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Promotion of Information Resources and Services to Distance Learners in Nigeria: The Role of an Embedded Librarian

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Abstract

Awareness to Information resources and services in libraries should be created because information resources in the library is out of place if access to it is not provided. This Study examined the nature and need for distance learning to unprivileged. It particularly examined the nature and role of digital libraries, as it has a unique facilities suitable for the distance learners, how digital in libraries has made information resources and services easier for accessibility and delivery for both library patrons and professionals. The paper also discussed on how promotion in libraries became the act of informing the library users what is available in the library holdings. It also examined the services in the digital libraries that promotes usage as: lending services; user education. And also the strategies libraries need to achieve optimal goal in promotion of information resources was discussed. The paper discussed the great role of an embedded librarian in a digital library and his specialized skills for information dissemination as: Interpersonal skills, good communication skills. However, the paper highlighted some challenges to the effective marketing of services to patrons such as: inadequate fund, lack of facilities to promote library services and lack of access to information technology to work with. Among the recommendations include that professionals librarians should be skilfully trained on the area of promotion and marketing of information resources and services; distance learning universities should be conversant with

the need for promoting library resources and services and as such assist libraries to accomplish its marketing mission.

Keywords: Promotion, Information Resources and Services, Distance Learner, Embedded Librarian

Introduction

Improving the development of individual and knowledge society through distance learning is an increasing adopted asset by individuals and government across the globe; this encourages development around individuals and communities. With this, several countries including Nigeria developed strategies to ensure the effort of providing its citizenry, who do not have opportunity to attend conventional institutions of higher learning, the opportunity of learning at a distance (DL). This open and distance education is really there to identify needs and provide people that missed educational opportunity an alternative means of added opportunity that is convenience to them regardless of the location, time and gender. UNESCO (2002) stated that the two main factors have led to an explosion of interest in distance learning are:

1. The growing need for continual skills upgrading.
2. Retraining and the technological advances that have made it possible to teach more and more subjects at a distance.

In the same vein, South African Institute for Distance Education (SAIDE) (2001) stated that open and distance learning is an approach to education which seeks to remove all unnecessary barriers to learning, while at the same time providing learners with a reasonable chance of success in an education and training system centred on their specific needs and located in multiple areas of learning.

Ogunleye (2013) also emphasised that open and distance education should be regarded as a self-paced learning process which makes it possible for all categories of learners to plan their study according to the time at their disposal.

Digital Library for Distance Learners

Libraries as an indispensable organization in an academic setting are a collection of information resources with the specific purpose of obtaining, preserving and making available recorded /online information and knowledge. Digital libraries like that for distance learners determine the efficiency of the successful provision of relevant, needed and timely resources to its patrons. The influence of digital on libraries, information centres and resource institutions have made information, resources and services most accessible and easier to deliver for patrons and library professionals. Gakibayo, Ikoja- Odongo, and Okello-Obura. (2013) opined that libraries and information services can provide access to resources through work – stations like PCs and terminals that are in patron’s offices, as well as in the library, this is in connection to distance learners that study at a distance and have a strong connectivity to the library database through links for information accessibility and retrieval.

Information services cannot exist properly in the absence of both the users, librarians and resources for an efficiency work, hence services depend on the different libraries, which at the same time has different user groups with different information needs. Libraries play different roles for different people (user community), a place to read books where patrons will be furnished with the current and up-to-date resources; a research place to access information in response to carry out a study to solve a particular problem or fill a gap; etc. Nowadays, digital libraries and embedded librarians play a vital role in providing packaged information, well organized and made accessible to distance learners (users) to meet up with their need at will. IFLA (2003) stated that digital library information resources and services

have a responsibility to serve all of the members of their community regardless of age, race, nationality, religion, culture, physical or other disabilities and gender. The embedded librarians make their inputs (services) needed by their patrons (distance learners) for their use. Adegoke, (2015) stated that information services are assistance given to users in their quest/ need for information resources in various forms, which encourage clientele to use the library. These resources are been packaged and repackaged by the embedded librarians and make it ever ready for the library users. This makes their work much easier and aids patron's accessibility.

