

Customer Retention Strategies for Information Services Delivery in University Libraries in North Western States of Nigeria

by
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Abstract

Customer retention is critical to the long term survival and growth of any library and information centers. This paper discusses customer retention strategies for information service delivery in University Libraries in North Western States of Nigeria. Survey research method was used and questionnaire was the instrument for data collection. Library staff in the relevant divisions and units constitute the population of the study. The study identified among other things that the use of soft and low voice, friendliness to library users and regular outreach were the customer attraction strategies used by University libraries studied while provision of adequate reading facilities, friendliness and courtesy and beautification of environment were some of the customer retention strategies used by the university libraries studied. Also, it was concluded that the low level of use of University libraries and the ever growing apathy among customers on the choice of Internet cafes over libraries would be gone if university libraries institute customer attraction and retention programmes. Therefore, the need for intensified efforts at attracting and retaining customers by university libraries via the provision of quality information resources and services, recruitment of qualified library staff, and regular needs assessment and communication have been recommended.

Introduction

Many organizations both profit and not for-profit took their customers for granted. This is largely due to the fact that customers often did not have many alternatives on one hand, and organizations including libraries are not well informed of the consequence of not fully satisfying the needs of their customers on the other hand. All business organizations must adapt to the changing business environment, and continuously design and improve marketing strategies. Relationship marketing is one of such contemporary marketing strategies employed by organizations to establish, develop, maintain, and sustain a successful relational transaction with a view to gaining the maximal value of customer attraction and retention. Several relationship marketing practices can help achieve efficiency, such as customer retention, efficient consumer response (ECR), and the sharing of resources between marketing partners. Each of these activities have the potential to reduce operating costs of the marketer.

However, Reichheld (1996) established the assumption that retention of the right customers was as powerful a weapon as customer acquisition and in some cases more powerful. He added that, "as a customer's relationship with a company lengthens, profit rise. Companies can boost profits by almost 100% by retaining just 5% or more of their customers". Hence, it makes sense for University libraries to spend money developing customer retention strategies rather than continually acquiring new customers. It is noteworthy to mention that when an organization loses a customer due to say poor service or poor product, it does not just lose that person's business, it may lose many potential customers. This may also be applicable to University

library where a student asking for a particular information product found to be available on the catalogue but not found on the shelves without any explanation. Alternatively, it might be that the user found the document to be available from his catalogue searches but the librarian was not on seat to attend to customers' requests. With this type of experience, the library user may on one hand not come back again and on the other may not hesitate to discourage his friends, family members, roommates, course mates, associates etc. from patronizing the University Library.

Statement of Problem

The focus of relationship marketing is frequently considered to be customer retention because retention is less costly than acquisition (Reichheld, 1996) and small increases in retention rates can have a dramatic effect on the profits of a company. It is about creating a sustainable competitive advantage by being the best at understanding, communicating, and delivering values to the existing customers in addition to creating and keeping new customers, Mukerjee (2007). The main objectives of libraries today are to become relevant in information service delivery and to provide an optimum level of services to reach more potential users and encourage the use of library resources. This naturally according to Kavulya (2004) requires a "shift from product or service orientation to customer or need orientation".

However, University libraries in Nigeria, despite several efforts to attract and retain their customers, it has been observed by the researcher that library use and patronage have dramatically reduced in most University libraries. This observation was earlier reported by Osinulu (1998); Ekpenyong (2003);

Oyesiku and Oduwole (2004); Igun et al (2007); Ugah (2007). It is against this background that this study was designed to identify customer attraction and retention strategies for information service delivery in selected university libraries in North Western States of Nigeria.

Research Questions

This study seeks to find answers to the following questions:

1. What type of customer retention strategies are adopted in information service delivery in University libraries in North Western States of Nigeria?
2. To what extent are the customer retention strategies useful in the university libraries in North Western States of Nigeria?

Hypothesis

Ho. There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for customer retention in the University libraries in North Western States of Nigeria.

Objectives of the Study

The objectives of this research are to:

1. Identify the type of customer retention strategies adopted in information service delivery in University libraries in North Western States of Nigeria
2. Determine the usefulness of the customer retention strategies adopted in the University Libraries in North Western States of Nigeria.
3. Determine the differences in the customer retention strategies adopted in the University Libraries in North Western States of Nigeria.

