

THE SIGNIFICANCE OF MARKETING LIBRARY AND INFORMATION SERVICES IN ENSURING THAT LIBRARIES CONTRIBUTE TO THE ATTAINMENT OF THE MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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Abstract

The high poverty levels in Zambia and indeed most countries in East, Central and Southern Africa send a message to the general populace that it is no longer up to the governments to find ways of abetting it, but that organization such as libraries in the various countries need to join the fight. This paper establishes the importance of information in the development process. The paper underscores the significance of marketing libraries in helping in the attainment of the Millennium Development Goals. Steps of how libraries could develop market plans are outlined. Finally, Challenges which library staff may face in the marketing process have been outlined.

Key words

Information, Development, Millennium Development goals (MDGs), Marketing

1. Introduction

The high poverty levels in Zambia and indeed most countries in East, Central and Southern Africa send a message to the general populace that it is no longer up to the governments to find ways of abetting it, but that organization such as libraries in the various countries need to join the fight. According to the report by the Department for International Development (DFID) (2008), Zambia's economic performance has improved in recent years and the economy is enjoying sustained growth of around 5.5% per annum. Zambia has also received extensive debt relief as a consequence of the G8 meeting in Gleneagles and Multilateral Debt Relief Initiative (MDRI). Zambia's external debt burden was reduced from around \$7.1 billion to \$0.5 billion. This means that the money that would have been used to pay back loans is now available to the Government to spend on health, environment and education and other priority sectors. The report also confirms that Zambia is performing well against some of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) particularly in primary universal education

and promoting gender equality in schools. Net enrolment rates for primary education improved from 63% in 2000 to 89% in 2005. However, more needs to be done if MDGs are to be achieved by 2015. Despite the introduction of free basic education in 2002, many girls and other vulnerable groups drop out of school before they complete primary school, largely due to poverty, and the impact of HIV and AIDS on families.

Good progress is being made in the fight against HIV and AIDS, malaria and other diseases, with indications that the HIV epidemic appears not to be spreading, and there are indications that there are fewer new infections in the 15-19 year old age group. According to China news (2008), HIV infection rates in Zambia appear to have reduced from 15.6% to 14.3 %. Services are becoming more widely available for the prevention of mother to child transmission (PMTCT) of HIV with over 90% of the districts having some PMTCT service sites. However while prevention efforts are improving, more still needs to be done. There are currently around 130,000 Zambians on anti-retro viral (ARVs) but this is only 40% of the estimated number of people who need access to these.

The current progress on the MDGs on poverty, hunger, child and maternal mortality and environmental sustainability targets is poor. Maternal mortality has increased from 649 per 100,000 between 1996-2000 to 729 per 100,000. A big effort is required if Zambia is to achieve these targets by 2015.

It is in the light of all this background that the vigorous participation of libraries in making information available would further enhance the efforts of achieving the MDGs.

2. Role information in development

According to Neelamegha and Akhtar, any economic, social and political system is likely to perform more efficiently if there exist within that system mechanisms, for ensuring that the functions, and tasks of gainful decision making, effective problem solving, planning, minimizing the chances of unnecessary duplication of effort, promotion of innovation are supported by the timely provision to all those participating in and contributing to the development process with relevant, up to date and reliable data and information.

Mathew (1986: 19) identifies information as a critical resource for development. The author is of the opinion that the inability of traditional or orthodox development theorists, economists, and statesmen to identify this critical resource results in the colossal failure of their efforts.

It can therefore be concluded that information is power that drives any development it be social, economic or political because all those engaged in planning need to have access to the best options in a particular situation. The Zambian people need to be well informed of the ills of not sending the children to school, destroying the environment, lack of maternal health programmes, lack of programmes of combating HIV/AIDS etc. Libraries have a critical role to disseminate information relating to these developmental issues. Libraries should use the marketing techniques applied by the corporate organizations to market services so that the Zambia citizens are well informed in their various disciplines.

3. The importance of Marketing Libraries Services

The Chartered Institute of Marketing define marketing as a process responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customer requirements profitably. While Kotler (2000: 4) define marketing as a social managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging products and value with others.

Marketing is critical in as far as determining suitable products for the users is concerned. There are many times when library staff take users for granted and have ended up with our services un-tapped. On the other hand Chang (1996: 19) believes that most library users take it for granted that libraries are for students who study for examinations. The author continued to say that it is therefore imperative for public libraries to be marketed.