Library Information Resources / Services and Promotion

Libraries develop and create awareness over its resources to their clientele, determine and meet up with their needs by providing the most appropriate resources and services for the client's satisfaction. Promotion of library resources and services in libraries are the act of informing the library users what is available in the library holdings, it is highly necessary, knowing fully well that information resources are out of place when access to it is not provided. The utmost vision for those who promote their library services are increased usage, increased value in the library, education of users and changed perceptions. Raul, Belapurkar and Munnolli (2016) opined that promotion and marketing is continues, as it is creating a connection between the library resources and its potential users so as to develop an effective relationship both within and outside the library as a vital ingredient for effective library services and utilization.

In this present time, vital information in virtual form are always available in internet, clouds, repositories, and online databases among others, and young users have experienced the power of technology and most academic researchers/ patrons always venture into the internet beyond library walls to access information and share with individual knowledge.

That is the reason why libraries connect to Web OPAC in order to extend its added value to the users. Gupta and Savard (2010) opined that with the impact of technologies and other environmental changes, the role and concept of library services is changing very fast and the range of services that take place outside the physical library is expanding due to the new technology, and it is likely to expand further. Such technologies are important and librarians, archivists, and other information professionals need to make effective use of such so as to improve both themselves and the services to users.

Librarians and information managers need to realize that these technologies are speedily broadening the market and therefore provide immense opportunities for them to offer services at the global level. The rationale behind the library service promotion and marketing could be of great importance for librarians and information professionals to boost the usage of their resources in their library. Adehunmisi (2013) is with the opinion that librarians have to market their services and products in order to improve the image of their libraries and themselves as libraries are unique in the kind of access and services they provide. He further stressed that libraries should always communicate and work with its customers to provide information about the library because libraries depends on the supports of people they serve for their survival.

In this digital age and for the embedded librarians to actively sale their handwork, they engage more on technological advertisement, promotion and marketing. This enable them to reach to their clients more easy and direct because it is actively essential to promote library resources and services in order to spread the word about the library, no matter the type of the library. Malekani and Benard (2018) opined that to keep pace with evolving information technologies in promotion of library, librarians ought to use a group of software applications including blogs, wikis; media-sharing tools such as YouTube and social networking services such as Twitter, Facebook to market both their resources and services

with huge success. Also Jain and Bhardwaj (2016) added that website of every library is a vital tool to share both the vision and mission of the library, as it serves as a handy tools to publicise the new addition of the library holdings, resources procured, databases subscribed by the library can be made available to the users through an active and transparent website. The attention and interest of the patron should be made manifest for them to know the library, its services and its worth by marketing and promoting the whole library and its services. Also to build relationship between librarians and users; to create a link between the librarians and their clients; marketing enables library and information managers to know and understand the needs of their clients which will help them to make good management decision for the benefit of the clients; and also it is a means of ensuring that libraries, librarians and librarianship are integrated into both today's and tomorrow's global culture. Sharma and Bhardwaj (2009) opted that it is of great important to understand the organization's mission to produce effective marketing resources and services that builds the library's brand and image, drives traffic to your website and differentiates the library from its competitors.

For the promotion of library services, once users need are recognised for continuous future service and resources availability, the librarian is in a position to plan the marketing objectives thus: the resources to be used and other strategies required to achieve for the services. Patil and Pradhan (2014) opined that the basic objective behind library promotion and marketing of library services and products are to achieve high level customer's satisfaction, ensure the survival of their respective institutions and enhance the perceived value of the services. This actually involves activities such as identifying user's needs, designing suitable services to meet such needs, communication and distribution to inform them, motivate and serve the users. Ochege and Anaehobi (2015) stressed that marketing these services in academic libraries will boost the interest and morale of users if they become aware that the library is engaging in such activities just to satisfy them.

Services in the Digital Library that Promotes Usage

The services of the digital library are provided on the basis of equality of access to all users and there must be an agreed standard of services made available to distance learners for optimum use of information. Munchen (2001) is with the opinion that to be successful in fulfilling its goals the digital library resources and services must be fully accessible to all its potential users and any limitation of access, whether deliberate or accidental, will reduce the ability of the library to fully achieve its primary role of meeting the library and information needs of the community it serves. The Library has so many services that need to promote or market for the benefit of the patrons, as such every functioning library should identify what actually it wishes to promote or market for patron's interest and use. Sharma and Bhardwaj (2009) posit that marketing is not just about developing and promoting new services and products, but also about bringing awareness to clients of the existing services and products and determining their appropriateness. These are the information services rendered in the libraries to patrons that promotes services as opined by (Odine, 2011) Thus:

Lending services

This is very essential service provided by academic libraries, a service in which a user has the privilege to borrow library materials for a stipulated period of time. Such materials could be books, journals, CD-ROM, audio-visual materials, slides, video tapes and projectors in order to promote equal and fair access to information materials lending.