Literature Review

The term relationship marketing can be traced back to the services marketing literature, though arguably it can be said to have originated in industrial marketing, Payne, et al (1995). In its earliest development, relationship marketing focused simply on the development and cultivation of long term profitable and mutually beneficial relationships between organizations and defined customer groups. The concept was further broadened to encompass internal marketing in acknowledgement of the fact that according to Flipo (1986) "successful management of external relationships was largely dependent on the alignment of supporting internal relationships".

Boone and Kurtz (1998) define relationship marketing as the development, growth and

maintenance of long term, cost effective exchange relationships with individual customers, suppliers, employees and other partners for mutual benefit. In relationship marketing, the term customer is viewed to include both the internal customers (employees) and the external customers (consumers, customers, users, buyers, suppliers, vendors etc.).

Basant and Sharp (2000) observed that "over the years libraries have been building relationships with numerous stakeholders which include book sellers, database providers, library consortia, system analysts and of course, the library users". It therefore follows that in order to create a dynamic University library system that strives towards high customer value delivery it is necessary to cultivate and manage relationships with customers. In this respect, it is the opinion of the researcher that, relationship marketing seems to be an obvious philosophy and strategy for effective and efficient information service delivery. It then follows that, relationship marketing requires that all the organization's department/units have to work together as a team to serve the customer. A good working relationship among all departments and employees is essential for the smooth operation of the library.

From the foregoing discussions, it can be argued that libraries have been for long involved in cultivating and managing relationship among themselves through inter library cooperation, consortium and networking etc. The formation of Committee of University Librarians of Nigerian University libraries (CULNU) to strengthen cooperation and relationships among University libraries in Nigeria is no exception. Strategies for Customer Retention in Libraries

Strategies are set of procedures adopted by individual or organization for the attainment set objectives. In general, the concept of strategy relates to corporate/organizational strategy that guides the corporation or organization as a whole towards the attainment of its goals.

University libraries have objectives to achieve in terms of providing relevant information products and services to numerous customers. It should be one of the basic targets of the University library to ensure that library users are regularly patronizing it and using its products and services. This could be done by establishing trust with customers which is seen as a pre-requisite for any permanent relationship.

For a university library to retain its customers, it has to adopt several strategies among which is to identify exactly what the preferences, needs and desires of its customers are and adjust its offers accordingly towards meeting those needs, preferences and

desires, (Vogt,2004). In addition, University libraries need to further develop their offerings for the readers by way of collecting input from their numerous customers. This could be made possible through the use of focused group discussions/forums, instituting complaint management system and conducting periodic customer satisfaction surveys.

Top-notch marketing firms have realized that delighting customers involve more than simply opening a complaint management department, smiling a lot, conducting customer satisfaction surveys and being nice. "It should be an organizational culture enshrined in the mission and vision statement of the organization," (Hatch and Schell, 2002). This implies that University Libraries have to capture the notion of customer centric philosophy in their organizational values which have to be embedded in their mission and vision statement. This may be the only way to ensure that librarians and other library staff can make library users delighted. In turn, this will certainly guarantee their loyalty to the library system as a whole.

Also, it is indispensable for University library to note that, a customer decision to be loyal or to defect to other competitors is the sum total of many encounters with the organization/company. In this respect, a University library needs to create a "branded customer experience" by ensuring that the right personnel, right equipment and facilities are made available for the efficient and effective information service delivery to customers. Boone and Kurtz (1998) observed that many buyers form their perceptions of service quality during their service encounters. This implies that frontline employees determine whether customers emerge satisfied or not. They further revealed that, service encounter with clients and customers particularly in service organizations/companies can lead to three outcomes: words-of-mouth communications (negative or positive), service switching and service loyalty. Based on this observation, Ovara (1997) remarked that "a key marketing position in library is the service frontline. Every meeting with a client inside the library or outside is a moment of truth and of opportunity. If the frontline is ill-equipped, fancy strategies from the head come to nothing".

Vtrenz (2004) outlined some major strategies to be adopted by organizations to effectively manage relationships as well as retain their customer base. Namely,

- i. Build awareness of your brand;
- ii. Use variety of offers to retain your customer such as electronic letters, guides, workshops etc.;

- iii. Build trust by demonstrating from your action that the needs of the customer come before your needs;
- iv. Nurture your customer via regular communication. The use of electronic marketing tactics and occasional phone calls could be adopted; and
- v. Create a value proposition.

