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# Marketing of library and information products and services

A theoretical analysis

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*'With the mushrooming of new information providers such as cyber cafes, mega-bookstores, online book dealers, the Internet community, consultants and individual customers, libraries, for example, cannot continue to assume that they are the only sources of information that people will consult.'*

## Abstract

The article considers the concept of marketing in the light of library and information services and mentions the necessity of marketing techniques in library and information centres. It outlines the principles of information products/services marketing and discusses the key steps of marketing for library and information centres. The article indicates the methods of applying marketing techniques to library and information centres and marketing difficulties to library and information services in developing countries are also discussed, with particular reference to those in Bangladesh.

**Keywords:** Bangladesh libraries, information products, marketing, strategy, training, users

## Introduction

Marketing has emerged as an important area for libraries and information centres. Marketing of information products and services is an integral part of library administration, especially as a means for improving user satisfaction and promoting the use of services by current and potential users. Three main

factors, namely the information explosion, the technology revolution, and escalating library costs are responsible for encouraging the library profession to develop a marketing approach in its operations and services (Joseph and Parameswari, 2002)

Today marketing reference and information services is significant in any dynamic library services in a competitive environment. With the mushrooming of new information providers such as cyber cafes, mega-bookstores, online book dealers, the Internet community, consultants and individual customers, libraries, for example, cannot continue to assume that they are the only sources of information that people will consult. Librarians and other information professionals have to adopt marketing as a tool if they have to exist in the tomorrow environment (Kaane, 2006). Hence Kotler (1995) points out, organizations such as museums, universities, libraries and charities need to market their causes and their products to gain political and social support as well as economic support.

In Bangladesh, some modern libraries and information centres like Bangladesh National Scientific and Technical Documentation Centre (BANSDOC), International Centre for Diarrhoeal Disease Research, Bangladesh (ICDDR,B) library, Centre on Integrated Rural Development for Asia and the Pacific (CIRDAP) library, Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC), Advice and Information Centre (AIC), Bangladesh Institute of Development Studies (BIDS) library, etc. have set up a fully fledged division of Marketing and Customer Services to keep the users community constantly up to date with the latest information on new services with publicity and advertising materials and by participating in various exhibitions, fairs, etc. (Munsi, 2004). Besides, BIDS library, Bangladesh Academy for Rural Development (BARD) library, Community Development Library (CDL), Islamic Foundation library, National Book Centre participate in the Ekushey Boi Mela (Book fair on the language movement) organized by Bangla Academy. Moreover, CDL and the Islamic Foundation library participate in the District and Thana (sub-district) level book fairs as well.

## Marketing concepts

The concept of marketing in libraries began when Philip Kotler formally propagated the marketing

concept in non-profit organizations in the 1970s and was sharpened in the 1980s when the concept of services marketing emerged (Gupta, 2003).

Marketing is the human activity directed at satisfying needs and wants through exchange process (Kotler, 1980). Udell and Laczniak (1981) viewed marketing, which is also applicable for library marketing, as 'the product planning, pricing, promotion, distribution and servicing of goods and services needed and desired by users'.

Today, with increased competition in this world of information, marketing is a factor for survival. Marketing of library services is concerned with satisfying the needs of the users. Hence, Narayana (1991) points out that the 'survival of a library depends among other things on its image in the minds of the users and the fund allocators. This image should be the outcome of the quality and effectiveness of the services, the ability to anticipate the desires and requirements of actual and potential users and their fulfillment. Marketing is the instrument through which these library objectives can be fulfilled'. Information products/services marketing can be considered as 'a bridge between information production and consumption' – encompassing all the activities performed in order to get information products and services into the hands of users (Ryan, 1981)

## Information products/ services concepts

Product refers to a set of tangible and intangible attributes, including packaging, colour, price, quality and brand, plus the seller's service and reputation (Stanton, 1994). A service is an intangible product involving a deed, a performance or an effort that cannot be physically possessed (Berry, 1980). Few products can be classified purely as goods or a services, and information can be seen to sit astride this boundary. Books for example, could be viewed as goods, but the facility to borrow books is a service (Rowley, 1995).

Thus, the information product or service refers to a tangible or physical product containing information (such as a book, journal article, CD-ROM, video, film or audio recording) as well as an intangible service (such as a lending service, or reference service) for information users.