Inter-library loan and document delivery service

This is a service where a library on behalf of its client borrows a particular material which is not available in its library from another library. This is much advantageous for the distance learners on online resources.

Reservation service

This is a system where a library reserves some materials that are heavily consulted, few and rare. This is important so that users can consult such information resources as they need it, not allowing some users to have advantage of borrowing it out and restricting it only to themselves.

Provision of seating and study facilities

Libraries are normally expected to provide adequate seating and study facilities to their users so that they can be comfortably seated to consult and read information materials that are relevant to them. Also study carrels should be provided for researchers.

Reference service

The provision of reference service is a very important function of any reputable library. Users have various information needs that they want a librarian to help them solve. The reference service provides opportunity for users to request for reference queries.

Exhibitions and displays

This service is used to advertise the various products and services available in the library. This is done by displaying such materials on display stands and display boards. For example library materials on a particular topic that might be of interest to the public could be exhibited.

Library publications

Libraries are expected to issue out publications in form of a leaflet that serve as a guide to users in the use of library's resources, services and facilities. These publications should provide current and accurate information about the library, its resources and services.

User education

Libraries provide user education to users, it is to enable them equip users with enough knowledge on the use of library. When users are enlightened on the use of library they will be

able to use the library effectively and efficiently without the help of a librarian. Through user education the user is able to get any information he/she desires as well as developing the skills to use the resources of the library independently. This could be done by one-to one session, library orientation tours and through classroom instructions.

Selective dissemination of information

This is a customized service that provides users with information that will promote the research, teaching and learning activities of users.

Referral service

This is a situation in which a reader might be directed to another library or alternative source of information. Examples of such places are professional organizations, research institutes and individual specialist.

Translation service

There are some publications written in foreign languages like French and library users might desire such publications then it is important for libraries to provide access to such publications and translate it for the users who need them. This service is very important in libraries that has different users with various needs.

Bibliography, Abstracting and indexing services

It is the function of library to publish serial publications that analyse on a continuous basis the contents of a whole range of periodicals and other titles relating to common disciplines. Such publications could be in printed or electronic format.

Consultancy Services

This is another important service that librarians employ to provide high level of professional advice to users, such services could be in the domain of information technology and e-learning. The role of consultancy are to advise users on various issues relating to their information needs, it is also to ensure robust delivery of existing services, to enable

innovation in service delivery, to develop a clear understanding of the needs of users, to focus on delivery quality services to users and to facilitate the flow of information to internal and external users.

Current awareness service

CAS is another very important service that libraries provide to their users, for it is a method by which academic libraries furnish their users with relevant information on newly available resources/ materials that are made available in the library, they encourage their users to develop healthy habits of keeping track of recently published literature, through current awareness services, for libraries without users is out of place.

All these could be of great important and to be made available in the library through some strategies to accomplish its purpose for the benefit of the distance learners (the user). The strategies of promoting library resources and services need to be developed and implemented alongside with its enhancement of the services. Promoting and marketing strategies of library resources and information services are an interesting task, hence it assists in bringing users closer to the library and its resources. Bello (2015) inferred that the provision of the information resources (product) is based on a proper knowledge of the information needs of the user, there is no reason why the information resources will not sell or meet their market. On that note Kotler and Armstrong (2008) itemized strategies for organization as well as libraries to achieve an optimal goal in promotion and marketing of their resources and services thus:

Product: It must be an information services that add value to the user and also be of great assistance for use to the patron, such as referral services, online database searches and document delivery among others.

Price: This has to do with all the things the user has to sacrifice in order to make use of the library and its resources, which are usually that of the time and effort the user spends travelling to the library.

Place: Place of service is 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.

Promotion: 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 are: publicity, public relations, personal representatives, advertising, and sales promotion.

Participation: Are all human actors who play a part in reference and information services delivery, such the library's personnel.

Physical Evidence: Is the environment in which the reference and information services are delivered that facilitates the performance and communication between the patron and the services.

Process: Is the procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities by which the reference and information services are acquired.

Library Week: It is usually an annual event in some libraries. Library week feature such promotional events as certain activities that promote the library will be in place such as library carnival, book exhibition, library talk, speeches, library tour and user education among others. These attract the attention of the public to the library for them to know actually what the library has.