Another important strategy to retain customers is to measure customer satisfaction periodically. Kotler and Keller (2006) reported that "a highly satisfied customer generally stays loyal longer, buy more as the company introduces new products and upgrades existing products and talks favourably about the company and its product...". They added that organization can only strengthen and boost their customer retention by delivering high customer satisfactions. This will make it harder for competitors to offer lower prices or inducements to switch. Thus, organizations including university libraries should make it easy for the customer to complain by providing suggestion forms, toll-free numbers, as (hotlines) websites and e-mail addresses to allow for quick 2-way communication. However, listening is not enough the University Library in particular must respond quickly and constructively to any complaint.

Akers (2007) opines that libraries can retain their customer base by implementing the following strategies:

- ❖ Delivering consistent quality throughout the library;
- ❖ Consistently offer good service, promote collections by using creativity in developing displays and exhibitions;
- ❖ Make sure that library environment is always clean and inviting; and

Methodology

Survey research design was adopted to conduct this research. This is because survey design could be conveniently used in the study of large and small population without sacrificing efficiency, time, cost and accuracy, Aina and Ajiferuke (2002). The research instrument used for the study was questionnaire. Sambo (2005) argued that questionnaire is more economical for reasons of time or funds and are directly associated to survey research design. Library staff (professionals and paraprofessionals) in readers' services division, collection development division, reference division, serial division, ICT unit/division and research and bibliographic service division of Kashim Ibrahim Library, Abdullahi Fodiyo Library and Bayero

University Library located at Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria, Usmanu Danfodiyo University, Sokoto and Bayero University, Kano respectively formed the population of this study. The choice of the library staff in these divisions was informed by the fact that, they are the people involved in interaction with the clients (customers) and are regarded as the front line staff. Below is the breakdown of the number of staff in each university library;

Sample and Sampling Technique

It is apparent that the population of this study is not too large; therefore, all the 160 library staff were used as sample for this research. Hence no sampling technique was required.

Findings and Discussions

160 copies of questionnaire were distributed to the respondents but only 148 (92.5%) copies were

returned duly completed and found usable for this study. Also, the data collected from the research questions raised were presented and analyzed using frequency tables, and simple percentages while the hypothesis was tested using One Way Analysis of variance (ANOVA). Below is the analysis of the responses:-

Customer Retention Strategies Adopted by the Selected University Libraries in North Western States of Nigeria

This research tried to identify the types of customer retention strategies adopted by the selected university libraries in North Western States of Nigeria. To do this, a list of customer retention strategies was drawn for the respondents to tick as many strategies as are relevant. Below is table 3 showing the responses:

Table 1-Total number of Library staff in readers’ service, collection development, reference, serial, ICT unit and research and bibliographic service divisions of the three selected University Libraries in North Western States of Nigeria

University Library	Total No. of Staff		Total
	Professional	paraprofessional	
Kashim Ibrahim Library	22	59	81
Bayero University Library	14	35	49
Abdullahi Fodiyo Library	05	25	30
Total	41	119	160

Source: Library Duty Roster for the Month of August, 2010

Table 3: Types of Customer Retention Strategies Adopted by the selected University Libraries

Types of Customer Retention Strategies Adopted	Names of Libraries					
	KIL, ABU Zaria		BUL, BU Kano		AFUL, UDU, Sokoto	
	F	%	F	%	F	%
Provision of quality information resources and services	51	67.1	36	76.6	21	84
Provision of adequate reading facilities	66	86.8	38	80.9	22	88
Recruitment of competent staff	13	17.1	4	8.5	2	8
Friendliness in information service delivery	66	86.8	37	78.7	22	88
Anticipating customer needs	56	73.7	35	74.5	19	76
Beautification of library environment	47	61.8	18	38.3	9	36
Accuracy of information services	68	89.5	43	91.5	22	88
Regular needs assessment	3	3.9	2	4.3	2	8
Customers’ involvement in information services provision	56	73.7	5	10.6	20	80
Periodic customer satisfaction surveys	7	9.2	4	8.5	2	8
Regular communication with customers	61	80.3	38	80.9	19	76

