

Marketing of Information Resources in Nigeria: Strategies and Challenges

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Abstract

In a country where reading culture is poor, that is, where majority of the inhabitants do not find anything fascinating in reading, even for pleasure, marketing of Information or Information Resources is undoubtedly, a herculean task. Marketing in this context, is the activity of presenting, advertising and selling Information or Information Resources (product) in the best possible way or ways to the people. In marketing, the product you intend to sell must have, at least, potential buyers. Realizing the poor attitude of Nigerians towards reading, identifying the best way to marketing Information Resources to them is the primary focus of this paper. The paper begins with the definitions of the key concepts, marketing, information and Information Resources. It dwells more on discussing the processes of marketing viz-a-viz their potentials in creating interest in reading by the people. The paper closes with, highlighting the best strategies by which people could be made to buy information Resources, both human and material.

Introduction

Information is a significant individual and national resource. It is a resource that is needed by all living creatures. Both human and animals need and seek information for survival. Scholars such as Nnadozie and Nnadozie (2014), Nwosu and Unagha(2014) regard information as the fifth factor of production, in view of its importance to national development. Information is defined by Aguolu and Aguolu (2007) as the message of human experience, which is obtained from or a result of human interactions. In the course of human interactions, useful sets of information are generated and communication of the generated information leads to the creation of yet a new set of information. Information is, therefore, conceptualized here as a cyclical social process propelled by communication. The word information cannot stand until it is communicated and its meaningful essence is acknowledged as such by the targeted receiver.

The means through which information or message is communicated to its pre-determined target is usually referred to as the information resource. Information resources are carriers of information or messages. They are the media through which information is conveyed, channeled and transmitted. Information resource is one of the significant processes of communication. Without information resources, not only is communication of information almost impossible, but also, transmission, storage, preservation and future use of the information is also, almost impossible. Lack of information resource impliedly suggest non- existence of information. A Library does not exist if there is no information resource. As observed by Nwalo (2000), availability of relevant information materials (or resources) is the hallmark of a Library. They are the essence of a Library (Oyelude, 2004). They are the hobs of other Library services (khan, 2009). They represent the intellectual, artistic, musical and other outputs of people, living or dead (Adeoye and Popoola, 2011). Information resources, according to Adeoye and Popoola, can be looked at from two broad categories: print and non-print. Print information resource: include books, serials, pamphlets, maps and atlases, while non-print include: Audio-visual resources, electronic resources.

These resources are not created just for fun. Most of them contain life- dependent information. They carry information which are inevitable for the survival of an individual as well as a nation. A Library is a social institution established to identify, acquire, organize, repackage information resource and make them available to the people for whom the library is established usually in an atmosphere conducive for the use of the resources. The ultimate aim of library resources, therefore, is use. The essence of this paper, therefore, is to discuss how information resources in libraries in Nigeria can best be put into use through strategic marketing approach. The challenges of marketing library resources in Nigeria will also be discussed.

The Concept of Marketing

Marketing is a child of civilization. It is as old as human civilization itself. At the onset, marketing and trade were used interchangeably as if they are synonyms. American Marketing Associations (1935), in (Gupta and Savard, 2010,p: 3553) first defined marketing as “the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producers to consumers: Since marketing is environmentally dictated, it changes as a result of environmental changes, in (2004), AMA redefined marketing as: “an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stake holders” (Gupta and Savard, 2010: p3554). The first definition of AMA is a business- centered definition. The emphasis is on the efficient performance of

business in the process of exchange of goods and services. The second definition recognizes the changing situation in the business environment. In the new environment, the role of customers in the successful marketing of product and services became glaring. Schmidt (2011) observed that understanding and retention of customers are very crucial in any business operation that hopes to thrive in a highly competitive market.

