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Making university libraries in Kenya the destination for the user population

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548

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Abstract

Purpose – The purpose of this paper is to explore the concept of marketing of information products and services in university libraries in Kenya.

Design/methodology/approach – The paper utilises literature surveys of currently published articles and the researcher's professional experience.

Findings – Marketing is a basic and essential management process for promoting information products and services in university libraries in Kenya, but it is not given the attention it deserves and/or is poorly coordinated. Marketing avails university libraries the unique opportunity to provide quality, and demand-based and user-oriented information products and services.

Research limitations/implications – The paper used mainly literature surveys of currently published articles and the researcher's professional experience.

Practical implications – The paper offers reasons, strategies or initiatives and recommendations on how to make university libraries the destination for the user population. In this respect, university libraries should be proactively involved in marketing of information products and services to the user population.

Social implications – University libraries in Kenya should involve themselves actively in marketing and promotion of information products and services to the information audience. This helps to create awareness among the user population leading to increased use of information products and services in the libraries.

Originality/value – The paper highlights various marketing initiatives of making university libraries in Kenya the destination for the user population. Also, the paper explores recent innovative strategies for marketing information products and services. Marketing helps university libraries to: market and promote information products and services, provide innovative products and services, understand the needs and demands of the information audience or user population, plan service provision, and provide efficient and effective information products and services.

Keywords Marketing strategy, University libraries, Kenya

Paper type Research paper

Introduction

The academic library as the heart of the university has long been symbolic of an academic truth: that knowledge grows best when built through a collaborative conversation among scholars. Moreover, most college and university libraries engage in aggressive marketing efforts to make the campus aware of collections and services (Campbell and Wesley, 2006). In less than three decades ago, the concept of marketing was introduced into the field of library and information services as thinking and orienting information products and services in marketing term (Das and Karn, 2008). Today, marketing which for years has been used as the preserve for the profit making commercial or business sectors is equally useful and relevant in the library environment. A successful library is one that informs users about services and convinces them to use it (Block, 2001).

University libraries need to provide quality information products and services based on the needs and demands of the information audience or user population. Provision of physical facilities and information materials are no longer sufficient



enough to attract funding from their institutions or sponsors, instead it is essential to emphasise on the needs and demands of the information audience. In a study from the USA, Spalding and Wang (2006) notes that:

Libraries are discovering that by using marketing principles and techniques, they can understand better their users' needs, justify funding, communicate more effectively with a variety of external audiences, and achieve greater efficiency and optimal results in delivering products and services that meet the identified needs of their clients.

In addition, the values of the university library is also being called into question with increasing "googleisation" and as millennial generations are making new demands on information products and services.

For an individual to use an information resource, several factors must be in place such as: knowledge of the existence of the information resource, access to the information resource and relevant information sources (Adika, 2003). All these factors point directly to the application of marketing of library and information services to the user population. Limited studies on marketing of library services in academic libraries in Kenya have been done. However, none of them addresses the application of marketing of library and information services in the current university library environment.

University libraries in Kenya are operating in a new environment that is competing with multiple demands for funding on their institutions. Due to the high number of students and constrained limited resources in universities, university libraries have not been able to provide quality services to the user population. Indeed, most of them operate in an environment of scarcity even for basic information products and services. The purpose of the paper is to explore in detail the concept of marketing information products and services in university libraries in Kenya. Innovative methods of marketing information products and services, and suggestions for developing marketing principles and practices are discussed.

The need for marketing information products and services in university libraries in Kenya

A well-established library is essential for any academic institution. As a focal point for teaching, learning and research, it is expected to provide standard information resources (Anunobi, 2008). The fundamental goal of university libraries is mainly to support teaching, learning and research activities or aspirations of their institutions. In Kenya, public universities include: University of Nairobi, Kenyatta University, Moi University, Egerton University, Jomo Kenyatta University of Agriculture and Technology, Maseno University and Masinde Muliro University of Science and Technology. Private universities include: University of Eastern Africa, Baraton, Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Daystar University, United States International University, Africa Nazarene University and Kenya Methodist University among others. In addition, the universities maintain many constituent colleges and campuses across the country, given the high number of qualified students seeking university education in Kenya (Commission for Higher Education, Kenya, 2008).

Marketing is the management process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirement profitably. Identifying means establishing who the clients and potential clients are and what needs they have which the service can satisfy. Anticipating means examining and monitoring trends to keep up to date with the user's needs, working methods and environment. Satisfying customer requirements means putting clients and their needs at the centre of all aspect of the business.

Profitability is a continual improvement of service performance in relation to cost (Marketing Teacher Ltd, 2000-2009). Kotler (1997) states that:

Marketing is the analysis, planning, implementation and control of carefully formulated programmes designed to bring about voluntary exchange of values with target market for the purpose of achieving organisational objectives.

