Nigerian University Libraries: Current situation, needed improvements, and how marketing might help

Abstract

This paper makes a case for marketing library and information services in Nigerian university libraries. It examines the practice and problems of marketing library and information services in Nigerian universities as well as charts the way forward in dealing with identified problems. It further posits that if carefully planned and executed, marketing could help the library improve its public perception and win more readership.

Introduction

University libraries in Nigeria have grown in number, infrastructure, personnel and services since the first university library was established sixty years ago. Though marketing of library services is a concept of comparatively recent origin, it has now emerged as an important idea within the library system for the improvement of university libraries in Nigeria. Marketing covers activities that connect the organization to those members of the outside world who use, buy, sell or influence its products and the benefits and services it offers (Joseph & Parameswari, 2002). Though marketing has a variety of definitions, the American Marketing Association's definition as cited by Kotler (2000) appears appropriate in our context. This definition views marketing as the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of ideas, goods, and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals. This view of marketing leads us to consider issues crucial to marketing of library and information services, such as:

- appropriate methods for planning and design of marketing programs

- the need to meet the objectives of the organization

- the importance of target markets

- the nature of pricesetting

- communication and distribution (Okogwu, 2006)

The library might be called an information market and the library user a consumer of information. Libraries' acquisition, organization, and dissemination of information can be improved by the practice of marketing in order to achieve reader satisfaction. In a time when the Internet and other information and communication technology (ICT) facilities are getting more user attention, the library should endeavor to capitalize on, improve, and nurture its culture of excellent customer service in order to enhance its image in the eyes of users. As Kotler (1995) points out, organizations such as museums, universities, libraries, and charities need to market their causes and their products as a way of gaining political, social, and economic support.

University Libraries in Nigeria: A Brief History

Development of university libraries in Nigeria cannot be separated from the evolution and growth of universities in the country. The history of library development in Nigeria dates back to pre-independence, when the University of Ibadan and its library were established in 1948. As pointed out by Aguolu (1996), since independence in 1960, there has been an unrelenting upsurge in the establishment

of educational institutions at all levels, but especially at the university level. University libraries, as integral academic parts of universities, generally emerged simultaneously with their parent institutions.

At independence in 1960, the federal government of Nigeria wanted to bridge the literacy and administrative manpower gaps existing in various regions of the country. It elected to establish a university in each of the regions in existence at that time. This brought about the establishment of the University of Nigeria in Nsukka, University of Ife (now ObafemiAwolowo University) in Ile-Ife, and Ahmadu Bello University in Zaria. These universities all established libraries to meet the needs of their students and staff. Over the years, universities and university libraries have increased in number. Federal and state governments have opened more universities, while private individuals and organizations are now licensed to operate universities. Presently, there are one hundred and four universities with university libraries in Nigeria (National Universities Commission, 2010).

The Current Situation

Government-owned university libraries are suffering from a low budgetary allocation for education. An analysis of the federal government allocation to the education sector in the last nine years is discouraging. Between 2000 and 2008, the Nigerian federal government allocated an average of only 9% of its budget to education (Mordi, 2008). In 2008, *The Punch* reported that of the N737 billion ($5.2 billion U.S. dollars) the federal government allocated to the education sector between 1999 and 2007, the federal ministry of education spent about N472 billion ($3.5 billion U.S. dollars) on salaries and wages, leaving a meager N265 billion ($1.75 billion U.S. dollars) for the development of infrastructure in these universities over a period of eight years ("Decay in Public Education System", 2008).

With such low funding, universities are not able to operate libraries with first-class services. As a result, facilities and information resources are inadequate, and students use the libraries mainly for study space. Few faculty members use the libraries' resources regularly and most seem unaware of new developments and resources within the library. The library staff struggles to provide access to electronic resources while coping with unreliable power, unreliable access to the Internet, and low bandwidth. Many view the library as weak and unable to support the teaching and research missions of the university (Macarthur Foundation, 2005). Thus, it is clear that university libraries are facing dire challenges as they try to fit into the emerging information society.

How Marketing Can Help

These challenges can be met by developing strategies for marketing that help stakeholders begin to recognize the role of librarians and their value to society. If carefully planned, marketing has the potential to increase the university libraries' chances of survival and may even help them flourish. For university libraries in Nigeria, marketing of information products and services is essential, especially as a means of promoting the use of services by current and potential users.

Marketing in University Libraries

The concept of marketing in libraries is often misunderstood. Many associate it with profit motives or see it only as promotion of library services (Okogwu, 2006). While these views are not entirely wrong, they do not reflect the broad nature of marketing. Olson and Moseman (1997) and Okogwu (2006) posit that marketing includes determining market niches, defining products and services, setting prices, promoting services, and building good public relations. In the university library setting, marketing library

and information services entails understanding the objectives of the library, researching the needs of the target market, packaging the library and its services to meet these needs, then promotion of the library and its services to attract the target market, and finally, pricing. It is important that the libraries first create a clear vision of their values, and of their contributions to the university, its faculty, staff and students, and to society as a whole. To do this, libraries must first define their mission and objectives, increase their customer focus, and provide quality management and effective and efficient service (Nkanga, 1999).

