Chapter 5
Strategies for Marketing an Academic Library in an African Setting

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ABSTRACT

Marketing of library services varies from one environment to another. This chapter discusses the kind of strategies that a librarian manning a university library in Africa needs to come up with to realize a successful marketing programme. The limited resources and an adverse working environment characteristic of the African situation are highlighted. It is observed that a successful marketer is one who has the right personal qualities, sensitive to the needs of the users, knowledgeable about the product, and promoting it with passion. The chapter also looks at issues that affect the marketing capabilities of academic libraries in Africa. It concludes that academic libraries in Africa have very tight budgets, and most cannot afford to earmark any funds towards marketing their services. The chapter is significant in that not much literature is available for marketing of academic libraries in an African setting, and it provides some solutions that can be applied without extra funding. Students in Africa rely on mobile phones and social networking sites to communicate, and it is recommended that the use of social media for marketing can be very effective in Africa today.

INTRODUCTION

Marketing has been defined in many ways but the one that applies most to the information services sector is that by Shimpock-Vieweg (1992). She says that

Marketing makes a library visible within the firm, ensures its continued survival and growth, and positions the library as an indispensable resource which fills a need that cannot be met elsewhere. In addition, marketing provides librarians with a vehicle to express their needs and accomplishments in a way that can be easily understood by others.

As we know, the library is not always visible and this is not how it should be.

The central idea of marketing is of a matching between a company's capabilities and the wants of customers in order to achieve the objectives of both parties (McDonald, 2007). From this definition, it is clear that the end result of marketing is customer satisfaction. It is a process that has to be managed, involves careful planning, and requires analysis of customer's needs and ways of satisfying those needs. The marketing concept, as opposed to the marketing function, implies that all the activities of an organization are driven by a desire to satisfy customer needs.

The technological changes witnessed recently in information and communication creates the need for customer focus and inclusion of marketing and planning in the library and information center management process. It can no longer be assumed that information services are valued but they must demonstrate that the service they provide contributes to the achievement of organizational goals, hence marketing strategies.

According to Coote (1994), there are a number of key activities, which must be undertaken when considering marketing:

- Researching and analyzing the existing marketplace in which the library can offer its services
- Identifying what the needs are and which parts of that marketplace share them
- Analyzing the library's strengths and weaknesses in terms of resources, personnel and areas of specialist expertise
- Understanding the competition
- Designing services and products which translate the library's internal strengths into specific services that meet the identified customer needs
- Making existing and potential customers aware of these services and products
- Monitoring and measuring customer satisfaction with the services provided, feeding back and acting on the resultant information.

Marketing is a continuous and dynamic process. The needs of customers change with time, and the library services and resources change in harmony with the changing information environment. This does not mean, however, that extensive research be undertaken every so often. Once the first marketing strategy has been prepared, it is enough to update records and to review the strategy every one or two years, as the situation deems necessary. For marketing to succeed, it should be embraced by the whole library system – from top management down.

RELEVANCE OF STRATEGIC MARKETING TO ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

Not long ago it was necessary to persuade library and information professionals of the wisdom and appropriateness of marketing. Marketing was regarded as a foreign commercial process, not applicable to libraries and inconsistent with the core values of public service. Today, marketing

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