Key:

KIL-Kashim Ibrahim Library, Zaria, BUL- Bayero University Library, Kano, AFUL- Abdullahi Fodiyo University Library, Sokoto

Table 3 indicated that at Kashim Ibrahim Library (KIL), accuracy of information service 68(89.5%), provision of adequate reading facilities and friendliness and courtesy with 66(86.8%) scores each, regular communication with customers 61(80.3%), anticipating customer needs 56(73.7%), provision of quality information resource/services 51(67.1%), customers' involvement in information service delivery 56(73.7%) and beautification of environment 47(61.8%) were the customer retention strategies adopted with the high response scores in the library. On the other hand, the customer retention strategies adopted in KIL with least response scores include regular needs assessment 3(3.9%) and periodic customer surveys 7(9.2%).

It was also discovered that in Bayero University Library Kano, out of the eleven (11) customer retention strategies identified only 6 of them were adopted by the library staff. These are accuracy of information service 43(91.5%), provision of adequate reading facilities and regular communication with customers with 38(80.9%) scores, friendliness in information service delivery, 37(78.7%), provision of quality information resource/services 36(76.6%) and anticipating customer needs 35(74.5%). Also, it was found that regular need assessment 2(4.3%), periodic customer surveys and recruitment of competent staff with 4(8.5%) scores each and customer involvement in information services 5(10.6%) respectively were the customer retention strategies employed in the library with the least response rates.

In the Abdullahi Fodiyo University Library, Sokoto, the study revealed that provision of adequate reading facilities and friendliness, accuracy of information services and courtesy in information service delivery with 22(88%) scores each, provision of quality information resource/services 21(84%), anticipating customer needs and regular communication with customers with 19(76%) scores each respectively were among the types of customer retention strategies used in the library with the high response scores. On the other hand, regular needs assessment, periodic customer surveys and recruitment of competent staff with 2(8%)

scores each respectively were the customer retention strategies used in the Library with the least frequencies.

From the above analysis, it can be concluded that provision of quality information resource/services, provision of adequate reading facilities, friendliness and courtesy, anticipating customer needs, beautification of environment, accuracy of information service, customer involvement in information service delivery and regular communication with customers were the common customer retention strategies adopted by the three selected university libraries in North Western States of Nigeria. This finding was supported by Akers (2007) and Vasishtha (2008). This finding also corroborates that of Gojeh (2004) who found that provision of relevant information materials, provision of sufficient and comfortable reading facilities... were the strategies employed in colleges of education libraries in Nigeria to motivate and satisfy their users' needs.

However, the study revealed that regular needs assessment and periodic customer surveys were among the least customer retention strategies used by the university libraries. By implication, university libraries may risk the opportunity of keeping track of the ever-changing needs and expectations of their customers. Thus, university libraries must strive to retain and increase their customer base by focusing on meeting their customers' expectations so as to survive in this volatile competitive environment.

Level of Usefulness of Customer Retention Strategies adopted by the selected University Libraries in North Western States of Nigeria

In order to determine the usefulness of customer retention strategies adopted by the selected university libraries in North Western States of Nigeria, a research question was raised with respect to this and subsequently respondents were asked to indicate their level of usefulness in their respective libraries using Likert Scale. Discussion was done along three options; Very Useful (VU); Undecided (U) and Not Useful (NU). Below is table 4 showing the responses:

Table 4: Level of Usefulness of Customer Retention Strategies adopted by the selected University Libraries in North Western States of Nigeria