It relies heavily on designing the organisation's offering in terms of the target market's needs and desires and as using effective pricing, communication and distribution to inform, motivate and service the markets.

Therefore, marketing is a management process that involves analysing, planning, implementing and controlling of information activities. It is a long-term and continuous information management process. Marketing in a university library setting implies that: first, the library identifies its objectives; second, the library identifies its target users and their particular needs; and third, the library develops products and services aimed at these categories. In this way, the university library becomes a market-oriented organisation in which all operations including acquisition, processing, storage and service are focused on the needs of users and which embraces not only the satisfaction of demand but also creation, awakening and increasing demand (Kavulya, 2004).

A number of writers suggest various reasons for marketing of library and information products and services (Das and Karn, 2008; Kavulya, 2004; Konata, 2006; Spalding and Wang, 2006; and Sweeney and Richard, 2005). These include the following sections.

Competition for resources

In Kenya, public universities are largely supported by tax payers' revenue, while private universities are largely supported by private funds from sponsors and donors. However, in the last few years funding for public universities has dropped drastically forcing them to look for alternative sources. This has forced public universities to source for alternative funds from students on self sponsored programmes such as open/distance learning- or school-based programmes. Jostling for funds and attention from the policy makers ends up creating problems among the various departments in the university. Indeed, this leads to less financial support and funding to the departments since no department receives enough resources to operate efficiently and effectively. History has shown that in such cases university libraries suffer most. In light of this, library services like marketing of information products and services halt to a stop. This creates a poor image of the university library since there are no resources allocated to market information products and services to the information audience or user population.

Business approach

Hard economic situations coupled with shrinking budgets have forced university libraries to the business world. Due to the perceptions created by university decision or policy makers, university libraries are now seen as profit oriented or income generating enterprises. This goes beyond the traditional approach of providing information products and services freely. The truth of the matter is that, university libraries in Kenya charge for information products and services rendered to the user population in form of library development and associated fees. The bottom line is that the information audience needs quality information, not just information resources or

mere presence of physical facilities. This can only be achieved if the user population is made aware of the existence of the available information materials in the library.

Information audience – top priority

In the business world, the concept of marketing is a straight forward process involving goods being transacted between the seller and the buyer. In the information environment, the process is rather tricky since the nature of goods and services being transacted is not known and understood. In addition, marketing information product and service does not offer the measure of return like profit that a commercial enterprise does. Making clients and the satisfaction of their needs the focus for structuring and the delivery of information services and the application of resources is where marketing and justification of the existence of the information services come together. The information audience in universities is better educated and more informed to make choices that satisfies their needs and demands. They need an information environment that provides multiple information products and services.

Proper use of resources

Marketing is a continuous service for managing information services. As part of a marketing strategy, university libraries need to be actively involved in marketing of information products and services to ensure proper use of resources. In an environment of cost cutting and elimination of waste, it becomes inevitable that the university library will eventually focus on the information service, look at the costs which it incurs and determine value adding in relation to the financial input to the service. This will ensure that the information service serves the needs and demands of the information audience using the available resources.

Adding value

Historically, the information service, whether public, academic, school or special has been viewed as a “god thing.” They provide information products and services only to the information audience in need. Due to this approach, it was seen as not necessary to market the information products and services since it was assumed that whoever wanted to use the service would do so without any form of encouragement or inducement. Information professionals must be actively involved in marketing of information products and services to the user population. Since marketing today embraces an integrated approach; the information audience can put forward their views to improve the products and services. In the university library marketing largely depends on the preferences and cues of the information audience.

Responsiveness

In a university library with large information collection, it is inevitable that part of the collection may be relatively underused, overlooked or used only occasionally. In most university libraries there are information collections that are hardly used since the user population does not know about their existence. The information that is seldom being used or not being used at all has the potential for exploitation and it should be promoted. Such collections could have a much wider audience if brought to the existence of the user population through marketing activities. It is the willingness to help customers and to provide prompt service. This dimension emphasises attentiveness and promptness in dealing with customers’ requests, complaints and

queries. Responsiveness is demonstrated in terms of accessible employees, least waiting time and attention to problems.