Marketing Library Objectives

To be able to market its services effectively, the library must take its objectives into consideration. In general, a university library is geared towards the advancement of the objectives of its parent institution by providing cost-effective information services and knowledge products to its resident community. It is up to each individual university library to expand upon these objectives to describe its particular situation. All the processes of marketing undertaken by the library must be guided by these objectives. The marketing process begins at the library's core, namely, the library's mission statement. The mission statement should reflect the values of the library and explicitly state the service philosophy. Ifidon and Ifidon (2007) outline the major objectives of university libraries as:

- provision of material in support of the learning process

- provision of materials for research for students and faculty

- provision of materials to help library users in their personal self-development

- cooperation with other libraries to broaden access to materials for the benefit of users

- meeting the specialized information needs of the university community

Bringing users to appreciate these functions and services in relation to their academic progress and success is the essence of marketing for university libraries.

The Target Market

In marketing information services, the library should study the target market's needs, then design appropriate products and services to meet these needs. Once this has been accomplished, the library can design a program to inform, motivate, and serve the market. One method to assist with studying the target market's needs is through market segmentation. Market segmentation is the division of the market or consumers into certain categories according to their buying habits (Dictionary of Marketing, 2000). To do this, the library identifies its distinct groups of users and their expectations of the library and librarians. For university libraries, the target market comprises:

- members of faculty, including academic staff of various ranks such as professors, readers, senior and junior lecturers, assistant lecturers and graduate assistants

- undergraduate and postgraduate students

- non-academic staff

- users outside the university community

Each of these groups of users has distinct needs and user behaviors that must be taken into consideration for proper and effective marketing to be carried out. For example, in her research on the impact of electronic resources in academic libraries in Nigeria, Adeyemi (2009) observed that senior academics (especially those between the ages of 55 and 65 years) rarely make use of electronic resources due to poor eyesight, lack of Internet search skills, or inability to use computers. This implies that they prefer to make use of hard copy (print) rather than non-print versions of information resources in the library. Consequently, in order to effectively market libraries' resources and services to senior academics in Nigeria, libraries should either focus on use of print materials or collaborate with relevant agencies to organize seminars and training workshops on Internet and database search skills as well as the use of computers.

The situation is much different for junior academics and students. Both are favorably disposed toward the use of both electronic and print resources. Ilo and Ifijeh (2010) posited that Nigerian students rely on electronic resources, especially the Internet, in their academic pursuits. Thus, university libraries can take advantage of the use of the Internet in driving their marketing efforts toward these target groups. This would require the university authorities establishing electronic media centers in libraries. Electronic media centers provide users with access to electronic journal articles, e-books, and other important information resources available on the Internet. Therefore, the creation of such centers would increase patronage for junior academics, students, and other members of the university community. In categorizing these users and their needs, the library should be able to answer the following questions:

- Who uses your services the most?

- What are the top ten subject areas?

- What are the most common competitive tasks?

- What are recent customer complaints?

- Are any of these recurring complaints?

Identifying the distinct groups of users and their needs will help the library to concentrate on the most productive services to supply, and also create an opportunity to discover better ways to meet users' other needs. Similarly, the subject areas that are consulted the most should also be considered in the process of developing a good marketing strategy that highlights the ways that library materials meet the needs of users. Customer complaints as well as feedback regarding popular services should also be given adequate and satisfactory attention.

Packaging the Library and its Services

Packaging implies putting things in place to attract customers. Some of the facilities and resources that should be considered in the packaging process include the library building, the library's resources, and library staff.

The library building houses library staff, readers, information resources, and equipment. Each of these has needs that the building must meet if the library services are to be effective and efficient. Ideally, the library building should occupy a central location on campus for easy accessibility to users. Ideally, users may access the library through the online public access catalogue (OPAC); however, very few libraries in Nigeria operate the OPAC system. Where OPACs do exists, users can gain access to library holdings from

various locations without necessarily going to the library. Without access to OPACs, users will need to visit the library itself in order to browse, borrow, return, or renew library materials. Libraries must ensure their reading rooms are neat, well-ventilated and comfortable to encourage readership. Currently, most government-owned university library buildings are in poor shape due to a lack of maintenance caused by poor funding (Mordi, 2008). There is a dire need to renovate these buildings and install relevant facilities if libraries are to market their collections and services effectively and increase patronage.

The library should provide quality information resources that reflect the various fields of study offered at the university. These should be in print and non-print formats. The library's collection should be competitive with those of other information resource centers. The library should also be equipped with Internet and e-learning facilities.

In addition to providing sufficient resources, the library must have adequate numbers of professional librarians. In addition to their technical knowledge of librarianship, librarians should possess skills for marketing library and information services. Such skills include knowledge of marketing strategies and the ability to obtain feedback from users and perceive user needs.