## Necessity for marketing techniques in library and information centres

Any organization either profitable or non-profitable is likely to be more successful when a strong marketing viewpoint permeates the thinking and guides the decisions and actions of everyone in the organization. Like many other non-profitable organizations, library and information centres also need a strong and effective marketing programme because of the following two main reasons (Stanton, 1994):

- Increasing competition among non-profit organizations, and
- Non-profit organizations needing to improve their image and gain acceptance among sponsors, government agencies, news media, and of course, consumers, all of which collectively determine an organization's success.

According to Leisner (1995) the basis for library marketing is the need first to enhance the quality of services, and second, to improve the perceived value of these services and thus achieve the highest level of customer satisfaction to ensure survival of the organization. Alemna (2001) stated that effective marketing is the obvious means by which users can be made aware of the services of the library and their value.

A well-developed library marketing programme, according to Narayana (1991) will bring in the following benefits:

- Improved user satisfaction
- Extension of the service to potential users and enlargement of the customers' circle
- Efficient use of marketing resources
- Improved resource attraction to the organization.

Gupta (2003) stated that there are some other reasons that require marketing orientation in library and information services, such as:

- It helps in managing libraries better;
- It brings commitment to customer focus;

- It publicizes the benefits of the library services and listens to customers needs;
- It helps in making users feel better so that they use the library again and again;
- It improves the library's image.

However, we can express the necessity of marketing in libraries and information centres in the following manner.

### *1. Attaining the goals and objectives of library and information centres*

Every type of library and information centre has some basic objectives to ensure the maximum use of its reading materials. In this case marketing of information products and services plays a dynamic role to attain the predetermined goals and objectives of library and information centres.

### *2. Changing the concept of library*

Due to revolutionary changes in Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs), the primary concept of the library (as a storehouse of knowledge) has been changed and become more dynamic. The mode of users' demand has also been changed and developed. Today, users are not so interested in getting their desired information in traditional ways. As a result library and information officials have been compelled to market their information products and services to users more actively.

### *3. Getting the desired information easily*

Because of the information explosion it has become difficult for users to find their desired information properly. Marketing of information products and services can help the users to get the information they want easily from the huge amount of information available.

### *4. Changing the attitude of users*

Effective marketing is only one of the factors that determines library use. Effective marketing provides the

means by which users are made aware of the services of the library and their value (Martey, 2000). Due to the dramatic change of users' attitudes towards information, the necessity of marketing information products and services has been realized by library officials.

### 5. *Changing the attitude of the librarian*

By implementing the marketing concept in libraries, Rowley (1995) renamed the librarian from storekeeper to salesman. Libraries must be run like commercial firms and professional librarians must be the managers.

## Principles of marketing library and information products and services

The principles of marketing library and information products and services are as follows.

### 1. *Assortment of information*

The first and foremost principle of marketing information products or services is to develop a well-balanced collection or storage of information or data which can help to satisfy the needs of users/customers.

### 2. *Organizing information*

As a marketable commodity it is necessary to repackage the information by using various processing techniques such as indexing and abstracting information, etc.

### 3. *Determine the target user group*

The idea of a target community consists of identification of the target customers or user group that the information centre decides to serve. In this case the following tasks need to be accomplished:

- Creation of user awareness about the commodity/information product,
- Creation of demand by users for the said commodity/information product.

### 4. *Marketing the information products / services*

Then it is necessary to market the commodity, that is to provide the information products on the shelf for the purpose of satisfying the demand of the community regarding the information products/commodity.

### 5. *Responding to feedback*

Finally it is necessary to take feedback from the user community about the products/services. If possible, research will be conducted with a view to improving the quality of the products/services.

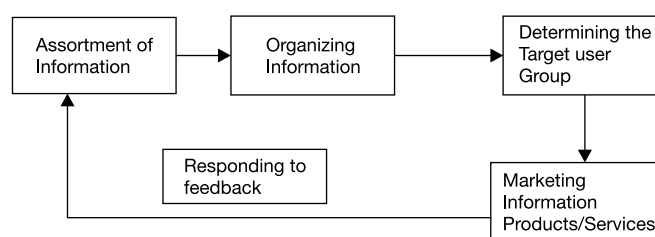
The life cycle of principle of marketing information products/services can best be illustrated through Figure 1.

