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CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIPS MANAGEMENT IN LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

To measure customer satisfaction, the relationship between the customer and the library must be clear and understood. It must be a friendly relationship. A customer relationship is comprised of a hierarchy of encounters through facilities, resources, services and service providers. In this case the service providers are libraries and the key product or service is the information. This then calls for Customer Relationship Management (CRM) so as to efficiently and effectively meet the customers' information needs.

KEY WORDS: *Customer Relationship Management (CRM), customer, quality, products, services, information, knowledge.*

1. INTRODUCTION

In this age of information and knowledge economy, information and knowledge are at the center stage and they make everything happen. Information has become one of the basic necessities and should actually be added as one of the physiological needs on Maslow's hierarchy of needs. To serve the customer the library should serve as host, as advocated by Ranganathan (1961). He considers that like a host, the library should provide full hospitality to a user as a supreme guest at the premises of the library. Jones and George (2011: 281) aver that one functional strategy managers can use to get close to customers and understand their needs is Customer Relationship Management (CRM). The Customer Relationship Management helps us to understand our customers better and be able to anticipate and satisfy the customers' needs. Kotler (2005:59) opines that "it is no longer enough to satisfy customers. You need to delight them". A delighted customer will advertise for us. He/she will call at least five new customers to our libraries.

2. PURPOSE OF THE ARTICLE

The purpose of the article is to demonstrate Customer Relationship Management in libraries.

3. CUSTOMER RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT (CRM)

Meredith et al (1992:161) notes that "your business exists to satisfy your customers, your products and service must satisfy the needs of customers better than those of your competitors". Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is all about managing the relationships you have with your customers. It is the overall process of building and maintaining profitable customer relationships by delivering superior customer value and satisfaction (Kotler and Armstrong, 2010:37). Ward (2016) delineates that it refers to the methodologies and tools that help businesses manage customer relationships in an organised way. Customer Relationship Management (CRM) is an information industry term for methodologies, software, and usually internet capabilities that help libraries to manage customer relationships in an organised way. For example, a library might build a database about its customers that describes relationships in sufficient detail so that management, salespeople, people providing service, and perhaps the customer directly could access information, match customer needs with product plans and offerings, remind customers of service requirements, know what other products a customer had purchased, and so forth. Some organisations have installed sophisticated CRM Information Technology to track customers' library's changing demands. This maximizes responsiveness.

Customer Relationship Management tools include software and browser-based applications that collect and organise information about customers. For instance, as part of their CRM strategy, a business might use a database of customer information to help construct a customer satisfaction survey, or decide which new product their customers might be interested in (Ward, 2016). Kotler (2005: 182) alludes that "the most important thing is to forecast where customers are moving and to be in front of them". This is made possible through Customer Relationship Management.

Ranganathan gives the following customer relationships tips:

- Give service with full attention and sincerity,
- Give him/her service to the best capacity at your command,
- Give him/her service in all modesty and in full freedom from any touch of prestige or ego,
- Give him/her service in full measure. There should not be any offence to the laws of library science,
- Acquire the best knowledge and information for giving him/her your best service. We cannot retain customers unless given prompt and relevant service in a personal way. She/he is human and human personality alone can keep good humor, make the appreciation of the value of books which blossom in him/her and transform him/her into a willingness beneficiary of the library.

Ranganathan's tips all points to the need of Customer Relationship Management.

4. RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN LIBRARY SERVICES AND THE CUSTOMER

The relationship between library services and the customer are illustrated in figure 1. There is need for marketing, customers, services or products and quality.