The definition of marketing provided by AMA is a little technical for this paper. A broader definition may be better. Kotler and Armstrong (2008) defined marketing as a social and managerial process by which individuals and organizations obtain what they need and want through creating and exchanging value with others. Value in this sense or context is the basket of benefits or utilities which a user, be it individual or organization, gets while using a product (information resources) or services. In the context of Librarianship, marketing is defined by Gupta, (2003), as supported by Arachchije (2012), as the processes and services introduced in libraries to ensure user information needs are satisfied. The essence of marketing in information environment is the execution of all activities involved in increasing satisfaction of users by providing maximum value to them.

What About Marketing of Information Resources ?

Part of the answers to the above question lies in Ranganathan's Law of Librarianship. According to Ranganathan (1931), books are for use; every book its user; every user his/her book; save the time of the user; library is a growing organism. Book is used by Ranganathan as a generic term to mean any kind of medium of information, print or non-print. In other words by 'book', Ranganathan refers to all kinds of library or information resources. Libraries provide them for the purpose of use. Their presence in the libraries must be made known to the users through the strategy of marketing, hence the need for marketing of information resources.

It is also implied in Ranganathan's law of librarianship that libraries are user centered (customer-centered) organizations. In Nigeria, there is a general apathy among the diverse library users. Either the apathy is an outgrowth from lack of education or ignorance of where to secure or lay hands on requisite information. In a situation like this, libraries are expected to come out of their domain and show people what they have, what they can do or capable of doing and their degree of relevance to the people. The most effective way to go about this publicity is marketing. Marketing is the activity of presenting, advertising and selling the products of libraries in the best possible way.

In their respective contributions to the reasons for marketing of information resources, Gupta (2003) and Anafo (2014) noted the following:

- a) Increasing tight budget in the face of increasing unit competition for funding. Libraries have to justify their increasing budget needs. Failure of which they lose to the units that can satisfactorily defend their relevance to the parent or finance organization.
- b) Fund providing agencies demand well articulated proposal before money or fund can be released. A good idea of marketing, its processes and strategies are invaluable in this regard.
- c) Rising competition among the emerging information provision agencies, such as the cyber café, search engines, social networks. All these new information agencies are really questioning the continuous relevance of libraries as major information provision centers.

The only way libraries can defend their continuous relevance to the society; the only way they can indicate their marked difference from other information provision agencies; the only way they can continue to get the support of funding agencies is through aggressive marketing of their information resources as well as associated information services.

How Can Libraries Market Their Information Resources

Marketing as I had already indicated somewhere in the paper, is a social and managerial process through which people (user or customer) obtained what they need and want from the organization established primarily to serve them. The goals of marketing in this context are basically two:

1. To attract customers or users by promising superior value or benefit;
2. To keep and grow already built up customers or users by delivering satisfaction.

In a nutshell, marketing aims at creating value for customers and to capture value from customers in return.

How then can information resources be marketed in such a way that libraries will not only retain their users but also they would ensure growth in their users through a well designed customer satisfaction strategies? The aim of any library is to ensure their information resources are used. More importantly, users must derive maximum value (satisfaction) from the use of the information resources. Only then will user be ready to cooperate with the library for mutual benefits.

In order to market information resources, therefore, libraries must adopt the marketing tools often used by profit making organizations. These tools are collectively referred to as marketing mix. This is a set of marketing tools profit organizations use to implement their distinct marketing strategies. The major marketing mix tools are classified into four broad groups, called the four Ps of marketing, which are product, price, place

and promotion (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008). Each of the marketing mix will be discussed viz-a-viz marketing of information resources.

Products: In profit-making organizations such as industries, manufacturing and distribution companies, products are the various items offered for marketing. In non-profit-making social organizations, products are mostly services which they render to the public or certain segment of it in return for commensurate civic responsibility. In libraries, products are the information resources as well as the associated services which they provide for the benefits of their respective audiences or users. The most beneficial products are those truly required by the beneficiaries (the users or the customers) and those that can give them the requisite satisfaction. In this case, before deciding on the product to offer, it is absolutely necessary that the users needs and wants must, first and foremost be ascertained. The process of ascertaining user needs and wants, in librarianship, is called community or user analysis. In marketing, it is called “market survey”. The process remains almost the same. The process include segmentation of the user (marketing segmentation), which involves dividing the user into their respective categories or characteristics; designing questionnaire for administration to each category of users for completion, sorting and categorization of the information elicited through the questionnaire and the final analysis and interpretation of the information so gathered from both the real and potential users. In this way

1. The information needs and wants;
2. The human elements dictating the needs and wants;
3. The nature of information needed by the users;
4. Users expectation for each piece of information required;
5. The format;
6. The time and place they require the information would all be known.