## Steps for marketing libraries and information centres

The key steps for marketing stress that a library and information centre can achieve its goals by providing user satisfaction through coordinated activities. These activities are way of thinking or management philosophy about a library's total activities. Mishra (1994–5) describes those steps in the following five ways.

### 1. *Market segmentation*

Market segmentation for libraries depends on the type of library, its objectives, and the environment in which the library operates (Narayana, 1991). Public libraries do segment their clients on the basis of demographic characteristic and use 'community survey' to know about the actual and potential users of the library and



**Figure 1 – Life cycle of principle of marketing information products/services**

quantify them. A public library may segment its users in different groups such as children, adults, senior citizens and the visually impaired (Mishra, 1994–5).

## 2. *Market positioning*

This is a process of arranging for a product to occupy a clear, distinctive, and desirable place relative to competing products in the minds of target consumers (Kotler and Armstrong, 2001). Having the market segmentation of the library, the librarian decides the major target group according to the objectives of the library and available resources (Mishra, 1994–5).

## 3. *Consumer analysis*

The process of determining the needs and preferences of the target group is known as consumer analysis. In libraries, we do user surveys to learn the needs and preferences of the users and call them 'Information Gathering Habits', 'Information Seeking Behaviour', and 'Information Needs' (Mishra, 1994–5). This is the most important step because the total marketing concept depends upon the consumer and his/her satisfaction.

## 4. *Marketing programme*

This is often called the marketing mix, which implies that it is possible to mix or blend the elements of the marketing concept in an infinite number of combinations in order to achieve marketing goals. These elements of marketing are product, price, promotion and place. For the sake of simplicity these are often called the 4Ps identified by McCarthy (Webber, 1999). Shapiro (1981) recategorizes the 4Ps by adding advertising and policy for the purpose of non-profit organizations. We can describe, in brief, the marketing mix as:

- **Product:** The item or service being marketed, through its features, quality, benefits and quantities (Copley, 2004). The product can be ideas, services, goods or any combination of these three.
- **Price:** Price relates to the activities associated with establishing pricing policies and determining product prices (Rowley, 1995). Pricing is the marketing activity that determines the price of the

product on the basis of costs as well as market factors, such as distribution channels, discount structure, competitors' prices, the ability or willingness of customers to pay, and so on.

- **Place:** Place is the marketing term for describing where the product or service is offered (Leisner, 1995). Place refers to location (such as a library), the distribution channel where a service is delivered, geographical coverage, telecommunications, travel and so on (Munshi, 2001).
- **Promotion:** The promotion variable is used to inform one or more groups of people about an organization and its products (Rowley, 1995). Promotion includes all the activities undertaken by the library to communicate its resources and services to the target user groups (Nicholas, 1998). Promotion activities include things like personal selling, advertising, sales promotions, publicity, public relations and packaging.

Munshi (2001) also extends the concept of the 4Ps by adding people and process for the libraries and information centre.

- **People:** People cover staff/personnel that are responsible for providing effective information services to users.
- **Process:** Process means techniques, methods or ways by which the products, goods or information services are managed and delivered to users.

Booms and Bitner (1981) suggested a 7Ps mix by which they extended the traditional 4Ps (product, price, promotion and place) with including 3Ps (participants, physical evidence and process).

- **Participants:** All human actors who play a part in reference and information services delivery, namely the library's personnel.
- **Physical evidence:** The environment in which the reference and information services are delivered that facilitates the performance and communication of the service.
- **Process:** The procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities by which the reference and information services are acquired.

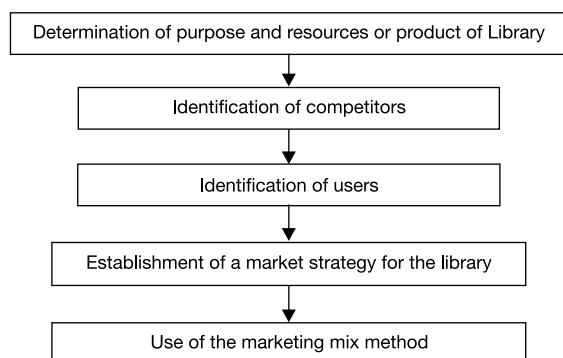
## 5. Marketing audit

The marketing audit is a systematic, critical and unbiased review and performance appraisal of the marketing programme in the light of the data gathered from market segmentation, consumer analysis, and the objectives of the organization. On implementing a marketing programme, it is necessary to evaluate how far the programme has been able to achieve its set objectives. A few of the evaluation criteria are (Narayana, 1991):

