Research Paper

Marketing of Information Products and Services in Libraries

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ABSTRACT: *The paper deals with the theme of marketing of information products and services in the libraries. Various aspects have been dealt with in this regard. The scope of marketing has been discussed in general and also in terms of libraries. The factors of knowledge management in respect of marketing information have been mentioned. These include information explosion, the increased need of knowledge and the speed of time by which knowledge is regenerated. The data-information-knowledge sequence has also been touched upon. The first entity in the sequence is data and then comes information and finally knowledge is generated. The unique features of marketing of services have been dealt with. The features include the facts that services are not produced and owned, intangible, inseparable, imperishable and variable. Above all, the marketing principles to be followed by the modern library services have been discussed in detail. The principles include the active attitude of the company, equal importance of 'marketing' as other functions, integrated marketing activity. The special professional skills of the librarians for marketing information and library services have been highlighted. The problems of marketing information services have been mentioned which are lack of proper knowledge, scientific and technical products being used in non-market environment and difficulty in estimating the value of information products and services.*

Keywords: *information management, information marketing, information products, information services, knowledge, marketing, marketing principles*

I. INTRODUCTION

The strength of a society depends upon its magnitude of consumption and generation of information. The society which consumes and generates the most knowledge and information is the strongest society. Marketing of information products and services has become a predominant area of libraries and information centres.AsPhilip Kotler has pointed out that organizations like museums, libraries, universities and charities should market their causes and products to gain political, social and economic support. A major obstacle in running a successful information business is the lack of business expertise on the part of librarians and information scientists. The term 'marketing' refers to all the processes required for user satisfaction and generation of revenue for the information firm. The libraries and information centres are realizing day by day that marketing of information products and services is a vital part of library administration as means of achieving user satisfaction as well as escalating the use of services by the current and the potential users. The factors such as information explosion, rapid technological development and increased library costs are making the library professionals to approach the marketing concept regarding the library operations and services. Marketing approach is vital for survival in the highly competitive world of information. Different marketing concepts provide with various tools to the libraries for collecting and analyzing data regarding the needs of users. The libraries, nowadays, should develop a user-oriented marketing strategy as part of effective library management. Large libraries like university libraries invest huge amount of money on collection development, processing and storage of information resources. These expensive resources are often not utilized resulting in

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wastage of money, time, space and energy. The marketing principles involved are: firstly, the libraries should identify their objectives, secondly, they should identify their target users and their information needs and thirdly, develop the products and services aimed at fulfilling these user needs. As a result, these libraries can become market-oriented organizations in which the acquisition, storage and retrieval services are focused on the user needs and which not only satisfy the user demands but also try to create new demands and increase the existing demands.

SCOPE OF MARKETING

According to the American Marketing Association, "Marketing is an organizational function and a set of process for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders."

The concept of 'marketing" can be defined from the social and the managerial point of views. A social definition of marketing goes as follows: "Marketing is a societal process by which individuals and groupsobtain what they need and want through creating, offering and freely exchanging products and services of value with others." (Kotler, 2009)

In terms of libraries the concept of marketing is that the librarians should change the traditional attitude towards acquisition, processing and retrieving information. The library service should be mainly based on the ways to satisfy the needs of the users to a greater extent. The libraries can achieve this objective only if they follow systematic information collection, procedures and policies and adjust their products, services and organizational policies and procedures to satisfy the demands of the users.

MARKETING INFORMATION SYSTEM

Marketing information is a vital part of effective marketing management. Marketing excellence of a firm often directly depends on the way of its handling marketing information. Marketing excellence is the net result of correct decisions. In the present era, decisions need to be information based. Nowadays, every business organization needs knowledge management to achieve success. In launching new businesses and developing corporate strategies as well as in executing management activities, knowledge management has become essential. Some of the newly developed factors have made the firms to manage knowledge systematically. They are as follows:

- The knowledge or information explosion
- The increased need of knowledge for managing a business
- The rapidity of time at which knowledge is being replaced by new knowledge or regenerated.

DATA-INFORMATION-KNOWLEDGE SEQUENCE

Information is the basis of knowledge. When information is classified, processed and assembled in an organized way, it becomes knowledge. But what is first required is 'data' which when processed and organized becomes information which in turn when processed and organized becomes 'knowledge'. Knowledge is the final entity in the sequence. A firm requires knowledge not just data or information. A firm may possess unlimited data or information but to convert them into useful knowledge requires a special expertise. For example, Internet provides with unlimited data or information but to translate those into relevant knowledge will need special effort. Now, a firm requires various kinds of knowledge- knowledge of its operations, customers, suppliers, competitors, technology, etc. What a firm knows is important but how it uses the knowledge it possess and how fast it can acquire knowledge is of greater importance. The firm even needs to have knowledge about how to use the knowledge it possesses and the way to acquire new knowledge. The entire knowledge accumulated by a firm is its intellectual property. Since marketing is a strategic function, it needs knowledge the most. Marketing also shoulders the responsibility of relating the firm with the environment which is a knowledge-intensive task. So, knowledge management is essential in the field of marketing.

INFORMATION MANAGEMENT

Information management helps in managing the processes of selection, acquisition, processing, storage and dissemination of information in an organization. Information management can help in recognizing the potential of information resources in an organization. Libraries have a vital role to play in information management since they play a crucial part in the information-user matching process.

MARKETING OF INFORMATION PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

Information is a type of power and the libraries and information centres deal with this power. Marketing of information implies a set of activities related to transferring the information to the potential users. The concept of marketing is user-oriented. It increases the user satisfaction and thereby develops an element of competition in providing better services to the users. The focus is on saving the time, money and labour as well as adopting the techniques of information technology. Earlier, the users had to pay for the library services in the form of subscription, caution deposit, penalty for lost/damaged books, etc. These measures were adopted to make the users prompt in using the library services. But nowadays, information has become a tradable product which has given rise to the concept of marketing in the libraries. The excessive values of information and it being a resource for the development of the nation have changed the information into a product to be sold in the markets.