The establishment of information such as the above is invaluable in selection and acquisition of the information resources. Since the provision of the information resources (product) is based on a proper knowledge of the information needs of the user, there is no reason why the information resources will not sell or meet their market.

For a wholistic acquisition of these kinds of pre-requisite or background information for the provision and ultimate sales (effective utilization) of the product (information resources), it may also be necessary to go beyond questionnaire into other information elicitation methods, such as interview, observation, focus group and snowballing methods. Either or combination of these would provide the relevant information needed for the product (or need-satisfying market offering).

Pricing: This the amount of money charged for a product or services, or the sum of the values (benefits-social or otherwise) that consumer exchange for the satisfaction derived from using the product or services (Kotler and Armstrong, 2008). While the former definition applies to profit-making organization, the latter definition applies to non-profit –making organization such as libraries. Libraries, wherever they may be and for whomever they may be established, are 95% social organizations. They are non-profit organizations and, therefore, majority of them are not expected to charge money for the services or products they offer.

The price of product for non-profit organization is the sum total of value users or customers attached to the products. The more relevant and satisfying is the product, the more value the customers or users give to the product. A product may have no value unless it is accessible to the user or customers. However relevant or satisfying is the product, if it is not accessible, it may have little or no value to the customer or user. The level of accessibility of a product depends very much in part, on the nature of organization of the product. In other words, information resources must not only be made available in the libraries, but also, they must be put in the most accessible condition for the user. Thus, information is needed in terms of the ways and manner user view information, seek for it and would want to use it. These kinds of information are fundamental to the effective organization of the product or information resources. Understanding or a good knowledge of these three fundamental organizational processes is sine-qua-non to accessibility and effective exploitation of the products and the consequent value attached to the products by the users. Arachchige (2012) noted that no service is effective; no product or information resource is useful or has any value if the potential users or customers do not use them. Managing customers relationship, which is a necessary pre-requisite for the overall social recognition accorded organization, lies in the degree of benefits and satisfaction the customers enjoy from the product. Social recognition usually brings about high level of social support for organization (information centers).

Place: This is the aggregate environment in which a product offering organization, such as the libraries and other information centers operate. Place, in other words, is the physical, the demographic, the social, economic, political and cultural forces that dictates and establishes the nature of operational environment of the product offering centers. In order to put the discussion of place in proper perspective of the paper, we must be reminded of the fact that marketing, from the point of view of non-profit organizations, connotes the aggregate activities of managing profitable customer or user relationship, through creation of value (benefit) for customer and in return capture their values (that is, their total and unconditional cooperation). By implication, marketing is a customer- or –user-centered activity. Thus, the place or environment of the product offering centers must be

predominantly dictated by the users of the centers, that is, it/they must be user-oriented or user-dictated environment.

One of the forces influencing the product offering environment (place) is the physical force. The level of marketability or utilization of a product is quite often dictated by such factors as physical quarters (that is, the building) of the product or the information resources. The location, the nature or general design of the building, its level of conduciveness for the purpose for which the building becomes imperative, all affect the accessibility and utilization level of the product (that is the marketing opportunity open for the product).