- Size of market covered (population or geographic area)
- Market share of the library (percentage of neo-literate adults, minority sector, handicapped students and so on)
- Number and value of sales (number of on-line searches by customers and their sale value)
- Number of users
- Frequency of use of the library services (browsing, loan, reference)
- User satisfaction or library goodness

## Application of marketing techniques in library and information centres

Marketing strategy or technique varies with changes in environment, objectives of the organization, resources and the users. So it is not so easy to implement



**Figure 2 – Application of marketing techniques in library and information centre**

marketing techniques in libraries. A librarian can either employ an outside expert or do this activity him/herself. Ojiambo (1994) identified five stages by which a librarian can simply apply marketing techniques in library or information centre. These stages can be illustrated on the basis of those ideas:

### *Stage-1: Determination of purpose and resources or product of library*

This stage involves the following series of actions:

- Determine the purposes and goals of the library or information centre
- Identify the goals of the library for a marketing programme
- Know well the products that are being offered

### *Stage-2: Identification of competitors*

Libraries and information centres are in competition with several non-profit and profit making organizations in providing information. Managers of libraries/information centres should identify those organizations with which they are in competition.

### *Stage-3: Identification of users*

Applying marketing techniques to libraries requires that a library identifies various groups of users and modifies the library service and information based on those different groups and their different needs. This process is called segmentation. This will involve knowing libraries' patrons and their information needs by conducting user studies.

### *Stage-4: Establishment of a marketing strategy for the library*

After defining library segments and establishing needs and matching these with information resources, the next stage is to identify particular goals for the marketing programme and to develop specific strategies to reach them, and to develop a timetable for all communication efforts.

*Stage-5: Use of the marketing mix method*

This includes advertising and public relations, channels of distribution and product policies. In general these factors can be referred to as communicating with the library/information centre segments. Communication with the segments enables the library/information centre not only to provide its users with needed information but also to get feedback.

## Difficulties of marketing techniques in library and information services

Libraries and information centres face tremendous problems for applying marketing techniques in libraries. Most of the libraries in developing countries are still governed in the most primitive way. These libraries are only involved in providing assistance to users for finding books. Library and information centre officials of this region sometimes have a negative attitude towards marketing. They think that marketing is relevant only to business, but not to libraries. This problem is common overall to the libraries of developing countries like Bangladesh.

We can sum up below some of the problems that the libraries of Bangladesh face to implement marketing concepts.

*1. Ignorance about marketing concepts*

Many of the library officials in Bangladesh do not understand what the term marketing means and why it is appropriate for libraries.

*2. Lack of proper education and training of library staff*

Due to lack of training and knowledge of marketing tools and techniques, librarians often do not promote library services properly.

*3. Negative attitude of users*

The attitude of users towards marketing also plays a passive role not to implement marketing concepts in libraries.

*4. Lack of definite marketing strategy and policy*

Due to the lack of a definite marketing strategy and policy (such as information product policy, end user policy, pricing policy, tariff policy, service policy at local and national level) it becomes very difficult to implement marketing techniques in this field.

*5. Lack of proper financial support*

Libraries of Bangladesh are totally non-profitable organizations. Due to limited funds allotted to the libraries, library officials are being compelled not to implement marketing concepts in this field.

*6. Complex task factors*

Marketing is a complicated task for libraries because of their wide range of products and services, from books to Internet access and diverse users that range from children to aged people, public officials to business people and students to teachers or faculty (Rajashekhar, 2004).

The above factors leave the library professions with a problem whether to launch marketing techniques in the libraries to survive or not. Figure 3 depicts this do-or-die situation perfectly.