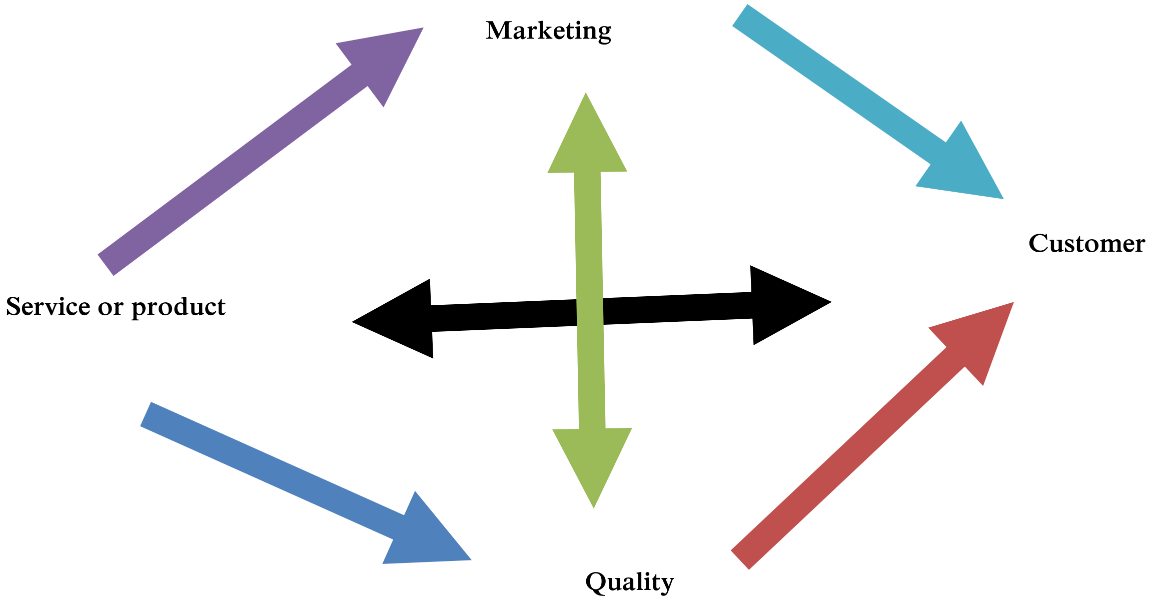

Figure 1: Relationships between library services and customers

4.1 Marketing

Customer Relationship Management would not occur without marketing. 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. 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 one is portrayed as a facilitator helping individuals to satisfy their needs and the firm to create its goals.

4.2 Quality

The user of the service is the ultimate judge of the quality. She/he weighs the value she received from a service organisation against the time spent and /or the efforts involved besides the monetary burden in getting the desires service and thus decides the quality. Customer's needs should be expressed in terms of customer's own words and them linking customers' perceived quality into internal process and measuring the impact of quality measurement on the market place.

4.3 Service or product

Products are defined by Kotler (1988:60) as covering "anything that can be offered to someone to satisfy a need or want". Kotler (2005:444) defines service as "any act or performance that one party can offer to another that is essentially intangible and does not result in the ownership of anything. Its production may or may not be tied to a physical product". Thus a library produces some performances for someone and that performance should be at someone's satisfaction. In so doing quality products and service should be provided at the right time and place.

4.4 Customer

Roper and Williams (1999: 84) defines a customer as anyone who needs, uses or benefits from an organisation's products or services. They go on to say that customer care is any contact between a customer and an employee that is positive and productive for all involved. Some organisations may employ specialised customer service representatives, regularly taking orders by telephone, answering enquiries or handling complaints. However, the fact is that anyone who is in contact with the customer, even for a minute, is part of customer care. Caring for a customer is important because that is what business is all about in every organisation. A customer is the reason for the library's survival. A customer is not a disruption, but is all what libraries need to live forever.

4.4.1 Handling Complaints

Roper and Williams (1999: 84) suggest the following ways of handing customers:

- Show interest. For example, call customers by name and let them know that you are listening; give them your name too. Always treat customers with respect.
- Show empathy with customers. Imagine how you would feel in their position.
- Restate the complaint to make sure there are no misunderstandings.
- Admit the problem, if there is one. Be sure to say that '*we*' made the mistake, rather than *'I'* or '*they*', and apologise for any inconvenience caused.
- Ask the customer what he or she would like done: a replacement? A refund?
- Don't be defensive. The complaint is not about you personally. Remember, upset customers may be reacting to other things that have happened that day.
- Do not give a flat '*no*' for an answer. Always offer an explanation.
- Do not assign blame (to the computer, the mail room, and so on). Customers do not care whose fault it was; they just want a solution.
- Do not give commands to customers. Instead of '*sign this*' say '*if you would please sign this ...*'.
- Do not make promises that are unrealistic. The customer will just be more disappointed later on.
- Do not leave the customer dangling. Keep writing or calling with progress reports until the matter is resolved.
- Do not lose your sense of humour. Seeing the light side of things will make both you and the customer feel better. At the same time, don't give the impression that you think the complaint is trivial.
- Monitor complaints and have targets for dealing with them.
- Customer service depends on the individual. Staff should be courteous, positive.

There is also need to consider the internal customers who are the employees. Failure to satisfy and delight them would result is the failure to achieve the organisational goals and objectives. There is therefore need to instill soft skills which will be of the benefit to both the internal and external customer. Soft skills are personal attributes that enhance an individual's interactions, job performance and career prospects. Hard skills are about a person's skill set and ability to perform a certain type of task or activity, soft skills are interpersonal and broadly applicable. The soft skills and hard skill if incorporated will bring out efficiency and effectiveness in Customer Relationship Management.

5. CONCLUSION

It is paramount for all libraries to exercise Customer Relationship Management (CRM). This results in continual relationships and even lifelong relationship as they will continue coming back as well as inviting new customers. Libraries are surviving because of the customers and they have to be fully satisfied and delighted.

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BIO-DATA

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