Professional Branding of an Information Professional through ICT for Effective Service Delivery

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Introduction

Professional branding in any organization cannot be over emphasised most especially in libraries and information centres. Libraries are in existence with the sole aim of achieving some set goals and objectives. It is obviously clear that realizing the objectives effectively predicates on effective service delivery skills. Professional branding through the use of information technology is as a result of the sophisticated nature of the present day information centre and the users as well. The 21st century has brought a lot of dynamism within the library and information profession and no one wants to lag behind. Apart from the fact that information professionals need to embrace the new technology they also need to compete with their contemporaries and are expected to build a lasting positive image for themselves.

One of the most significant outcomes of the progress of information technology is professional branding over the internet, a new way of advocacy. Though only a few years old, it may radically alter economic activities and the social environment. It implies the seamless application of information and communication technology in carrying out services in a more efficient manner.

It should be noted that the drastic change in library practices brought about by rapid changes in information communication technology is posing challenges to the Librarians and information centres in recent times particularly in the developing countries. To cope with these challenges posed by ICT, Librarians in developed countries moved quickly to learn and adopt new information technologies (Ramzan, 2004). Computers, software, CD-ROM, email, Internet, networks, and other information management and communication technologies were introduced to perform different library functions and to provide innovative user services. At the same time, library staff raised their level of knowledge of new information technologies through continuing education programs, professional training, and through revisions in their library and information school curriculums. This helped them to leverage the benefits of new technologies.

Purpose of paper
The purpose of this paper is to suggest ways libraries and information centres can recreate their professional branding through information technology for effective service delivery.

**Concept of Professional Branding**

Professional branding is about putting your best foot forward and creating a niche for oneself in a competitive environment (Ajie, 2016). Professional branding goes encompasses everything that pertains to the library or information centre. It is used to gain client loyalty and therefore increase success through differentiation. Professional branding is how a library or information centre advertises what it has to offer to both potential and existing clients. Walker, 2009 defined professional branding as a set of attributes and qualities often intangible that makes an organization distinctive.

**Concept Information Technology**

Information technology has catapulted the world into an information driven society that relies on ideas and information. Information has now become the most strategic resource that is transforming the world economy which has brought about changes in different aspects of human life in the 21st century. The new opportunities provided by ICT in business, learning, communication and so on, have catapulted the world into a new society called the knowledge society or information society (Anyakoha, 2005). Thus the world has become a global village. The internet where one can migrate from one chain of computers to the other is called the information super highway. Information Communication Technology, ICT has caused socio-cultural, political, educational, and economic change. Just like Salisu (2002) noted, ICT has engendered a new approach to work and service delivery, and is a technological development that has changed work and job expectations. The library and information centres are few areas deeply affected by ICT which is the backbone of information age. This is due to the fact that the library being the main stay of information and knowledge has been made virtual such that library and information services extend beyond walls and physical buildings. Most of the services offered in information centres which are usually carried out in the traditional manual method have been replaced with information technology.

**Personal Branding of Librarians and Personnel in Information Centres**

Eno et al (2014) discussed personal branding of librarians and they are as follows:-

1. **Mind-set to boost the personal brand opportunities of librarians:** Many librarians today are accidental librarians. This means that many librarians ventured into
librarianship probably because their dream course failed them an opportunity. This of course, would contribute to the low self-esteem of many librarians. In fact, according to the writers of this paper, “the reason for the low self-esteem of many librarians is the fact that some of them were employed as Library Assistant in their junior cadre and have grown through promotions to senior/librarian cadre as such they would not want to leave the library. This is their career and they prefer to retire here. This affects their personal branding opportunities”. This hampers their contribution to the society. This should be tackled seriously as to boost the personal brand opportunities of such librarians. When a librarian prepares his mind to be a librarian, there is the tendency to map out goals and visions. This helps in building librarian’s personal brand. Personal brand has to do with understanding your purpose first, then how you would add value to your purpose to reach out to the crowd.

2. **Develop a positive and unique vision statement**: A vision statement reveals your aim as a librarian. People have different visions in life; what they pursue and how they want to be viewed. Your vision statement comes in concise terms that summarizes what you represent as a professional; what you aim at, your long-term goal.

3. **Get a Signature**: A signature is a purposed indelible mark representing an individual’s name or initials. It usually comes at the end of a letter. In the online medium these days, there is room for creation of e-mail signature where one can scan and paste a signature and it remains there for every mail sent out to recipients. Signatures involve more than the scanned signature. A signature could be someone’s initials or name(s) followed by address, phone number, online identification like e-mails, blogs, face book profile page, and other social networks wherein the individual is involved. For building a positive brand, it is good for librarians to include their title such as: University Librarian, Deputy University Librarian, Senior Librarian, Principal Librarian, and others. This should be consistent in all mails or letters sent out as it creates a lasting impression. As promotion comes, there is also need for update in cadre.