Whether or not the product should have a physical quarter is further determined by such factors as demographic, social, economic, political and changing culture of the customers or users. Most people, particularly youths, nowadays prefer a wall-less product centers (that is, virtual information centers). This is because, these people, majority of whom are children of primary and post-primary school age, deals more with social networks centers (that have no physical quarters) than the traditional information centers such as the libraries. Similarly, in view of the changing culture of the people (the potential customers) master- minded principally by technological development, many potential information users would prefer an information structure that provides free or uninterrupted interaction with the requisite information from wherever and at any desired point in time. In order to ensure effective marketability of information resources or product, these socio-economic and technological forces must be taken into cognizance in selecting information environment. In Nigeria, political forces may dictate the selection of information environment. Care must be taken as this may be counter productive to the marketing of information resources. If the choice is not strictly based on peoples' needs, the products or information resources may not find their market or user, as earlier observed by Ranganathan.

Promotion: This refers to the various methods and procedures used by an organization to draw customers' or users' awareness not only to the availability of products or segment of the products but also to the benefit or series of benefits (values) that the customers or users can derive from the product or specific aspect of the products. These techniques include: advertising, personal selling, sales promotion and public relation. These promotion techniques or methods are used more often by profit-making business organizations than non-profit organizations such as the libraries. The fact that business organizations use the methods more does not preclude libraries from using them to promote their information resources. Profit or non-profit organization, marketing objectives remains the same, that is, to create and exchange values with the customers (users), real or potential.

How can libraries use these various promotion outfits to create market for their products (information resources)?

Advertising: This is any special form of non-personal presentation of ideas, goods, services and any other values by an identified sponsor. The overall objective of advertising is to help build customer relationships by communicating customer value. Advertising can be made through any of the mass media such as newsprint, radio and television. The objective of advertising must be clearly defined for the advertiser; whether the advertising is meant to inform, persuade or remind. Although, advertising is costly but it has the advantage of reaching large and diverse audience quickly. Public libraries can use this platform to promote information resources that has tremendous public interest.

Personal selling: Involves personal interaction between the sales men and women and the buyers, so each person in interaction can observe each other's needs and characteristics and make adjustment accordingly. In the case of libraries, every staff of a library automatically assumes the position of a sales man or woman, whose primary concern is to ensure information resources in the collections of their respective libraries are used. Some of the personal selling steps we take in libraries, especially, academic and special libraries include selective dissemination of information and other current awareness services such as information repackaging services, document routening, photocopying services etc. One of the major advantages of personal selling promotion method is that it enables all kinds of customer or user relationship to take place. For example, general and specific interest as well as their specific information needs problems would no longer be anything new to the library staff. Such knowledge would enable the staff to provide relevant information resources that are geared to meet the information needs of the users on regular and, perhaps, timely basis.

Sales Promotion: This is defined by Kotler and Armstrong (2008) as "a short term incentives to encourage the purchase or sale of a product or service". In other words, these are series of customer services meant to attract and encourage patronage of a given product. In profit-making business companies, the incentive include such tangible things as company designed handkerchief, soap, biro, key-holder, calculator etc. each bearing the company's name and logo. These are simply meant to provide a temporary or semi-temporary incentive for the buyers. In libraries, semblance of incentives are given, usually during library week, in which series of gifts are given to users that are in attendance. Although, this is not a generalized practice in all libraries. They are common practice among some special libraries in Nigeria. Some of the services provided under current awareness services are actually meant to encourage use of information resources. In some advanced communities, public libraries offer child care services, (that is, day care). Working women usually take their children to the public library, where they will stay up-to the closing time of their respective work place. The day care sections of

the libraries are usually equipped with series of educational toys, by which the children are engaged up-to the time their mothers would return to pick them. The biggest advantage of this sales promotion strategy is that the children finally grew up with a well developed culture of reading. This also has positive consequences in their subsequent educational pursuit and active use of information resource.

Library Week: This is usually an annual event in some libraries. Library week feature such promotional events as library carnival, book exhibition, library talk, speeches, newsbits, library tour, user education, to mention a few.

Public Relation and Publicity: This involves creating or building good relations with the library community, building a good corporate image and endeavoring to debunk unfavorable remarks about the library. It is the duty of the public relation personnel to ensure people's negative impression about the libraries is corrected. Public relation is used generally to promote products, people, ideas, activities etc. organizations use public relations to build good relationship with users, sponsors, media, communities and donor agencies. Effective public relation activity can contribute tremendously to the level of financial and social support and patronage a library may have.