The marketing process takes the librarian through the product cycle which begin with the product idea generation and screening, the business analysis of the product, test marketing, product modification and offering the product to the users. Once the service has been introduced, it is incumbent upon the service provider in the library to ensure that they monitor the product life cycle through the stages which include the introduction, growth, maturity up to the time the uptake start declining.

Marketing is critical for libraries in that it enables library managers come up with promotional strategies which suit their users. The library managers think through the best channels to be used to communicate to the users of the specific libraries. Effective promotional mix include advertising, personal selling, public relations and lectures.

In the process of market planning, one is able to say whether the location of the library is convenient to users, and whether a choice of access though remote access would be best for the users. It is also very important when examining the

suitability of a place whether the opening hours of the library are in line with user needs.

Harper (1998: 115) contents that marketing of LIS services would be useful in the presentation of the new range of information services. He argues that marketing concepts help in arriving at some fundamental decisions about pricing. Library, staff have to ask the questions as to whether the charges demanded from users are in their interest.

Some of the charging strategies in practice today include price discrimination where users are charged differently in line with the market segments e.g. pensioners, students may be charged less than the well paid.

Offering discounts during events such as Christmas, New Year, would also attract a number of new users to the library.

Lastly but not the least, marketing is a critical tool for libraries to maintain their traditional users in the library. This can be achieved through understanding customer needs. Information services must retain users by ensuring that their information needs are being met by giving them services not offered by other libraries therefore retaining the competitive edge. Libraries should ensure that services are tailored to meet customer requirements. This can only be attained if needs of the users are constantly evaluated. It is also important that users are reached using the communication modes suitable to them. Regular consultation has also proved to improve the services of the library.

4. Steps in coming up with marketing strategies for libraries:

Background analysis

The first step in the marketing process is to analyse and review what a particular library has offered in the past and to critically think of what it will do in the future. Mohamedali (1999: 310) says that the initial analysis should involve a careful examination of the overall mission of the library and also of its collections, services, budgets, plans, reports, and any statistical information the library may have on library use and users. Some of the questions which need to be answered identified by Miller in Mohamedali (1999: 311) include

- What is the overall mission of the organisation which supports libraries?
- What services or products have the information professionals tried to market in the past?
- How successful/unsuccessful have they been?

- What are the current resources e.g. personnel, materials, financial?
- How good are the current services?
- Are they already promising people more than they can deliver?
- How likely are they to have the personnel, financial and material resources to sustain an increased level of services in the future?
- How much marketing can they really afford?
- Should they consolidate their existing marketing strategies or develop new ones?

Segmentation of users

The second step in marketing library services according to Cuesta and McGovern (2002) is to identify the segment of the target group of the library that you want to reach. Everything else in the marketing effort flows from this decision.

They say that the needs assessment process identifies a long list of pressing community needs that it becomes necessary to segment the market.

marketing efforts because you are afraid that you will disappoint the community with what little you have to offer. Or you may be afraid of being overwhelmed with the demand for services.

Some of the factors to be considered in narrowing down the focus of the initial marketing efforts include as identified by Cuesta and McGovern include:

- Size of the group within the community or emerging group within the community: To have the greatest impact at first, the specific focus of the marketing activities may need to be the largest or the fastest-growing segment of the target group. For example, the community may be experiencing a large influx of limited English-speaking immigrants from a specific country.
- Urgency of need: The results of your needs assessment may show that a specific segment of the target group has pressing needs that deserve immediate attention. For example, recent immigrants or refugees may need basic survival information about where to find adequate housing, how to get a job, or how to access medical services.
- Library resources available: Find a match between the needs assessment data and already-existing services or strengths of the library. For example, the data may show that parents are very concerned about the educational oppor-

tunities for their children. If one of the library's strengths is the variety and depth of children's services provided, this may be the focus of your initial marketing effort. Other strengths to capitalize on may include staff expertise, language ability, and size and depth of collection.

- **Community or political concerns:** The community may be facing a particular issue or problem that is of critical interest or importance. For example, community leaders may need immediate help in distributing current and reliable information about upcoming deadlines and changes in immigration policy that could result in deportation for many members of the community.
- **Partnering opportunities:** Other agencies and groups in the community may already be addressing a pressing need in the community, such as the need for information about changes in immigration policy mentioned above. The library's willingness to collaborate and be a part of this effort will help the library build trust within the community.
- **Demands for service:** There may be segments of the community that are particularly vocal and pressing for attention to their specific needs.
- **Existing community contacts or strengths:** The library may already have well-established contacts within a community that can serve as the focus of an initial marketing effort. For example, in the course of their general outreach activities, children's librarians may have made connections with a variety of different groups and agencies serving the target group.