4. **Get a complimentary card**: Most often, librarians attend conferences/workshops and meet with fellow librarians from other places, and further meet with fellow academic/faculty staff and researchers, and they wish to exchange contact details. This is where the use of complimentary card is important. This is because, a complimentary card contains not just the person’s name, but qualification, cadre, contact address and phone number. Complimentary cards help shape your brand and would help project the
librarian to the outside world. These elements should be consistent. Consistency is the key to developing a lasting positive brand.

5. **Create a Positive Personal Branding of Yourself:** This is the crux of this paper. This entails taking personal branding to a higher level – that of projecting the image of the librarian beyond the local level; crossing the threshold of invisibility and locality to that of visibility and internationality, respectively. First, we ought to grasp the concept of information technology and then marry it with how it can optimize the personal branding of librarians.

6. **Participate in online discussion forums:** Participating in online discussion forums like Nigerian Library Association (NLA) forum announces you in the digital society. Here, you are advised to leave your posts with a signature of your name and affiliation. This activity does not just identify you among your professional colleagues, but registers your name in the digital world.

**Basics for Effective Service Delivery**

**Leadership**

The subject of leadership has been described as a very imperative one that can never be overflogged because in every organization, a good leader can ensure that their services are delivered effectively. More imperative is the relevance of the theme in library and information management profession. Again, in agreement with Chemmers (2002), another source submitted as thus:

> “Leadership is a process by which a person influences others to accomplish an objective and direct the organization in a way that makes it cohesive and coherent. Leaders carry out this process by applying their Leadership attributes, such as beliefs, values, ethics, character, knowledge, and skills.”

The leadership qualities of a person create a niche for him and a combination of leadership competencies of managers in the workplace brings corporate success and efficient service delivery.

However, Nye (2004) has succinctly categorized leadership skills into four, although in relation to librarianship and information centres, but adopted from general leadership principles as thus:

(a) **Organization:** This includes the ability to organize people, projects, and meeting agenda.
Communication: Ability to communicate well is very germane to fruitful relationship and success of a leader. Giving relevant and timely information as well as the expectation of feedbacks from stakeholders are desirable.

Hopefulness: The leader requires a high degree of optimism to forge through difficult times. He must always give the assurance of a positive outcome.

Praise & Celebration: Individual and group contributions and successes need to be acknowledged. The celebration of such gives further encouragement to those involved.

Communication

Owoeye et al. (2014) quoting Subba (2007) emphasized he following as the importance of communication in any organization, library and information centre inclusive:

i. All the functions of management such as planning, organizing, leading and controlling involve the act of communication without which they cannot be performed at all;

ii. Managers devote a major portion of their time to the activity of communication;

iii. Interpersonal relations and group relations are maintained and developed only through the system of communication;

iv. To keep employees informed of company’s progress;

v. To reduce relevant turnover;

vi. To instil each employee with personal pride of being member of the company.

Record keeping

The purpose of any record or archives management department is to make sure records are available for use at any stage of the life-cycle. Thus, in the process service delivery and professional branding, clients should be able to walk into a library or information centre and ask for an information that’s really old and they expect to be attended to instead of being turned down. The essence of record keeping is that in whatever form a client wants his information, he will leave there happily. There is a long history of record keeping from CDROM to diskette to audio-visuals to physical books to digital library and so on, libraries and information centres should ensure that they are well equipped not just to acquire the information but also to preserve them.
**Professional branding through information technology for effective service delivery**

The relevance of the application of information and communication technology in library activities such as acquisition, cataloguing, circulation, serials management and so on are no longer debatable as libraries globally have realized the need to move from their isolated past into integrated systems and networked operations. Recent developments in information handling processes have also obligated libraries and information centres to embrace automation as a means of enhancing their service delivery to their clientele. According to Lubanski (2012) automation simply means "the use of machines or technologies to optimize productivity in the production of goods and delivery of services". Aina (2004) opined that automation involves the computerization of routine tasks hitherto being performed by human beings. Library automation therefore is a process of applying or utilizing ICT facilities to perform those tasks that are traditionally performed manually in the libraries such as acquisition, cataloging, circulation, serials management, etc. Library automation requires the utilization of hardware and software. Sudhamani (2010) supporting the above enumerated the following as relevance of library automation

➢ It improves the quality, speed and effectiveness of service
➢ Improves access to remote users
➢ Facilitates wider dissemination of information products and services
➢ Facilitates resource sharing among libraries
➢ Enables rapid communication with other libraries
➢ Improves the management of physical and financial resources
➢ Facilitates generation of reports for better decision making and effective management of the library

In line with the above, the application of information technology in the form of automation has become absolutely indispensable. Library decision makers must therefore determine how to meet new and evolving expectations for library services and materials. Clearly, libraries are operating from vastly different assumptions about the ways in which they might best carry out their responsibilities than they did a few, short years ago. While library practice is changing, it remains based in a commitment to service. Collections of books and other information resources without accompanying access tools, instruction, or other library services are mere warehouses, not libraries. Librarians in all types of libraries work to ensure that their organizations provide high quality service in support of the goals of the library's parent institution.
Professional Branding using Information Technology for effective service delivery.

