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THE MARKETING OF INFORMATION PRODUCTS AND SERVICES IN LIBRARIES AND INFORMATION CENTRES

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ABSTRACT

Marketing is becoming a battle based on information than on sales power (Kotler, 2005:123).Who should ultimately design the product? The customer, of course (Kotler, 2005:123). Marketing of information products and services has emerged as an important area for libraries and information centres. If Marketing is not conducted in the provision of information products and services, the information professional will not be in a position to really identify the customers' needs and wants. Hence the call for marketing of information products and services in libraries and information centres. This paper defines Marketing and distinguishes it from advertising and selling. The importance of Marketing of information products and services in libraries and information centres are established. The strategies that can be used by librarians and information professional in marketing are identified. This paper recommends that Marketing should be embraced by all information centres as a strategic asset as it offers sustainable and distinctive competitive advantage. Organisations will be able to strategically position themselves in this world of information and knowledge economy.

KEY WORDS*: marketing, products, services, libraries, information centres, information, information centres*

1. INTRODUCTION

Labour and capital which were the paramount asserts of an industrial age business, today stand replaced by information and knowledge as the most important asserts in businesses. The information age that the world is operating on calls for the marketing of information products and services in libraries and information centres. With the mushrooming of new information providers such as cyber cafes, mega-bookstores, online book dealers, the internet community, and consultants, libraries and information centres cannot continue to assume that they are the only sources of information that people will consult (Kaane, 2006:2). According to Ranganathan (1957)'s 5th law, a library is a "growing organism". Due to the global information explosion, more information comes every second and today's information is becoming old very fast for tomorrow (Basanta, 2008). This then calls for the marketing of information products and services in libraries and information centres.

2. OBJECTIVES OF THE ARTICLE

The objectives of the article are to:

- Define marketing, product and services
- To give The importance of Marketing of information products and services in libraries and information centres
- Identify some marketing stratifies that can be applies I n libraries and information services.

3. What is Marketing?

Solomon and Stuart (2005:3) aver that marketing is the process of planning and executing/implementing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of

ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organisational objectives". The definition shows that marketing satisfies needs and wants. The most important part of the definition is to satisfy individual and organisational objectives. Thus the central aspect of marketing is to satisfy the needs of both consumers and producers. A consumer is the ultimate user of goods. Marketing is a management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements and profitability. (Chartered Institute of Marketing, 2000). The definition shows that management must be totally involved in what the company is producing and selling, to whom, why and whether it will be a business success or not. As a marketer you are portrayed as a facilitator helping individuals to satisfy their needs and the firm to create its goals.

This definition indicates that:

- Finding out who the information centre's customers are and what their needs and wants are and how they are satisfied which calls for the marketing research.
- Future needs and wants for existing customers and potential customers must be predicted and then ensure the requirements are met.
- There is need to match product benefits to consumer needs at a price and place which satisfies the identified requirements. Customer requirements must be met at a profit or benefit to the information centre. There is no point in marketing a product/ service unless it will make a profit or a benefit even if it takes time to get the profit.
- The emphasis of this definition is on satisfying customer requirements. The satisfied customer is more likely than not to come back again and as a result, the organisation will have a future source of profits

Marketing according to Kotler (1988:6) "is a social and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others". Thus marketing is a process of satisfying customer's needs through exchange of products and services for profit or efficiency.

4. **What is a product?**

Solomon and Stuart (2005:41) are of the opinion that a product is "a tangible good, service, idea or service or some combination of these that satisfies consumer or business customer needs through the exchange process. Kotler (1988:60) defines a product as covering anything that can be afforded to someone to satisfy a need or a want. It can be tangible or intangible.

5. **What is a service?**

Kotler (2004:444) defines a service as any act of performance that can offer to another that is essentially intangible. Solomon and Stuart (2005:41) assert that a service is an "intangible products that are exchanged directly from the producer to the customer".

6. **The importance of Marketing of information products and services in libraries and information Centres**

The importance of marketing in the information field include the following:

- It meets customer's needs and wants therefore resulting in the commitment to customer satisfaction. Only satisfied customers come back and there are greater chances that a dissatisfied customer will find some other suppliers of information to meet his /her information needs.
- To satisfy and delight the customer. Kotler (2004:59) posits that "it is no longer enough to satisfy the customers. You need to delight the customer". A delighted customer would call at least five to seven more people to the organisation. Kotler (2004:589) posits that the best advertising done by satisfied customers.
- Organisations such as libraries, records centres and museums as well as other information centres need to market their products and services for recognition and therefore results in more customers coming up.
- 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 (Jestin and Parameswari, 2002).
- With increased competition in the world of information, marketing is a factor for survival.
- Able to serve the customer better
- Marketing activities play a major role in the creation of utility which means that a product provides benefits when it is used. By working to ensure that people have the type of product they want, where and when they want it, then marketing strategy makes people's lives easier (Solomon, 2005:52).
- Results in a competitive advantage- Kotler (2004:158) observes that "today you have to run faster to stay in the same place.
- Able to quickly respond to market changes