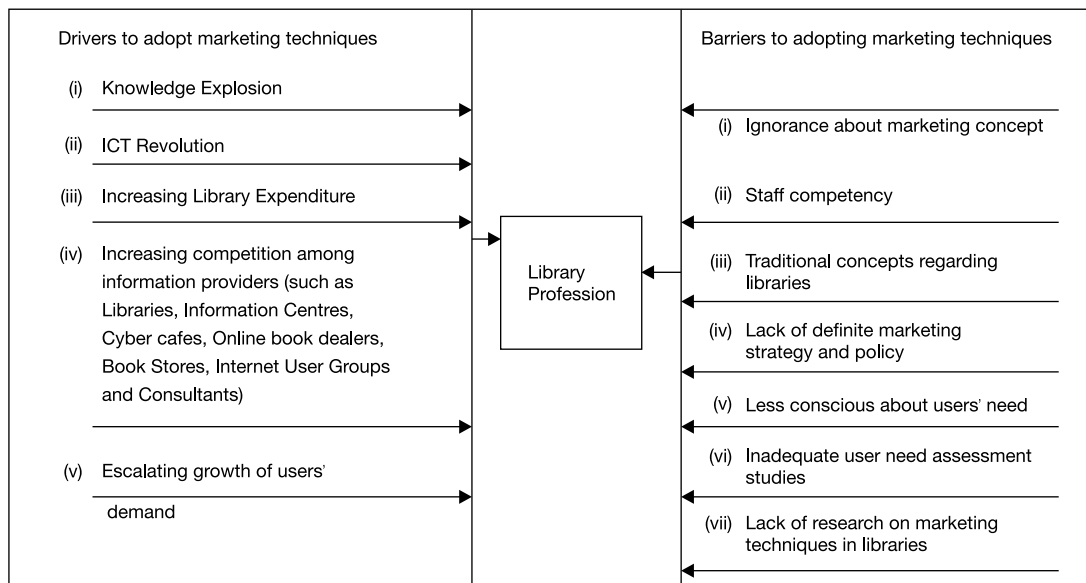
## Proposed recommendations for implementing marketing concept in developing countries like Bangladesh

A packaged initiative may be taken to implement marketing concepts in libraries and information centres of Bangladesh successfully.

*1st Tier**i. By updating the course curriculum in library schools*

Library schools should change their syllabus by inserting more courses on marketing information products and services and public relations from first





**Figure 3 – Do-or-die situation for library profession whether to launch marketing techniques or not**

year to graduate level. It is not easy to design a new syllabus on marketing. In this case necessary suggestions may be taken from marketing specialists. It is needed to keep in mind that today's learners of library schools will be the librarians of the future. So to keep pace with other information providers, learners at library school need to know what marketing is, why it is so essential in libraries, what strategies of marketing will be fruitful to implement, how users' satisfaction can be achieved by applying marketing concepts and so on, that are pertinent to the library field.

#### *ii. By employing marketing specialists in library school*

In library schools the people who have a good experience and knowledge of marketing should be employed as part-time/full-time faculty to make marketing oriented courses effective.

### *2nd Tier*

#### *i. By arranging training programmes*

Those librarians or other library officials who have no idea of marketing concepts need to be trained. This will be very effective for library officials to ensure better coordination between users and will be very helpful to ensure user satisfaction. Library officials

from top to bottom levels may undertake this training programme.

#### *ii. By arranging seminars and symposia*

Seminars and symposia on marketing may also help to eradicate the ignorance of library officials regarding the necessity of using marketing concepts in non-profitable organization.

#### *iii. Research on library marketing*

Research is also needed to provide a clearer sense of what librarians understand by the term 'Marketing'. If many librarians associate marketing only with 'hard sell' business practices, this would support a need for better education on this subject. However, more training and research will be needed for librarians to support their marketing efforts (Shontz et al., 2004).

### *3rd Tier*

#### *i. User involvement*

Nothing can be fruitful in libraries and information centre without the direct involvement of the users. So users' attitudes towards marketing should be changed. 'For better services with better payments' should be the slogan of tomorrow's marketing activities in libraries.

ii. *Government and sponsor involvement*

Government, higher authorities and various sponsors and benefactors of a country should be involved in the marketing activities of libraries. It is necessary to clarify the concept that for the betterment of library services, marketing of information products and services would be the only solution.

## Conclusion

In libraries or information centres, marketing involves information based activities like user need analysis, determining user segment, analysis of the available products, definition of differentiated products, matching user profile with product profile, determining proper tools and techniques of trade, creating suitable publicity of products and defining outreach areas and levels. These activities promote the libraries or information centres to provide better information products and services to users. As a non-profitable organization survival of a library depends on its image in the minds of the users and the fund allocators. This image should be the outcome of the quality and effectiveness of the services, and the ability to anticipate the desires and requirements of actual and potential users and their fulfilment.

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