Customer Retention Strategies	Kashim Ibrahim Library ABU Zaria			Bayero University library Kano			Abdullahi Fodiyo Library Sokoto		
	VU	U	NU	VU	U	NU	VU	U	NU
Provision of quality information resources & services	57(75%)	6(7.9%)	13(17.1%)	23 (48.9%)	4 (8.5%)	20 (42.6%)	10 (40%)	8 (32%)	7 (28%)
Provision of adequate and comfortable reading facilities	64(84.2%)	6(7.9%)	6(7.9%)	7 (14.9%)	14 (29.8%)	26 (55.3%)	0 (0%)	12 (48%)	13 (52%)
Recruitment of competent and qualified library staff in the library	64 (84.2%)	4 (5.3%)	8 (10.5%)	4 (8.5%)	3 (6.4%)	40 (85.1%)	0 (0%)	2 (8%)	23 (92%)
Friendliness and courtesy in information services delivery	59 (77.6%)	11 (14.5%)	6 (7.9%)	42 (89.4%)	4 (8.5%)	1 (2.1%)	23 (92%)	2 (8%)	0 (.0%)
Anticipating customer needs	69 (90.8%)	2 (2.6%)	5 (6.6%)	4 (8.5%)	9 (19.1%)	34 (72.3%)	23 (92%)	2 (8%)	0 (.0%)
Beautification of library environment	56 (73.7%)	6 (7.9%)	14 (18.4%)	38 (80.9%)	5 (10.6%)	4 (8.5%)	23 (92%)	2 (8%)	0 (.0%)
Accuracy of information service	47 (61.8%)	14 (18.4%)	15 (19.7%)	39 (83%)	6 (12.8%)	2 (4.3%)	25 (100%)	0 (0%)	0 (.0%)
Regular needs assessment	65 (85.5%)	1 (1.3%)	10 (13.2%)	4 (8.5%)	8 (17%)	35 (74.5%)	0 (0%)	3 (12%)	22 (88%)
Customers' involvement in information services	53 (69.7%)	6 (7.9%)	17 (22.4%)	40 (85.1%)	4 (8.5%)	3 (6.4%)	23 (92%)	2 (8%)	0 (.0%)
Periodic customer surveys	9 (11.8%)	10 (13.2%)	57 (75%)	4 (8.5%)	8 (17%)	35 (74.5%)	0 (0%)	10 (4%)	24 (96%)
Regular communication with customers	53 (69.7%)	13 (17.1%)	10 (13.2%)	1 (2.1%)	5 (10.6%)	41 (87.2%)	3 (12%)	2 (8%)	20 (80%)

Table 4 indicated that at Kashim Ibrahim Library, the following customer retention strategies were found very useful in helping the library retain its customers. These strategies include the anticipating customer needs 69(90.8%), provision of adequate and comfortable reading facilities, and recruitment of competent and qualified library staff with 64(84.2%) scores, friendliness and courtesy in information service delivery, 59(77.6%), provision of quality information resources and services, 57(75%), beautification of the library environment 56(73.7%), accuracy of information service, 47(61.8%), regular need assessment 65(85.5%), customer involvement in information services 53(69.7%) and regular communication with customers 53(69.7%) respectively. On the other hand, periodic customer surveys 57(75%) are found not useful in retaining

customers in Kashim Ibrahim Library. It might be so perhaps the periodic customer surveys may not have been properly and appropriately handled in such a way that positive results could be generated. So therefore, library staff needs to be well equipped with requisite skills and methods for conducting and monitoring customer satisfaction surveys.

It was discovered that at the Bayero University Library Kano, the customer retention strategies adopted by the library and found very useful in retaining library customers include the provision of quality information resources and services 23(48.9%), friendliness and courtesy in information service delivery, 42(89.4%), beautification of the library environment, 38(80.9%), accuracy of information, 39(83%) and customers' involvement in

information service, 40(85.1%). However, it was revealed from the table that provision of adequate and comfortable reading facilities, 26(55.3%), recruitment of competent and qualified library staff, 40(85.1%), anticipating customers need, 34(72.3%), regular need assessment, 35(74.5%), periodic customer surveys, 35(7.5%) and regular communication with customers, 41(87.2%) respectively were found not useful in retaining customers in Bayero University Library, Kano. This might be perhaps due to the poor perception of the need to retain customers by the library staff. Thus, library staff should be encouraged to know the value of retaining their customer base.

Also, at the Abdullahi Fodiyo University library Sokoto, it was discovered that out of the eleven (11) customer retention strategies identified, only five (5) were found very useful in retaining library customers. These were friendliness and courtesy in information service delivery, 23(92%), anticipating customers needs, 23(92%), beautification of the library environment, 23(92%), accuracy of information service 25(100%), and customers' involvement in information services, 23(92%). A further observation of the table showed that provision of adequate and comfortable reading facilities, 13(52%), recruitment of competent and qualified library staff, 23(92%), regular needs assessment, 22(88%), periodic customer surveys, 24(96%) and regular communication with customers, 20(80%) were not useful strategies for retaining library customers in Abdullahi Fodiyo University Library Sokoto.