- Results in marketing research techniques in order to come up with the solution to the problem
- Leads to the dissemination of the right information to the right customer at the right time
- Due to the explosion of information at global level which has resulted in more information available in the market, the marketing of information products/services in libraries and information centres becomes a great necessity for libraries to remain competitive.
- Understanding customers better. No library and information centres owns its customers to the extent of determining their needs and wants
- Improves image and reputation
- Increases market share

7. Marketing, Advertising and Selling

There is often a great deal of misunderstanding about marketing. Some people consider marketing as advertising while others consider it as selling, which is not the case. Advertising and selling are part of marketing. Marketing is the wide range of activities involved in making sure that "you are continuing to meet the needs of your customers and getting value in return" (McNamara, 2011). Various methods of market research are used to get information about market, target markets, customer's needs, competitors, market trends and customer satisfaction and expectations with products and service. Marketing is more than selling and advertising. Selling is the actual transaction of getting a product or service in the hands of your customers. Adverting is persuading people to go for a product or service. It is a non-personal communication which is paid for to persuade or inform. The selling, transporting and manipulating of information have become a huge business.

8. User needs analysis

User Needs Analysis is to describe the issues, themes and common areas of users concern It is a process of developing libraries and other information centres in order to strategically plan so as to meet the current as well as the future needs of users. This will build customer satisfaction, value and retention. There is need to identify and categorise the target audience to appropriately identify specific needs.

9. The Marketing Mix (The 4 Ps , additional 3 Ps and 7Cs)

Marketing mix are the controllable variables the organisation puts together to satisfy a target group. The 4 Ps which are Product, place, promotion and price make up the marketing mix and the additional three Ps as well as the 7Cs.

Product

The product is what satisfies customer needs. The products can be goods, service or ideas. This is concerned with developing the right "product' for the target market. The product is not limited to physical goods.

Price

The price is the assigned value or amount to be exchanged for the product. It is often used as a way of increasing consumer's interest in a product. This answers the following questions:

- What is the value of the product or service to the buyer?
- Will a small decrease in price will gain you extra market share?
- What discounts should be offered to customers or to other specific segments of your market?

Price should be in line with the environment and competition. A marketer should try you estimate customer reaction to possible prices.

Place

The place is the channel for distribution. It is getting the product to the customer. This refers to the availability of the product or service to the customer at the desired time and location. Sometimes a channel system is quite short. It may run directly from a producer to a final user or consumer for example online website. This will answer the following question: Where do buyers look for your product or service?

Promotion

Promotion is the organisation's efforts to persuade customers to buy a product. It is concerned with telling the target market or others in the channel of distribution about the "right" product. Sometimes promotion is focused on acquiring new customers, retaining current customers and so on. This is done through promotion mix which is done through personal selling, sales promotions and mass selling which involves publicity and advertising as well as public relations.

Personal selling

Personal selling is the direct spoken communication between sellers and potential customers. This is face to face selling. It is a two way form of communicating however it might be expensive.

Mass selling

Mass selling is communicating with large number of customers at the same time through advertising and publicity.

Advertising- is any paid form of non- personal presentation of ideas, goods or services by an identified sponsor.

Publicity –is any unpaid from of non-personal presentation of ideas, goods or services.

Sales promotions

Sales promotion is any initiative undertaken by an organisation to promote an increase in sales, usage or trial of a product or service. S ales promotion can be both personnel and mass selling more effective by coordinating both efforts. These can be catalogues, directory references, displays, circulars and trade show exhibitions.

Later writers on marketing added 3 further Ps to reflect the complexities of the market in the 2nd half of the 20th century. These were people, process and physical evidence.

People were added as they make up the supplier-customer relationship.

Process- the actual mechanics of the product/service acquisition

Physical evidence-confirmation.

One can argue that the extra 3Ps were actually included in the original 4PS.

Physical evidence being the product and people and process are involved in all the four Ps.

The 7Ps were translated into 7 Cs which are shown on the table 1 below:

Table 1: 7 Ps and 7s

Seven Ps	Seven Cs
Product	Consumer benefit/value
Price	Cost
place	convenience
Promotion	Communication
Physical evidence	Confirmation
People	Consideration
Process	Co-ordination and concern

The 7Cs should be considered alongside with 7 Ps. All the ingredients need to be
Co-coordinated to achieve a suitable mix.