Promotion and Publicity

The library needs to make its users aware of the services it provides. Promotion involves mechanisms that inform the target groups about the resources, services, and products offered by the library (Joseph & Parameswari, 2002). In carrying out promotional activities, the library should emphasize its areas of strength and competitive advantage, taking into consideration unique benefits users gain from its services. Some promotional activities the library could embark on include:

- publishing and distribution of hand bills
- publishing and distribution of newsletters
- mailing list programs
- placing posters in strategic places
- use of billboards
- library awareness programs such as library week or library orientation for all incoming students

Pricing

Pricing is the marketing activity that determines the price of products and services. This is done on the basis of cost of production as well as market factors like distribution channels, competitor's prices, and the ability or willingness of customers to pay. Though the library is not profit-oriented, the reality of today's world in terms of the cost of acquisitions and services makes it inevitable that the library will have to charge users for services rendered. However, the amount to be charged should be minimal and for certain specialized services only. Such services may include:

- Registration. For example, users might be charged annual registration fees before they are allowed to use the library. Many university libraries offer guests the option to purchase a guest library card.

- Selective dissemination of information. For example, getting users' profiles and sending specialized information and research findings that matched their profiles to them, either through e-mails or postal mail.

- Use of the library's Tnternet facilities.

- Specialized abstracting and indexing services for individual users based on the user's individual research needs.

Libraries also charge fees for overdue items. It is important to note that funds generated from such charges can help to maintain the library's collection and provide better facilities and services for users; therefore, fees overdue items can be marketed as having a positive effect for the users.

Problems Involved in Marketing of University Libraries in Nigeria

Packaging the library to make it marketable requires funds. For government-owned universities in Nigeria, funds are not readily available (Aguolu, 1996). This has hampered professional library services and frustrated marketing efforts. Many university libraries cannot compete with other information resource centers due to poor infrastructure, low morale among librarians, and lack of quality learning resources (MacArthur Foundation, 2005). The MacArthur Foundation (2005), in its report on university libraries in Nigeria, stated that many students and faculty view the libraries as weak and unable to support research. With this attitude in place, marketing the library and its services becomes a Herculean task. Moreover, most librarians in Nigeria lack business expertise (Joseph and Parameswari, 2002). Thus, librarians tend to focus on traditional duties of acquisition, cataloguing, classification, and shelving; and thereafter, wait for patrons to come, instead of reaching out to attract the users through professional marketing of services.

The Way Forward

Create a Marketing Plan and Strategy

Effective marketing of library services in Nigerian university libraries should begin with each library implementing a library marketing plan. The marketing plan should revolve around a mission statement, which can give the library staff a sense of direction and purpose, especially if they are asked to contribute to the creation of this plan. The effects of marketing library services will be more pronounced if library staff follow a predetermined marketing plan.

Marketing on a Tight Budget

Marketing demands funding. Rather than waiting for allocations from the government or its parent institution, the university library needs to generate funds in order to compete with other information resource centers. These funds can be acquired from library development levies for consulting services, library fines, registration fees, and through grant funding by donor agencies.

Funds provided and generated must be well-managed and carefully used. Rather than expensive marketing ideas, libraries might opt for the use of handbills and other cost-effective materials to carry out promotions and publicity. Libraries can also use e-mail to publicize their activities. This is much less expensive than other sources of publicity. University library managers must cut waste and excess in order to minimize cost and promote effectiveness and efficiency. Libraries can encourage university

alumni and other friends of the library to volunteer their skills and time towards library development programs.

The marketing model for special libraries in Botswana as proposed by Nkanga (1999) is a clear example of marketing on a tight budget. The Botswana library marketing model was based on the Work Improvement Teams (WITS) programme created by the Botswana Government in 1993 in order to enhance productivity in organizations in the country. Organizations, including libraries were encouraged to adopt economic measures as advocated in the programme. The library model involved separating marketing from the day-to-day operations of the libraries and giving specific responsibility for marketing to an officer or a team of officers. Funds for marketing activities were to be generated through library levies collected from users and donations from friends of the libraries. The heads of the libraries were to ensure that marketing officers gave periodic accounts of all monies received and spent. Though there is no follow-up report to show the extent of success or failure of the model, this model is useful for university libraries in Nigeria as a strategy for effective marketing of library services.

Staff Training

Librarians need to acquire strong marketing skills. This can be achieved through in-house retraining programs and through short-term marketing courses. Nigerian library schools should incorporate marketing courses in their curricula to equip graduates with marketing skills that will benefit them as practitioners. Ifidon (2008) rightly observed that Nigerian library schools need to include business and marketing courses in their curricula in order to equip students with marketing skills needed to excel at their workplaces.

Conclusion

As libraries improve upon their services and engage in marketing and promotion, users' low esteem for the library will gradually change. Improving service delivery will require the library to ensure that greater effort is devoted to designing and implementing programs and services that provide what users want from their libraries. In order to achieve their primary objective of disseminating information to their users, Nigerian university libraries need to fully embrace the concept of marketing. Though libraries cannot claim a monopoly on information, the advent of information and communication technology has brought about competition in the domain and primary functions of the library. University libraries should employ marketing as a tool in order to become relevant to the overall objectives of universities and users. Librarians should package library services so that users will value their services and even become willing to pay for some of them, a development that would signal a dramatic improvement in the quality of library services.

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