Public Relation and Publicity: This involve building a good relationship between the outsiders and the library community. It is the work of the Public Relation Personnel to ensure

that any negative impression about the library is corrected. Effective Public relation promotes resources, services and library at large.

Embedded Librarian in a Digital Library

In a digital library, with the availability of internet accessibility and technological facilities, it is apparently possible and realistic to provide proper access links to electronic resources that increases the information needs satisfaction of distance learners. The practice of getting packaged / repackaged information for the benefit of distance learning students in form of embedded librarianship, which is a distinctive innovation that takes the librarian out from the library setting, for him to create a new view of library and information work for its patrons. In this case the librarian forms a strong working relationship between him and the patron, close proximity provide the librarian an advantage in better understanding their users' need. Kesselman and Watstein (2009) described embedded librarianship as bringing the library and the librarian to the user regardless of the user's physical location. With a specialised skills, he has a pre-knowledge of the needs of the learner, packaged the information / resources to meet such needs. The embedded librarian becomes engaged in the work of that user group and equally develops highly customised and value – added contributions to the group (distance learners). (LIANZA 2013) noted that in order to extend existing services and competencies into digital librarianships for the benefit of the user group, there must be willingness of librarians to try things out where considered crucial to developing skills and knowledge.

For embedded librarians to involve in promotion of library resources and services there is utmost need for training of such specialized skills for effective handling of the information for its dissemination to users. Such skills that can assist a librarian over promoting library information resources / services are thus:

- Interpersonal skills
- Good communication skills
- Ability to assist in research writing for patrons
- Ability to answer users query.
- Ability to question and evaluate library services
- Ability to sell ideas/ library services
- Ability to package/repackage needed information for patrons in advance
- Information technology skills
- Ability to possess and showcase a good attitude and moral to users.

Farkas (2006) opined that technology will come and go, change is inevitable, but if librarians can adapt to and embrace change, easily learn technologies, they can keep up with changes in the profession, plan for new services, evaluate old services and develop services and technologies that meet the needs of all user group in form of promoting ideas and services.

Advocacy and educating of the patrons on the holdings of the library increase the usage of that library resources, which depends wholly on the success of that library. For it to be achievable, strategies must be adopted by the embedded librarian as a good role to convince the users on the use of the library resources. Sharma and Bhardwaj (2009) suggested some ways to that effect thus:

- Creating a web page: Libraries should create web page for users which is a very effective way of promoting library information services and resources.
- E-mails: Emails can be sent to users about arrival of new library resources and tips on how to access them.
- Librarians should endeavour to attend academic lectures (Inaugural lecture) where prominent number of users can be found to discuss on where they can get certain information as well as to promote the services offered by the library.

- Librarians should provide links to users to access all appropriate library databases.
- Leaflets and posters on library resources and services as a way of promoting them.

The promotion of library services seems easy and without much stress, since it still revolves around the professional activities and services. But some challenges also militate the effective marketing of these services to patrons, such as:

- Lack of effective communication between the librarians and the user.
- Inadequate fund.
- Lack of facilities to market library services.
- Management may not understand the concept of promoting resources and services and to formulate a possible marketing policy as a guide.
- Lack of access to information technology/facilities to work with.
- Librarians are not conversant with marketing of library services, since there were no such training in the Library School.
- Lack of media access to marketing of library services.
- Lack of Professional confidence on the part of the librarians.

Recommendation

There are some recommendations that are to be considered, such as:

1. Professional librarians should be skilfully trained and retrained on the area of promotion and marketing of information resources and services (incorporating in the curriculum)
2. Library management officials need also to be aware of the effectiveness of a proper marketing in the library to improve usage of its resources and services.
3. A separate funding budget must be created to take care of the financial aspect of promoting resources and services in the library.

4. Distance Learning Universities should be conversant with the need for promoting library resources and services and as such assist the library to accomplish its marketing mission.

Conclusion

Promotion is not a new concept in librarianship, but still, several librarians and professionals find it difficult because of lack of proper understanding of the marketing concept and its applicability to their field. Obtaining information quickly is the main concern of the users and that is one of the goals of a library and the librarians so as to satisfy the users need. Yi, Jackson, Park and Probst (2006) opined that Information Technologies change rapidly; information product and services are in a multiplicity of formats in libraries, but for libraries and information centres to stay visible, it is important that they adopt strategies/ services to help meet the mission/ goal of its objective and possibly meet the user's need.

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