10. Marketing strategies

The following are some of the strategies that can be employed by information professionals in marketing of information products and services:

- Environmental scanning-there is need for the environmental scanning to get strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. This can be done through the use of 7s model, PESLEG and Porter's five forces
- Market Segmentation- Market segmentation is the identification of groups of individuals with common characteristics within a market that has significant implications for the determination of marketing mix . It is the process of dividing a larger market into smaller pieces based on one or more meaningful shared characteristics.
- The product life cycle/the market life cycle
- The BCG matrix- The Growth Matrix (BCG) is the brainchild of the Boston Consulting Group (BCG) in the USA. It was formed by Bruce Henderson, and is generally considered to be the pioneer of business strategy analysis. The BCG can be used to analyse industries, business units and products.

Figure 1: BCG Matrix
(Source :http://www.netmba.com/images/strategy/matrix/bcg/growthshare.gif)
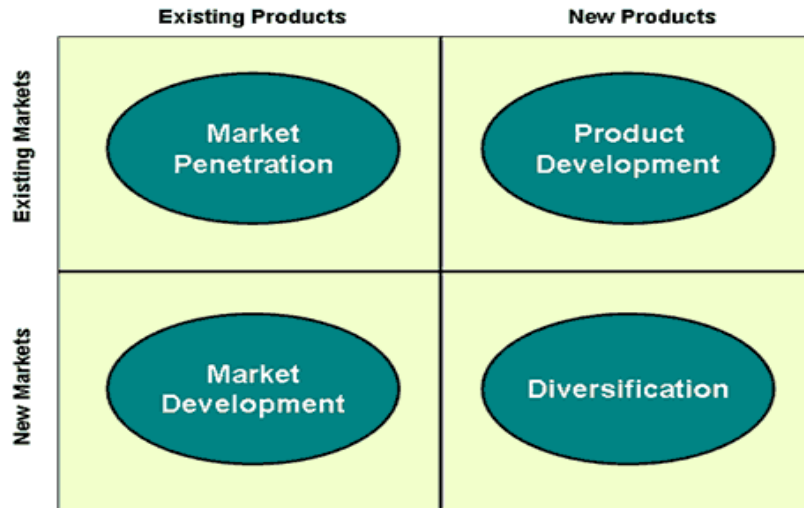
The Ansoff matrix

Figure 2: Ansoff's matrix

Ansoff's matrix is used by marketers who have objectives for growth. It offers strategic choices to achieve the objectives. It helps information professionals decide on the appropriate market growth strategy therefore set the direction of the business strategy. There are four main categories for selection which are market penetration- selling products or services into existing markets, market development- seeks to sell its existing products into new markets, product development - introducing new products into existing markets and diversification-. introduces completely new products to new customers.

- **Porter's generic competitive strategies**

Porter comes out with the five generic strategies. They are considered to be the backbone of all processes of crafting strategies. These strategies are called generic because all organisations can pursue them regardless of whether they are manufacturing, service or non-profit enterprises. They are also called generic because they can be pursued in different kinds of industry environments. These are cost leadership strategy, broad differentiation strategy, best cost provider strategy, a focused low cost strategy and a focused differentiation strategy.

- Offensive and defensive strategies- These are types of competitive strategies to

maintain a market share. An example of offensive strategy is **encirclement or envelopment strategy** which involves encircling the target competitor. An example of defensive strategy is **mobile defense which** stretches its domain over new territories

- AIDA model- The communication goals of attention, interest, desire and action. This means that the message should get attention, hold interest, create desire and produce action.
- Total Quality Management
- Customer Relationship Management- Customer relationship management (CRM) is all about managing the relationships you have with your customers. It refers to the methodologies and tools that help businesses manage customer relationships in an organised way. There is need to give a smile to the user as the customer is the king. To serve the customer, the library should serve as host as advocated by Ranganthan (1961) who advocates that like a host, the library should provide full hospitality to a user as a supreme guest.
- Just In Time (JIT) System

11. RECOMMENDATIONS
This paper calls for the following recommendations:

- Marketing of information products and services should be embraced by information professionals as a strategic asset as it offers sustainable and distinctive competitive advantage so that they will be able to strategically position themselves in this world of information and knowledge economy.
- The library should give priority to provide excellent customer service enhancing its image as information provider in the information age
- The library and information services should be value added according to the current requirements of the users
- Customers should be satisfied and delighted
- There is need for Customer Relationship Management (CRM)

- Total Quality Management and Just In Time (JIT) System should be employed by librarians and information professionals for effective marketing.

12. CONCLUSION
Marketing should be applied in libraries and information centres to meet up users' needs and wants and to effectively compete. Failure to do that would result in libraries sand information centre losing their competitive advantage and market share as there are other information providers in this world of information and knowledge economy.

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Bio-data

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