Provision of quality services

The concept of quality services can be described as a contract between a library and its customers, based on agreed upon standards of service and delivery. In a university library, the information audience is the ultimate judge of the quality of information products and services offered. The information audience weighs the value of the product and service offered by the library against the time spent and effort involved besides the monetary burden in getting the desired service, and thus, decides the quality. Normally the information audience defines the quality of information products and services in terms of stock size, annual budget, physical facilities, staff and the mere number of services. Provision of quality services in part depends on how well various elements function together in a service system. In a university library environment these elements include the library staff who perform the specific service in the service chain, equipment that support these performances and physical environment in which the services are provided. Provision of quality services is easily achieved through a management process of total quality management (TQM). TQM is a customer-focused management process which places emphasis on continuous, incremental improvements in its services by means of staff involvement (both professional, support and customer) and is one that uses some type of participative form of management. TQM process enables customers to have a greater say in the provision and delivery of information products and services in the library.

Innovative marketing strategies or initiatives

In a university library the starting point in marketing of information products and services is to develop and design an appropriate strategy. Marketing is not just about developing and promoting new products and services, but about bringing awareness to the various users of existing products and services as well as determining their appropriateness. A marketing strategy needs to be developed and implemented as an ongoing process. The result is to make the library to be vibrant to the needs and demands of the university and the information audience.

The strategic plan helps the university library to articulate clearly its vision and mission in relation to the parent university. Kavulya (2004) explains that: the mission statement identifies the core business and purpose of the library service, the customer base as well as its contribution to the teaching and research process of the university. Library managers help identify targeted user groups and their unique needs through market segmentation, develop marketing strategies to meet the needs, carry out promotion and advertise and at the same time engage in ongoing evaluation of the entire marketing process. No one could accuse academic librarians of relying on the philosophy of "build it and they will come." The campus communication airways are filled with new acquisitions lists, document delivery and so on (Campbell and Wesley, 2006).

Planning process

Marketing is a planning process that entails the participation of the entire university library staff. Having a formalised plan and direction of where the library is going, as opposed to being reactive to change and problems that arise, enables managers to successfully develop marketing strategies and successfully identify new services and products (Weingand, 2001). For new products and services, part of the planning must

involve the creation of a marketing and promotional strategy and the allocation of responsibility to library staff to ensure that the plan is carried through. In marketing of information collections in a university library there is need to ensure regular communication to the information audience. The library needs to inform the information audience of new acquisitions such as new online databases, online versions of examination papers, development of a digital institutional repository of research papers, use of plagiarism detection software and online thesis submission.

Noel and Waugh (2002), contrasting marketing efforts at Indiana University libraries and Abbott Laboratories, acknowledge that “getting users to use the library and making them aware of the library’s services” is an important ingredient in success. University librarians in Kenya are actively involved in planning the process of marketing and promoting library resources and services to the user population. For example, at the Catholic University of Eastern Africa library, it is the sole responsibility of the library staff to market and promote library resources and services to the user population through initiatives such as training, exhibitions and orientation programmes.

The use of social networking sites

The use of social networking sites, such as Facebook, MySpace, Twitter, Ning and Meebo, has provided university libraries unique opportunity to share and widen access to information resources and services. Steiner (2009) believes that social networks are used by libraries as vehicles for outreach and promoting services, programmes and new resources as well as for providing general information. Libraries have become increasingly focused on being “where” their users are.

University libraries in Kenya are increasingly making use of social networks to connect with the user population. Twitter seems to have emerged as the most favourable among university librarians. Meebo is also widely in use at the Strathmore University library for reference and promotion of information resources and services. University libraries in the country must embrace and utilise the use of social networking sites. For example, library Facebook pages are often used to announce updates promoting library services, resources and events (Steiner, 2009).

University exhibitions

University libraries in Kenya have paid some attention to marketing in order to compete. In Kenya, the Commission for Higher Education conducts an annual event for all universities to showcase their programmes to the public. In this event, university libraries are actively involved where they normally display and promote library and information services to the public. Brochures and other useful information materials about university libraries in Kenya are prepared and given to the public. This creates a unique opportunity for Kenyan University libraries to market and promote information products and services. In addition, they inform the user population on new arrivals of information resources using such methods like: notice boards, library web pages, email and cell phone communication, word of mouth, library catalogues or brochures, instant messaging, chat references, library orientation and user education. A successful library is one that informs users about services and convinces them to use them (Block, 2001).

Building modern information centres

Kenyan universities have responded well to the needs and demands of the information audience by building new learning resource centres or transforming the existing library buildings into a more inviting place with new information products and

services like: free internet; computers and laptop use; conference, study and multimedia rooms; online communication services; electronic information resources; email and cell phone communication; wireless services and information services for open or distance learning students. For example, the United States International University has already built a modern library and information centre and the Catholic University of Eastern Africa state-of-the-art learning resource centre is expected to be completed soon. These new learning resource centres normally provide informational and technological needs and demands that the information audience desire.