Challenges Facing Marketing Of Information Resources In Nigeria

The biggest challenge facing marketing of information resources in Nigeria is finance. Marketing as we can see, is a cost-intensive activity. In the face of increasing dwindling library budget, financing this important library activity is really a problem.

The second challenge is peoples or users' over attachment to internet (web information). These days people find getting information through the Internet tremendously easier and quicker than getting similar information through the conventional information resources centers such as the library. No doubt, this is a welcome development. However, the possibility of getting fake and unreliable information is greatly higher in web information than information in libraries. Not only are library information resources carefully selected and systematically organized taken into cognizance the information needs and use requirements of the users, they are made available at an environment conducive for the utilization of the resources. Internet information resources are rather armorphorse and devoid of proper organization which add value to the resources. Yet it is increasingly difficult to divert the attention of people to a more organized information structure.

Majority of Nigerians have poor reading culture. Rather than getting information from non-fiction literature in which well conceived, thoroughly researched and organized information have been documented, they prefer to get their information from unorthodox (or informal) channels, such as the family, friends and other acquaintances. People who are used to these categories of information channels hardly see the need to turn to orthodox (formal) channels represented by variety of information resources often domiciled in libraries. It may also be difficult to market or convince these categories of users to develop the behavior of patronizing orthodox information centers.

Staff attitude to work is another big challenge to information resources marketing in Nigeria. Most staff hardly see anything good in being serious at work. Besides rampant cases of truancy, some of them hardly sit down at their work post. At times, interpersonal communication between one staff and another can continue while the user seeks in vain for their attention. This attitude creates ill- feelings among the users, to the extent that they may cease to come to the library. A user that has turned his or her back against the library as a result of mistreatment can hardly come back, no matter the efforts made to bring them back.

Most library materials are far out of date. Even where money is made available for the up-date of the information resources, bureaucratic processes and corruption may affect the buying of the materials. Most libraries do not have Internet café, where they can turn to for alternative resources. If people come to the library once or twice and cannot find what they want they will be discouraged and may not return again to the library. These and many more problems, such as infrastructural deficiencies, incessant power failure, poor conveniences in the libraries, extreme rules and regulations can contribute to poor patronage of the libraries and hence poor usage of the information resources.

Conclusion

Ensuring information resources are used is a duty and mandatory one for that matter for librarians. It is by ensuring that information resources in our various libraries are used that we can make social impact or prove the extent of our relevance to the society. Thus, information resources marketing are an important aspect of our professional callings. Nobody except ourselves will do it for us. As educators of these socio-professional people (librarians), we must see to it that marketing is made compulsory or core course in our teaching curriculum.

Recommendation

The few challenges observed in marketing of information resources can easily be nip on the bud if:

- a) Libraries have adequate funding. One of the principal keys to action of any kind is money.

- Knowing what to do is one and embarking on the appropriate actions to do it is yet another and the latter seem to be more important.
- b) Libraries can take pro-active actions to educate people on the danger of over reliance on internet-based information. Attempts are right now in the offing to create order out of chaos currently characterizing the web information.
 - c) Libraries can engage themselves in public enlightenment. People need to be systematically consistently and regularly educated on the importance of reading. One of the scientifically recommended ways of solving psychologically related problems is bibliotherapy. Developing the habit of reading and regularly too is highly imperative for bibliotherapeutic approach to socio-psychological problems.
 - d) Concerted efforts are made always to ensure regular up-date of library resources. It is embarrassing for the users to come into the library to find the reverse of the library's claims during its marketing endeavor. People should come into the library to see the information resources you purported to have in the course of marketing. Anything to the contrary is clearly antithetical to the principles of marketing.
 - e) If library staff or information resources providers can maintain the most cherished staff-user relationship. This kind of relationship is a strong pillar in marketing especially of social services. Staff need to be reminded of or educated on the best way to relate with customers.

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