Some of the information products are:

- Books (in both print and electronic formats)
- Periodicals
    Academic journals
    Magazines
    Newspapers
    Newsletters and bulletin boards
- Reference Documents
    Encyclopaedias
    Dictionaries
    Bibliographies and bibliographic databases
Directories and databases
- Others
    Videos
    CDs
    DVDs
    Multimedia documents
    Govt. Publications
    Conference Proceedings
    Patents

Service marketing has certain specialties since services have certain unique features:

- A service is a performance while a product is produced.

- Services do not involve ownership transfer but a product changes ownership.

- Intangible since services cannot be touched, seen or smelt like a product. Again a service cannot be sampled like a product. So a customer cannot judge a service before it is bought.

- Inseparability, i.e., services produced and consumed simultaneously unlike a product. A product is produced at one point of time and location. It is stored and transported to a place where the customers are present. But services are produced and consumed at the same point of time and location.

- Services are perishable since they are consumed as soon as they are produced. They cannot be stored. For this reason, a customer is often billed even if he/she does not avail the service even after having booked it. For example, a passenger is charged by an airline even if he/she fails to 'show up' at the time of departure although the service value becomes zero as a result of his/her failing to 'show up' at the appointed time.

- Services are marked by variability for the following reasons:

i) Services are inseparable from the persons providing them which automatically bring the picture of variability.

  ii) Services are people-intensive which depend on the type of people providing the service----- like skilled services, unskilled services and professional services. This feature naturally involves variability. In case of physical products, the person producing the product is immaterial.

iii) The effect of services depends on when and where the services are being provided.

iv) The consumer is an integral part of the production process. In case of service, the consumer has to be physically present when the service is being produced. This is not the case with physical products.

v) In the matter of marketing channels, services differ from physical products. Some services cannot operate through intermediaries while some others may allow such approach but the role of marketing channel members always differ from that of the physical products.

INFORMATION MARKETING

The libraries may follow the following marketing tools for the promotion of their products and services:

Communication: Communication may be both personal and non-personal. In personal communication, two or more persons communicate. Oral communication is primary but other media such as e-mail, WhatsApp chat, Face book are also effective.

Non-personal communication includes TV, radio, newspapers, posters, etc.

Atmospherics: The term was coined by Kotler (1975) who defines atmospherics as "the designing of bringing and consuming environments in a manner calculated to produce specific cognitive and/or emotional effects on the target market". Thus, the library ambience, appearance and bahaviour of the employees, physical setting, lighting, noise level, etc. must be healthy to have a positive effect on the minds of the users.

Advertising: Advertising is an important means of promoting library services. Libraries can advertise their products and services in newspapers, magazines, radio, TV, scholarly journals, newsletters, Web, etc. Advertisements can be in the form of messages and longer articles on the role and services of the libraries written by the librarians and the library staff members.

Posters: Posters can create effective visual impact on the minds of the users. They should be displayed at prominent locations.

Newsletters: They can provide with the information regarding the new acquisition, new services, event and activities, etc. They can thus promote the services and products of the libraries. E-newsletters can also be brought out and they can be uploaded in the library website too.

Extension Activities: These activities include book exhibitions, various types of competitions, debates, seminars, etc. which can create a good image of the library on the minds of the users. This in turn will attract the users to the library and the use of the library products and services will be promoted.

Library Month/Day: The observation of National Library Day/Month can enable the libraries to create an awareness of its importance in society which in turn can promote the use of its products and services.

Promoting in Electronic Environment: Nowadays, libraries use ICT tools to promote their products and services. These tools include library websites and email. The library website includes information regarding collection, subscriptions, service terms and conditions, etc. The website must be updated regularly to avoid the negative impact on the minds of the users. The website can also be communicative so that the users can communicate with the library staff members.

E-mails can also be used as means of direct communication with the users.

User groups can be created in WhatsApp to promote the services nd products of libraries. Information regarding the new facilities, services, acquisitions and other aspects of the library can be posted to the user group. Each user in the group can also post his views and comments.

The modern library services should follow the following marketing principles:

- The company's attitude towards the market should be active. It cannot expect customers to buy the products simply because they are produced. It must study the market, create demands among the customers, promote the product and arrange for distributing the product.

- Marketing should be given as much importance as the other functions like administration, finance and the like.

- The marketing considerations should be taken into account in all the managerial decisions apart from these directly related with sales, i.e., the marketing activity should be integrated.

The library professionals require certain professional knowledge and skills for marketing information and library services:

- Knowledge of user demands and ability to obtain feedback from the users.

- Technical knowledge such as ability of using Internet, WhatsApp, social media and so on.

- Knowledge of various marketing strategies required for promoting information services.

Some of the factors pose some difficulties in marketing information services:

- Lack of proper knowledge regarding the user demands and needs.

- Several scientific and technical information products and services being used in highly-subsidized non-market environment.

- The difficulty in estimating the value of information products and services contributed to the advancement of scholarly pursuits.

Thus, the subjective concept of information makes marketing difficult. The value of information changes with the purpose and is time and space dependent. So, the benefits of marketing information cannot be projected properly. Besides, there is problem in estimating the value of information contributed to R & D activity and advancement of scholarly pursuits. Above all, the library and other information professionals often are reluctant to engage in the marketing activity.

II.   CONCLUSION

Libraries can be considered as information markets and the library users as consumers of information. The increasing role of information in various fields has led to the creation of various information systems to provide with a variety of information services and products. The acquisition, organization and dissemination of information should take into account the principles of marketing for satisfying the users.

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