization recognize and use the potentials of the resources of information and information technology. (Brenner) Librarians have a significant role to play in IM. Considering the IM cycle, one can find that librarians have a role to play in almost every step in the information-user matching process.

IM Cycle

1. Information Marketing

Basic Concepts and Definition:

Marketing is planning and managing the organization's exchange relations with its clientele. It consists of studying the target market's needs, designing appropriate products and services, and using effective pricing, communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and serve the market. The American Marketing Association defines marketing as those activities which direct the flow of goods and services, from production to consumption.

The following are vital concepts that will be discussed one by one:

- Marketing Activities
- Principles of Marketing Management
- Marketing Techniques
- Marketing Strategy
- Creating a Market

Marketing Activities

Market profiling is an important marketing activity, which is done to obtain marketing information. It is necessary to identify the market scope to formulate appropriate policies. Market profiling should consider:

- User affordability
- Extent of use
- Relevance of the service to users
- Repeat customers
- User preferences
- Staffing

Product planning is the marketing activity concerned with developing a product that satisfies customers. Management must decide:

- Who should be the user groups?
- To whom the information services/products should be targeted?
- What should be the services/products that can be produced and marketed to the different target groups?

Pricing is the marketing activity that determines the price of the product on the basis of costs as well as market factors such as distribution channels, discount structure, competitors' prices, ability or willingness of customers to pay, and so on.

The following are questions to ask during pricing.

- What are the costs involved in the generation of services and products?
- What factors need to be considered in arriving at costs?
- Should the information services/products be given free? If so, to whom and why?
- What would be the impact in relation to the value of a product, if given free?
- What should be the criteria for pricing?

Promotion is the activity that covers all aids to sales. Promotion stimulates demand and increases sales. Usually promotion moves the product toward the customers. It involves mechanisms that inform the target groups about the resources available, services and products offered by the libraries/information centers.

Questions to ask regarding promotion:

- To whom is the promotional material directed?
- What is the message?
- What promotional mechanisms are available?
- What points are to be considered in the design of a promotional package?
- What is the role of the library staff in promotional activities?

Distribution is the marketing activity concerned with distributing the product from the manufacturer to the customer, making the product available and easy to buy. Following are the major channels of dissemination:

- Interpersonal delivery
- Group personal delivery
- Strategic placement
- In-house dissemination
- Local depositories
- Mass media
- Broadcasting
- Mail
- Telephone

- Computer network

Principles of Marketing Management

Modern library services should be based on the following marketing principles.

- The company must have an active attitude towards the market. It cannot expect customers to buy a product simply because it is produced. The management must actively study the market, persuade customers, promote the product, and organize distribution.
- Marketing should be given at least as much importance as other basic functions such as administration, production and finance.
- The marketing function must be "integrated". This means that the various marketing considerations must be taken into account in the decisions of all the managers, not only those directly concerned with sales.

Marketing Techniques

Management is required to control the application of a range of skills and techniques in marketing, generally derived from practical industrial experience and from modern social sciences such as economics, statistics and applied psychology. Marketing skills and techniques can be divided into four broad groups.

- Those used in order to obtain data about the market
- Those used to create and stimulate demand
- Those used to analyze costs and other marketing factors
- Other practical skills and techniques

Marketing Strategy

Not all enterprises can afford to use all the marketing techniques. Furthermore, different situations require different techniques. The marketing manager must be able to select those techniques that are necessary for a particular product in a particular situation. Therefore, successful marketing includes the art of deciding which techniques to use in different situations. Marketing strategy also means selecting various techniques in proper proportion and balance.

Creating a Market

The proper and active use of marketing techniques provide the possibility of creating a market. Here are three examples:

- Increasing the present volume of sales can create a market.
- Creating a market can mean waking up a sleeping market.
- Creating a market can involve creating a demand that did not exist at all.

Thus, the products are made and the market is created as a result of effective marketing strategy.

Professional Skills for Marketing

Library personnel require the following professional knowledge and skills for marketing information and library services:

- Perception of user needs and ability to obtain feedback from users
- Technical knowledge, such as ability to use the Internet
- Knowledge of various marketing strategies for promoting information skills

Factors which characterize the difficulties of marketing information services are:

- The relatively low level of knowledge and lack of agreement on user requirements, wants, and needs.
- The subsidized non-market environment in which most scientific and technical information products and services are used.
- The virtual impossibility of estimating the value contributed by information products and services to the efficiency and conduct of research and development and the advancement of scholarly pursuits
- The general economic unsophistication of those, mostly schooled in the humanities and the non-market-oriented library school environment, who purchase information products and services.

Hence the subjective concept of information makes marketing difficult. The value of information varies with the purpose and is also time and space dependent - hence, the difficulty in projecting the benefits of marketing information. There is also difficulty in estimating the contribution of information to R&D activity and to the advancement of scholarly pursuits. In addition, the reluctance of librarians and other information professionals to engage in marketing adds to the problems.

Conclusion

The library can be called an information market and the library user is a consumer of information. Information is a vital resource for national development. Increasing realization of the role of information has resulted in the establishment of information systems to provide a variety of information services and products. It is an essential step in the planning, designing, and use of such services and products for optimal use of information. Library acquisition, organization and dissemination must be based on the modern concept of marketing to achieve reader satisfaction. It must endeavor to nurture culture of customer service to enhance its image in the eyes of the users.

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