MARKETING OF LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES: A STRATEGIC PERSPECTIVE

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In today's knowledge economy, library and information services are viewed as saleable products. More importantly, libraries have started treating their users as 'customers.' The paper analyzes the need for marketing of library and information services (LIS). It discusses the strategic planning required for LIS marketing. This conceptual paper also attempts to analyze the extended marketing mix or 'seven Ps' in the context of LIS marketing.

Key Words : ***Library and Information Services, Marketing, Marketing-mix, Strategic Planning, Services Marketing***

INTRODUCTION

THE concept of library as a not-for-profit organization is fast changing. Various internal as well as external factors are reshaping the role of libraries in the society. The focus is shifting from the size of the library collection to the services being offered by the library. Libraries have started to see their users as 'customers'. In today's knowledge economy, library and information services are increasingly being recognized as saleable products.[1]

The concept of marketing for non-profit organizations was first introduced by Kotler and Levy in 1969. Later in the book *Marketing for Non-profit Organizations*, Kotler (1982) elaborated the marketing strategies for organizations like libraries. According to him, a nonprofit organization like a library is basically engaged in the production of services rather than goods. Services are distinct in nature primarily due to the characteristics of being intangible, inseparable, variable and perishable. Thus there is also a need of different approach towards marketing of services vis-à-vis marketing of goods (Zeithaml, Parasuraman, Berry 1985). Within different kind of services, Information service is not only considered as a valuable commodity but also as a marketable commodity (Eagleton, 1992). Information products/services, like any other commodity, are demanded in the market and the demand is affected by factors like price, preference, income, expectations, populations, seasons, technology, and price of other goods (Kanaujia, 2004).

Marketing, according to Kotler (1982), *is the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programmes designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organizational objectives.* However, marketing intended for not-for-profit organizations such as libraries is referred to as "the societal marketing" (Adeloye, 2003). Adeloye, in fact, refers to Kotler - who explained, "Social marketing concept holds that the organization's task is to determine the needs, wants and interests of target markets and to deliver the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors in a way that preserves or enhances the consumer's and the society's well being." The societal marketing concept calls upon marketers to build social and ethical considerations into their marketing practices (Kotler, 2003). Though marketing is not new to library and information professionals, there is still a considerable misunderstanding within most of the library and information sector as to what constitutes effective marketing (Gupta and Jambhekar, 2003). Unfortunately, marketing is often reduced, when not

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understood in depth, to its two most visible and spectacular aspects; market research (surveys, etc.) and communication (promotion, publicity, etc.). But the discipline is infinitely more ambitious and more demanding, not confining itself to these two aspects (Muet and Salaun, 2003).

In light of the above inputs, in perspective of the present paper, LIS are considered more towards services marketing domain to make marketable as any other service commodity. Though LIS are also under the umbrella of not-for-profit organizations and hence related with social issues. Therefore, to understand the marketing of LIS, theoretical frameworks of services marketing are being applied in this paper for required analysis and discussions.

The objectives of this paper are:

- to understand the need for marketing of library and information services (LIS)
- to understand the strategic planning process required for LIS marketing
- to analyze the 'marketing mix' in the context of LIS marketing

NEED FOR LIS MARKETING

Library services have long been perceived as 'free'. But in today's modern economy, nothing comes free. Raina (1998) says, "the age old concept of certain social services like health, education, justice, etc. being made available free is becoming irrelevant as the time goes by. This is true with library and information services also. The institutions engaged in all such services are being asked to become self sufficient, if they are to survive in cost conscious and competition oriented social and environmental setups. Public funding for such purposes is being questioned."

Libraries are in the business of providing information services to its clientele. Thus the libraries' core activity resides in the intangible services of facilitating access to information and they seek to influence the use of their services (Mittermeyer, 2003). According to Kotler (1982), "*organizations become aware of marketing when their market undergoes a change. When buyers, members, funds, or other resources needed by the organization get scarce or harder to attract, the organization gets concerned.*" Today libraries are facing a whole lot of problems; their funds are shrinking, costs of resources like journals, etc. are increasing rapidly and reading habits among people declining due to reasons such as onslaught of television and Internet . A study conducted by Oldman as early as in 1977 had identified some of the reasons why people do not use libraries:

1. It is quicker to obtain information from sources other than the formal system;
2. Talking to people is regarded as preferable to reading books;
3. Individuals do not realize that they have an information problem;
4. Potential users are not aware of the library's facilities;
5. Users have had bad experiences with past or present service.