Environment :- The library or information centre should look very bright and inviting in the sense that the choice of paint has to be eye catching instead of a dull colour. When somewhere is attractive, clients will want to visit again and again. The furniture should also be modern and comfortable and not obsolete. The equipment in information centres should also be up to date so that if one is visiting from another country the person will not feel that he really is away from home. When all these have been put in place we can then move over to other items.

Personnel :- The personnel employed in information centres and libraries must have the required qualification for the position he/she applied for. Here, it is important to let go of sub-standard hands who find it difficult to deliver services efficiently not because they don’t want to but because they don’t know how to and this may ruin the professional brand of the library and information centre.

Training:- This is a continuous exercise that must be taken seriously. Personnel that were trained on the use of information technology 10 years ago is definitely not as knowledgeable as another personnel that was trained in the year 2015. There is need to re-train and keep up with what is happening globally.

Cataloguing:- Previously cataloguing was done manually and it takes a long time to go through the process but with information technology resources can be catalogued efficiently and one can move on to another task.

Creation of website:- Clients are able to look for information while on the go, they don’t need to enter a library physically for them to have access to a libraries portal. The website should be user friendly so that users or visitors can navigate from one angle to another and get the information they need.

Audio-visuals:- Audio-visuals are very useful for kids and clients who are challenged with either sight or with their ears. Libraries and information centres should be well equipped so that they can cater for every user who walks into their library or information centre.

Database:- The library or information centre should have a database of clients who have used their facility before and mails should be sent to them as often as possible informing them on updates and new resources that available including events taking place.
Chat room: A chat room should be introduced where clients can chat with one another and queries can be handled by the personnel of the library or information centre and other clients can benefit from the information as well.

Eno et al. (2014) discussed how librarians can create their personal branding through information technology to optimize effective library service delivery and some of them are as follows:

Create Google Alerts: This enables you to know when your name is mentioned online. By registering for google alerts, you get alerted on your mail whenever your books are cited or whenever a tag of you is created. This could also help if any message is sent to your email.

Data Curation and Digital Preservation: Data curation is a term used to indicate management activities required to maintain research data long-term such as it is available for reuse and preservation. In science, data curation may indicate the process of extraction of important information from scientific texts, such as research articles by experts, to be converted into an electronic format. While, Digital preservation can be understood as the series of managed activities necessary to ensure continued access to digital materials for as long as necessary (DPC, 2008).

Virtual Learning Environment: In this Information age where users have access to information anywhere, the librarian must do something to enable their library keep the users not to go out to cyber cafés for information, the library should allocate space for specific groups of students and researcher to have quiet reading. The virtual learning environment is equipped with computer workstations that are fully connected to the internet. The library should create a resource or chart room where users can make calls using their mobile phone.

Libraries can also create blogspots and community networking sites like online forums to foster discussions of issues and generation of new ideas among members of the academic communities. This helps in generating innovative ideas to improve the day-to day running of the library. E-Resource Management Services: The librarians must procure and subscribe to e-books and journals in different field of study. After procuring and subscribing these e-resources, the librarian must send alerts or notices to these users of the university community via short message service (SMS), Emails and social network tools to create awareness of the availability of such e-resources. This has also helped the library management to plan properly about the subscription and optimum use of the e-resources.
**Electronic Reservation Service:**- This service is different from the traditional book reservation, called reserved book room service in some academic libraries. Many students, faculty, and staff time is spent in digital space. To better meet the changing needs of our users, librarians must implement changes in the provision of library services to facilitate teaching, learning and research. They must expand the reserved collection to include books from the library collections; recommended texts from lecturers; online journal articles from the library’s electronic journals collection; lecture notes including any material for which the lecturer has copyright, whether electronic or paper; media including videos; DVDs, CD-ROMs and past examination papers.

**Upload Documents and videos online:**- Documents like power points could be uploaded in slideshare and videos could be uploaded in youtube. Pictures are usually shared using flickr and Youtube.

**Conclusion**

In the past few decades there has been a revolution in information technology, and all indications are that technological progress and use of information technology will continue at a rapid pace in all organizations including libraries and information centres. It is also expedient to add that professional branding is the only way libraries and information centres can compete with their competitors. This without mixing words is the surest was to survival in an extremely competitive environment.

**Recommendation**

Professional branding is pertinent to reposition personnel in information centres and libraries. The study recommends that there is need to avail themselves with current or trending technology so that they can compete in their contemporaries and if possible have an edge over them. They need to keep improving their skills and abilities by constant training and self-development so that they can deliver their services effectively. Also they should ensure they are seen globally to various clients, employers and contemporaries through information technology.
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