Orientation programmes

Rhoades and Arianne (2008) believe that: creating positive perceptions of academic libraries can occur at more than just the reference desk or during library instruction; and orientation programmes are designed to help students adjust to university life and ultimately improve retention rates, graduation rates and grade point averages. Materska (2004) and Wallis (2005) agree in principle on the need for information literacy skills and the role of information professionals in achieving lifelong learning knowledge and skills in this information age. Orientations offered to new students provide an ideal opportunity to be more innovative and proactive in creating first impressions of library resources and services. When librarians become involved with orientation programmes, positive interactions can begin before students even start their first semester. Becoming familiar with university resources like the library is one way students adjust to university life, and the earlier students learn about the library, the sooner they can begin to use it to improve their research skills (Rhoades and Arianne, 2008). Kenyan university libraries are actively involved in imparting lifelong learning skills to the audience through library orientation, user education, online information literacy, teaching information literacy and communication skills.

Library websites

A library website provides an effective means for marketing information products and services to the information audience. Libraries, knowingly or not, have used their websites as part of their marketing scheme. Many services provided by libraries are online and do not require a visit to the library or interaction with library personnel (Konata, 2006). Promoting new information products and services in a library website is important but is frequently not as effective as one would like to believe. Therefore, the online environment has to create and develop a relationship in the same way as a face-to-face interaction. University libraries in Kenya have created and developed their web pages. The web pages provide information on library operations and services. In addition, the useful services like Ask Librarian and Lib Help are readily available. In light of this, the information audience is effectively informed on the available information products and services offered by the library. This is an effective way of promoting the library within and beyond the university's borders.

Suggestions and recommendations

Marketing of information products and services in any library environment is a library management process just like administration, acquisitions, cataloguing, information systems, circulation and reference services. There is need for full-time information professionals to handle marketing of library and information services.

Library and information marketing in a university environment is about understanding and keeping the user population informed about library activities, and

involving them to ensure maximum utilisation of information resources and services. This can be achieved through initiatives such as regular communication, campus exhibitions and participatory planning.

The concept of marketing in a university library environment should involve all stakeholders including library management and staff, user community, friends of the library, donors and sponsors. The stakeholders can achieve more for the university library if they are actively involved in marketing and promotional activities.

Web marketing (using websites and social networking sites) seem to be effective means for reaching out and promoting information products and services especially current awareness services and dissemination of information services to the user population.

In this Google era, university libraries need to move out and go to where the users are using innovative approaches such as Twitter, Meebo and Facebook among others. Marketing provides a better platform of reaching out and promoting library services to the information audience.

Marketing provides university libraries the unique opportunity to make a difference in provision of information services. Marketing process directly looks at the available information products and services, needs and demands of the information audience, and the methods to achieve efficient and effective information services.

University libraries should be actively involved in developing innovative web based solutions such as Twitter, Facebook and Ask Librarian among others to help in delivery and marketing of information products and services to the user population.

Conclusion

Libraries in Kenya including university libraries need to appreciate the contribution that the application of the concept of marketing can make. University libraries provide a wide range of information products and services to the user population. The user population can be segmented using market research strategies based on: age, discipline of study, origin, ability (special need), nature of programme (undergraduate or graduate), course of study and level of computer literacy. Hence, in designing the marketing mix and developing the marketing plan, the 4Ps – product, price, place and promotion – in relation to the user population must be considered. The ultimate goal of the marketing process is the satisfaction of the needs and demands of the user population. University libraries should develop appropriate information products and services to meet the needs and demands of the various user groups. In addition, university libraries need to have thorough knowledge of who their user groups are. Only through this will they be able to provide information products and services suited to the needs and demands of the various user groups.

Library and information marketing is a basic and essential management process of managing information work in any library environment. It is a management process just like any other library operations. It is no longer a preserve of the commercial or business sectors. It is a multifaceted subject that cuts across all disciplines. University libraries should be actively involved in the process of marketing information resources and services to the user population. The ultimate aim of marketing is to provide the right information to the right user at the right time (Das and Karn, 2008). In light of this, information professionals have to recognise and emphasis that the core of marketing is the rapport or relationship between the university library (market place) and the information audience (customer), which goes a long way in enabling the information audience, know the available information resources.

In addition, there is need to adopt various modern marketing strategies in marketing of library and information services such as the use of Twitter and Facebook among others. These social networks provide the easiest and cheapest means of marketing and promoting of library and information services to the user population. The concept of marketing in university libraries in Kenya is still growing with brighter prospects. However, university libraries in Kenya can learn from their counterparts in developed or developing countries which have implemented marketing approaches in library and information services. Additionally, they can gain much from visits to service organisations like airports, banks, shops, supermarkets, restaurants and internet cafes which have fully utilised marketing services.

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