Today we live in era of competition. Library's competitors include Internet, television, FM radios, exhibitions and fairs, leisure services, holiday services, computer games, family retreats, sports events, etc. The library and information services sector operates in an environment which is undergoing constant evolution and change. Library and information service professionals are realizing that the delivery of effective services must be based on strategic planning. The ability of businesses and organizations to promote their services or to make potential users aware of their products can mean the difference between success and extinction (Kotler, 1997). Today's libraries need a marketing knowledge to operate effectively. Snoj and Petermanec (2001) give the following reasons for the libraries to have marketing strategies:

- To improve their organizational status and image to different stakeholders
- To develop new services or change existing ones to satisfy their users
- Improve their performance in general like timely procurement of books.

The basic philosophy underlying the need for LIS marketing can be summed up as:

1. *To focus on the customer:* As indicated above, today the customer has choices. Marketing makes the libraries realize and reaffirm who are their customers and what are their needs. Like any service organization, a library exists for its customers. Thus marketing helps to achieve high levels of customer satisfaction. The increased customer satisfaction will result in the increased

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willingness to use and pay for the services offered (Gupta and Jambhekar, 2003).

2. *To improve the image of the library:* Gone are the days when people used to consider libraries as store houses of books and other materials. Today's libraries are dynamic organizations. Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) make it possible for the libraries to reach out to their customers as never before. People's perception about libraries is fast changing. Marketing their services can help the libraries in reinventing themselves and finding their rightful place in the organization/society in which they operate.

3. *To build relationships with the corporate world:* Libraries can play a crucial role in developing industry-institution interactions and building partnerships. Often, libraries are the first gateways for the corporate world coming to the academic world. Libraries can help their organization in strengthening the existing relationships and finding new partners.

4. *Cost recovery:* The cost of the library resources both electronic and printed is increasing at a faster rate. Other operational costs, like maintaining of books, furniture and other infrastructure, are also increasing. However, in most of the instances, the library budget is either reducing or remains constant. So there is a need for the libraries to earn revenue for re-investing in the resources. There is a large market for library and information products/services in this present knowledge economy. Effective marketing strategies will make possible for the libraries to create a market for their products/services.

STRATEGIC PLANNING FOR LIS MARKETING

Strategic planning is the process of defining the purpose and pursuits of an organization and the methods for achieving those (Helms, 2006). Strategic planning is required for achieving success in marketing on sustainable basis. Strategic planning involves formulation of vision, mission and goals setting.

A vision statement describes what the organization is to become in the (long-term) future (Thompson, 2001). Thus, vision is a statement about what your library wants to become. It should say what you want to see at certain point in future. In other words, it is a future oriented description of outcomes you want to achieve. A vision should stretch the library's capabilities and image of itself. It gives shape and direction to a library in coming times.

Mission reflects the essential purpose of the organization, concerning particularly why it is in existence, the nature of the business(es) it is in, and the customers it seeks to serve and satisfy (Thompson, 2001). In other words, while the vision statement says 'where-we-will-be-going', the mission statement will say, 'how-we-will-get-there'. The mission statement flows directly from the vision statement. In other words, it is the implementation of the vision and it outlines what needs to be done in order to implement the vision. Defining the organization's mission forces managers to carefully identify the scope of its products or services (Robbins and Coulter, 2005).

Goals represent the desired general ends toward which efforts are directed while objectives are specific and often quantified versions of goal. For example, management's goal may be, " *to become the innovative leader in the industry*". On the basis of this goal, one of the specific objectives may be "*to have 25 per cent of sales each year coming from new products developed during the preceding three years*" (Wright, Kroll and Parnell, 1998). To put it in another way, goals are specific objectives that relate to specific time periods and are stated in terms of facts. They are nothing but steps towards accomplishing the vision/mission. Goals, when accomplished, bring you closer to the vision. While goals are the big steps, objectives are the smaller steps which we need to take in order to accomplish the goals.