Library staff need to define and describe the library target community or segment as specifically and completely as possible.

Analysis of Resources

Once the segmentation has been established, it is necessary to find out what resources are required to carry out the marketing of the services. An indication of what resources that will be required to accomplish the marketing assignment can be achieved from the analysis and assessment done earlier of the weakness and strength of the collection, facilities, services, equipment, staff and finances of the library. It is sometimes possible that some marketing strategies may not require additional money at all.

5. Development of the marketing plan

It is critical at this stage to develop a market plan which should have specific and measurable objectives which should be consistent of the parent organiza-

tion. If the objectives of the plan are not consistent with the parent organization, it would be very difficult to obtain funding for the implementation of the plan.

Library Staff should ensure that the following Components of the plan are included:

- **Executive Summary:** which should include a brief introduction of your library and what services it offers. The mission of the organization should be included.
- **Describe the current situation:** Define where the library is at the moment, and where you want it to be in future. Outline the current users, the services being offered, the size of the collection and the current budget.
- **Market audit:** The competitor analysis is outlined in this section. The strength, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the library are defined. An environmental analysis including political, economical, and technological of the area where the library is situated has to be stipulated here.
- **Marketing objectives:** It must be clear from here whether the aim is to open another library, introduce a new service or improve on the existing service. The time frame of when the introduction or improvement of a new service would be done should be clear.
- **Market strategy:** outlines the approach that will be used to achieve the plan's objectives. Here the 4Ps which include product, price, promotion and price are discussed in detail.
- **The action Plan:** Specific programs and activities are outlined here designed to meet the objectives, with timelines and assignment of tasks.
- **Budget:** This section details any financial constraints or profits.
- **Evaluation:** This section provides measures of assessment and feedback.

6. Challenges of Marketing Library and information services

Most librarians in Zambia and other countries do not market libraries because of a number of reasons which include the following:

Myth: There is a belief that libraries do not need to be marketed in any special way because their importance to society should be known to all. Most University libraries do not market their libraries because they say that the university already has a defined segments of users who do not need to be in-

formed about the library services. This has led to some of the university library services being underutilised or even not used at all. An example in point are electronic resources at the university of Zambia which at some point were not used, however with promotional strategies this was turned round.

Lack of training and education: Steadley (2003) notes that Often librarians do not promote library services well due to lack of training and knowledge of marketing tools and techniques. It has also been observed that although marketing is more widely discussed and accepted professionally than in the past, this acceptance hasn't necessarily resulted in more marketing classes in library schools' curricula. Despite the growing literature on library marketing, there remains a lack of familiarity with the total marketing concept among librarians. The University of Zambia Department of Library and Information Studies is just now in the process of introducing a full marketing course in its programme.

Money and attitude – Lack of funds is often used as a reason or excuse not to market library services. Although money should be available for marketing purposes, the attitude of library staff to users has a great impact on what users think about a particular library. Staff need to work harder to ensure that services are improved to the expectation of users. This has to start with library students who in most cases are ashamed of talking about their profession with their colleagues.

Lack of appreciation of library services by political leaders: Libraries in Zambia have suffered a high degree of neglect from the politicians. This has resulted in the country to date having no law in place to ensure that libraries are well coordinated and managed. This has resulted in libraries being at the mercy of the departments they have been placed under. In Zambia, public libraries are under the ministry of Education as well as the ministry of local Government and Housing. The two ministries have their core business which from the look of things does not include libraries. Librarians in the two ministries feel they have nothing to market.

Resistance to change: Most Librarians and libraries are limited by their traditional image – that libraries offer books for lending and provide services for children, but do not contribute to more sophisticated information needs. As long as this mentality is with the librarians, the battle of changing the way libraries could contribute to the MDGs will be lost.

7. Conclusion

It is important that libraries double up their efforts in contributing to the development process through the MDG platform. The adoption of the corporate world's marketing principles is part of the solution. However, librarians need to shake off some of their myths and beliefs in traditional practices if they are to be relevant in the current competitive world. The development of effective marketing plans is key to the survival of libraries in the midst of alternative sources of information such as the internet.

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