

Chapter 20

E-Resources Marketing in African Academic Libraries: Contexts, Challenges and Prospects

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ABSTRACT

Significant changes are taking place in the digital information environment that necessitate a marketing-oriented paradigm shift in the delivery of e-resources in most academic libraries in Africa. These changes present different challenges and prospects in terms of newer skills and programming that require a high degree of adaptability to well-designed marketing ethos in the delivery of e-resources offerings to the increasingly diverse and sophisticated clientele in the academic environment in Africa. This chapter examines the challenges and prospects of marketing e-resources in the digital environment in academic libraries in Africa. It explores the holistic marketing readiness of academic libraries in terms of product orientation, promotion, pricing, delivery channels, skills-set and atmospherics that would ensure that the ultimate exchange of value to their clientele is sustained over time. This will accentuate the survival and relevance of African academic libraries in the current dynamic, competitive, and technology-driven environment in the world.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing as a concept has been studied by many scholars and this has resulted in the development of various models and applications in context. People's understanding and conception of marketing vary; from simply pursuing sales and profit making with no concern for customer satisfaction; to the production of promotional materials such as brochures (Gupta & Jambhekar, 2002). This perception is usually influenced or determined by application of the concept in several contexts. As defined by Jestin and

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-7998-8051-6.ch020

Parameswari, (2002) "...marketing involves activities such as identifying target market's needs, designing suitable services or products to meet their needs and the use of effective pricing, communication and distribution to inform, motivate and serve the market..." (p. 2). Singh (2009, p. 11) posits that marketing is a business philosophy that places the customer at the centre of the organizational activities. Therefore, marketing in the business world is a purposive and proactive organizational activity directed towards satisfying targeted customers to achieve the organization's goals.

Beyond the business world, the marketing concept has over the years attracted debate on its appropriateness in application to public service organizations such as hospitals, universities and libraries. The argument has been that such organizations are non-profit, funded by the government with different operational environments and different objectives compared with the business world. In the context of libraries, the mandate is to continually meet the changing information needs of clientele, and that requires continuous studying and monitoring of existing programs and platforms. Marketing in relation to library and information services can be defined as "...the process of planning, pricing, promoting, and distributing goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy the library and the customer..." (Singh, 2009, p. 13). In fact, what is even more persuasive with libraries/information centers adopting marketing techniques is that the very philosophy of satisfying the customer that drives the marketing process has been the very core principle of why information services are provided since time immemorial. Thus, the integration of marketing into library and information services is helpful because it reinforces and reiterates the basic values and beliefs of the profession in a changing environment - which is to provide the right information to the right users at the right time and reducing barriers to access, enhancing the use of information, and empowering users to access information on their own, particularly through the use of modern technologies.

Since this chapter gives an insight into marketing in academic libraries, it is important to look into role of an academic library in the provision of various information services to the clientele. These information services include e-resources made available to the university communities, primarily the staff and student populations. Academic libraries are the essential information support systems to university teaching, learning and research systems world over. In recent times, significant changes have taken place in the digital information environment that have necessitated a paradigm shift in the collection development processes and programs with e-resources being at the core of the delivery of information services strategies in most academic libraries. Unique to e-resources marketing in academic libraries are the compelling factors that drive the need to explore, develop and implement information service delivery frameworks anchored on well-founded marketing strategies. These factors include dramatic change in the digital era where everything is going 'e'. This factor manifests in different ways and means such as the introduction of the digital learning systems in higher education where teaching and learning takes place.

Academic libraries have to embed their services and establish collaborative links with the departments and the information and communications technology (ICT) departments if they are to remain relevant. This linkage is essential as it will ensure that the required resources are at the reach of the end user. The present-day end user that has developed impeccable technological skills that allows them to interconnect globally and through multifaceted ICT applications can determine their time and space of learning. Reliance on e-resources is another factor that is necessitated by ease of access, use, delivery and storage. All these factors and more make marketing e-resources a unique and much needed service in academic libraries.

Therefore, the objectives of this chapter are to:

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