It is essential that libraries need a proper strategy for successful marketing and to meet its objectives. The key elements of such a strategy (Ewers and Austen, 2006) are:

- Understand your client (market research)
- Identify your client market (segment and target)
- Identify your strengths as a competitive business (position)
- Know the products your clients want and where they want to use it (product and place)
- Develop effective and efficient procedures and systems that facilitate outcomes for clients (processes)
- Employ and train staff in both work skills and client relationship marketing (people)
- Communicate the benefits and advantages of your product over competitors, such as the chaos of the internet (integrate marketing communication)

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Consumer Analysis

Too many assumptions are made by librarians about the consumers (Adeloye, 2003). For example:

- Collection of books and resources is inherently desirable;
- It is in the user's own interest to use the library. He/she will come to us anyway;
- Library needs to have all old classics;
- Our scholars are too proud to visit the library;
- Library has to be located in the most silent corner in the campus, users' convenience is secondary.

Strategic marketing principles, thus, call for continuous research into: (i) customer needs, wants and demands (ii) customer perception towards services and service provider (iii) preferences and (iv) satisfaction. Libraries cannot be all things to all people. Marketing segmentation subdivides a market into distinct and meaningful subsets of customers who might merit a separate marketing effort. Segmentation is followed by targeted marketing which is the act of concentrating on those market segments that can be served efficiently.

Remaining close to the customer is a prerequisite to the marketing success. The culture of customer oriented-ness needs to be emphasized in all strategic plan documents. The staff must 'think' customer. This attitude must permeate the organization's culture. Unless the library staff have the right attitude of open mindedness and readiness to act in response to customer needs, your organization will be ill equipped to win the battle for competitive advantage (Hill, 2001). In order to put customers first, not only should front line staff be 'customer conscious,' but all the employees are required to subscribe to such a philosophy (Ballantyne, 2000). Further, it is not enough to create the customer oriented culture, it has to be maintained. Otherwise, staff may early revert to a culture where the concern of the customer is no longer considered as of paramount importance and the organization ceases to have a marketing orientation. Therefore, in addition to staff training programmes in customer care, the senior staff should regularly articulate and 'live' customer oriented culture. Customer positive behavior needs to be encouraged by staff recognition and customer negative behavior needs to be changed by feedback. There have to be a plenty of in-built mechanisms to gather customer reactions which can be analyzed and corrective actions can be taken quickly.

MARKETING MIX FOR LIS

Marketing mix is the blend of four "Ps", namely, Product, Place, Pricing and Promotion, used to reach a target market. The "Four Ps of marketing" were first introduced by Jerome E. Mccarthy in 1960 and later popularized by Kotler. The "four Ps" lays the foundation for the modern marketing theory. However, in case of services marketing, there are three more "Ps" viz. People, Physical evidence and Process, considered as extended marketing-mix of "Seven Ps" (Booms and Bitner, 1981). An attempt is made to analyze briefly the 'Seven Ps' in the context of LIS marketing. Nonetheless, one can develop an effective set of marketing-mix strategies only after identifying one's target market needs as a pre-requisite.

Library product offer: The goods and services offered by the libraries are transforming very fast due to the increased applications of ICT in LIS sector. ICT has given librarians new ways to reach their customers in faster and efficient ways. Hermelbracht and Senst (2006) give examples of new services being offered by the libraries these days:

- Translated basic info packages for foreign library users
- Home delivery service for books
- Media workstations in the library
- Virtual "ask-a-librarian" agents on the web
- Video mediated book view
- 3D multi-modal search engines

Product planning also connotes the range of information materials the LIS will offer, their quality, usability and upto-date-ness.