From the above analysis, it is evident that there are agreements as well as disagreements among the

university libraries in terms of customer retention strategies adopted in their respective libraries. It is clear that all the university libraries agreed that friendliness and courtesy in information service, beautification of the library environment, accuracy of information services and customer involvement in information services are the customer retention strategies that are very useful in retaining their customers, while periodic customer surveys are considered not that useful in all the three university libraries.

Hypothesis

There is no significant difference in the strategies adopted for customer retention in the University libraries in North Western States of Nigeria

Table 5 shows the significant difference on the type of customer retention strategies adopted in information service delivery by the selected university libraries in North Western States of Nigeria at (P<0.05) level of significance. The observed F value of 222.375 is greater than the F critical value of 3.00 at the same degree of freedom. The observed level of significant from the test is 0.000. This implies that the null hypothesis which says that there is no significant difference in customer retention strategies adopted by the selected university libraries in North Western States of Nigeria cannot be retained but rejected. However, a post hoc Scheffe test carried out on the mean scores of the different selected university libraries is presented in table 5 below.

.Table 5: Analysis of Variance on the Customer Retention Strategies adopted by the selected University Libraries in North Western States of Nigeria

Source of Variance	Sum of Squares	DF	Means of Squares	F	P	F critical
Between Groups	15344.410	2	7672.205	222.375	.000	3.00
Within Groups	5002.671	145	34.501			
Total	20347.081	147				

Table 6: A Post hoc Scheffe Test on the Type of Customer Retention Strategies adopted by the selected University Libraries in North Western States of Nigeria

Dependent Variables	(i)University Libraries	(j)University libraries	Mean difference (I-J)	Standard error	Sign.
Customer Retention Strategies	KIL, Zaria	BUL, Kano	19.066*	1.090	.000
		AFUL, Sokoto	22.466*	1.354	.000
	BUL, Kano	KIL, Zaria	-19.066*	1.090	.000
		AFUL, Sokoto	3.400	1.454	.068
AFUL, Sokoto	KIL, Zaria	-22.466*	1.354	.000	
	BUL, Kano	-3.400	1.454	0.68	

NB: *Denote the pairs of University Libraries that are significantly different at 0.05 level of significance

KEY:

KIL-Kashim Ibrahim Library, Zaria

BUL-Bayero University Library, Kano

AFUL-Abdullahi Fodiyo University Library, Sokoto

The post hoc Scheffe table 5 shows that the responses of the selected university libraries on the type of customer retention strategies were significantly different in their application of CRM in information service delivery. The Kashim Ibrahim Library (KIL) responses on the customer retention strategies used is significantly different from that of Bayero University Library. The table also indicated that the opinion of KIL is significantly different from that of Abdullahi Fodiyo Library, Sokoto. On the other hand, the responses of Bayero University Library on the customer retention strategies adopted and that of Abdullahi Fodiyo Library were not significant.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that creating customer commitment can be effective in achieving the business goals of university libraries. Moreover, customers’ attitude, behavior and preference must be regularly studied in order to guarantee high customer satisfaction, customer attraction, retention and loyalty. This will go along way in promoting continued patronage of library resources and services by library users. And also enhance the library’s effectiveness within the university, and project new image and the perception of the university in its marketplace. It may in turn encourage university managers to reward the library with increased resources to further enhance library services.

Recommendations

Arising from the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. University libraries should intensify efforts at retaining their customer base by ensuring that their customers’ needs, desires and expectations are met through quality information service delivery, recruitment of qualified library staff,

regular communications and regular assessment of their customers’ needs.

2. Telephone, television, intranet, extranet, e-mail, website etc should be made available and functional in the university library. This will go along way in guaranteeing quality and relevant information service provision as well as facilitate communication. Also, organized focus group discussions, e-mail, SMS and use of library website/webpage should be adopted by university libraries to determine their customers’ satisfaction with their services and products.
3. Library staff should regard complaints as a tool that helps audit their services therefore keeping statistics of lodged complaints is highly advocated as it will help the university library to identify gaps that need to be closed in terms of customer satisfaction.
4. Library Staff should be educated on the need for them to intensify effort at attracting and retaining customers in information service delivery through seminars, workshops and conferences.

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