Price: Librarians are always reluctant in properly "pricing" their products. People used to think that a service like the library service should be free. However, the escalating cost of library resources makes the librarians to be more realistic. People do not mind spending on services once they are convinced of its worth. In a knowledge economy, people appreciate the value of timely information. Libraries can think of having flexible pricing structure for different types of services (Jose, 1995). In a public library, it may in the form of an annual subscription fee. In an academic library, it can be for accessing a certain services like online resources.

Place and Physical evidence: Traditionally, one-on-one (i.e. librarian/reader) distribution model is used in libraries which is usually coupled with a physical location (library). In case of a traditional library, the

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physical appearance and arrangement of materials have to be inviting and user friendly. The library buildings should be functional and attractive. It should have disabled-friendly access provisions. Various facilities available in the library should be maintained in a clean and tidy manner. There should be signage inside the library to help the users. The signage needs to be consistent and easy to follow. In today's academic libraries, specially designed areas such as group study rooms, discussion rooms, etc. are commonly expected.

In the context of present day ICT applications, the concept of "space" in LIS marketing is increasingly becoming irrelevant. Internet based online services allow the users to access the library services from remote locations. In other words, now library goes to the user instead of the user coming to the library to access the resources. So library managers also need to consider the "virtual space" in the context of online information services. Public libraries in countries like Singapore and USA allow the user to borrow book from a particular library and then return it at another branch library which is conveniently closer to him/her.

Promotion: Promotion involves getting publicity through various modes. Displays in vantage points, participating in fairs and advertising in newspapers, Internet, etc. can help libraries to some extent. However, the best way of promotion is through word-of-mouth. A library which is dedicated to achieving complete customer satisfaction indirectly promotes its services.

Processes: It is impossible to achieve success in marketing unless various library processes are efficient and in tune with the overall marketing strategy.

Library processes can be made efficient by:

- Appropriate use of technology. Suitable Library Management Systems (LMS) should be adopted for automating various housekeeping operations like procurement, cataloguing, issue/return, etc. Now-a-days, latest technologies like Radio Frequency Identification (RFID) are also used in libraries. RFID allows libraries to have self service counters which allow a user to borrow and return library books without having the direct intervention of library staff. (Jose et al, 2005).
- Providing facilities like the real-time access to online library catalogue, online reservations/ renewals, etc.
- Minimal turnaround time for procurement, inter-library loans, technical processing, etc.
- Well maintained electronic library portal with online services/resources.
- Customer-focused help services (face-to-face, email, telephone, etc.) with a problem solving approach.

People: Staff plays a crucial role in a service organization like the library itself. They are integral part of the production and delivery of the 'product' as well as the service interaction (Ewers and Austen, 2006). Staff should be proactive in offering services and should have a cheerful attitude. Front-line service staff needs to be trained on customer service. Libraries should also consider recruiting specific persons for marketing activities. For example, for promotion of library services in corporate sector.

CONCLUSION

Libraries are challenged as never before to remain relevant to the community to which they are offering their services. Today the user has many options with regard to accessing timely information. The rapid growth of internet has especially changed the information paradigm. To continue to remain relevant, libraries need to market their services as per the target market needs. Libraries need to treat their users as 'customers' and understand that they exist for their customers. Thus, a library that recognizes the marketing concept will be closest to its users. The paper further presents the strategic marketing requirements to develop effective marketing-mix strategies for LIS marketing.

NOTES

1. Increasingly libraries have started charging fees for their services in various countries. Use of full range of library facilities is generally restricted to the bonafide members only. For external users, the access is given against special fee though it is minor or on cost recovery basis in most cases. Services such as accessing online resources, inter library loans and printing are usually charged additional fee. By charging for library services, British Library of United Kingdom earned revenue of 24.3 million pounds during 2005/6 (Source: http://www.bl.uk/about/annual/2005 to 2006/pdf/accounts.pdf.). Columbia University Library charges the visitors $ 55 per month for reading and $100 per month for borrowing privileges (Source: http://www.columbia.edu/cu/lweb/services/lio/visitors.html). In India itself, many important libraries charge fees for access to their collection and for borrowing in case of external users. Examples include: Indian Institutes of Management, Indian Institute of Science, Indian Institutes of Technology, Management Development Institute, British Council Libraries, American Centre Libraries, etc.

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