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# ROLE OF THE CIRCULATION LIBRARIAN AS PUBLIC RELATION OFFICER IN A UNIVERSITY LIBRARY

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## **Abstract**

*Role of the circulation Librarian in an academic library in relation to the roles a public Relations officer (PRO) performs are discussed. The duties of both a Circulation Librarian and the Public Relations Officer highlighted, interface between both professionals was drawn and related their functions to the Librarian can enhance library publicity and usage for effectiveness in his responsibilities as public relation officer in a library setting.*

**Keywords:** Circulation Librarian Image-maker or image-bearer:

## **Introduction**

The importance of public relations activities cannot be over looked in any library, especially in academic libraries. Any library activity, directly, or indirectly is an act of public relations, in as much as, it is done to promote the library image and usage. The Circulation Librarian is part of the overall professional working to bring the required desire to fulfillment and therefore has a lot to contribute to make the services of the library a success. He is the intermediary between the users need and what the library has. Therefore, the roles of the Circulation Librarian in academic libraries and its relationship with the public relations activities can not be overstated.

Kuwthau (1994) submits that having services that no-one knows about is as good as having no services at all. He went further by adding that no matter how libraries respond to the needs of their users, their value will not be appreciated without an aggressive, systematic and determined programme of publicity to stimulate, inform and attract the information seekers/library users.

Although all library professionals should be involved in public relations activities, the circulation and reference librarian who work directly with the users perform more of public relations activities than the others. Likewise, the public relations officer in any organization is the image-maker and image-bearer of such an organization.

### **Duties of the Circulation Librarian**

The Circulation Librarian is the one who coordinates the activities at the circulation department. As one of the major departments which portray the image of the library to students or public, through the performance of the circulation department.

The Circulation Librarian through the library officers, library assistants circulate materials like, books, journal and host of other to users. It is in the circulation department that Library materials change hands, that is one person makes use of a library book drops it and another picks it up for use (Nwalo, 2003). The Circulation Librarian as the coordinator of the department, makes sure, shelving, shelf reading and shelf tidging are properly done, ease accessibility of materials on the shelf by the patrons. Good shelf guides advertise the collection and ensure that the clientele locate the books, they want in the quickest possible time.

Libraries tend to reach out to the public or user community, through publicity and displays. The more popular the libraries programmes and activities, the better for the library in the attainment of set goals.

The Circulation Librarian, who acts as the Public Relation Officer in the library is out to carve a good image of his library in the minds of the readers. It is the duty of the Circulation Librarian to inform the public (i.e. students, lecturers and entire university community about the service of the library).

It is the duty of the Circulation Librarian to make known to library users — new arrivals of library materials, by displaying such new arrivals for the awareness of the university communities. Display has been defined as a small exhibition of books usually on one or several related subjects in a library.

Reasons for library display is one of the vital duty of the circulation librarian as Public Relation Officer in the library setting.

Nwalo (2003) has given the following reasons for library display.

- (i) To inform the potential readers of all the library holdings under each subject or discipline.
- (ii) To stimulate the full exploitation of books and other library materials.
- (iii) To facilitate inter-library cooperation by exposing the library stock.
- (iv) To increase the readership of the library as a way of actively decreasing the illiteracy rate in any given society.
- (v) To sustain the interest of the users in the services rendered by the library so as to make them lively and active readers for pleasure and for self development.

As part of the duties of the Circulation Librarian to organize library cooperation and exchange programmes, copies of the accessions list and new bulletin are posted to sister libraries far and near.

The Circulation Librarian as a result of this activities to improve the services of the library through circulation statistics, coordinates statistical activities and records in the circulation unit. Having good circulation statistics can be used to lobby for more funds from the university management. When the circulation librarian is having evidences inform of statistical records to prove his case beyond reasonable doubt. Having reliable facts to buttress his argument taking adequate statistical records is one of the core duties of a good circulation librarian.

Common statistics in circulation department are:

- (i) Number of books consulted per day, subject by subject.
- (ii) Number of books charged out per day by subject
- (iii) Number of books discharged from the patrons per day subject by subject.

(iv) Periodical counting of readers in the library per day — about 4 times.

The necessities of this is to indicate to the library management the subjects which books are heavily consulted. Based on the statistics, the library may decide to acquire a little more materials in one subject and not in the other. Summarily, it helps the library policy makers to have sense of direction and focus.

### **Duties of the Reference Librarian**

The person who provides reference service is called a reference librarian. He should have a wide range of intellectual interests, desire to assist the users, flair for organizing documents, ability to search literature and adequate knowledge of the resources of the library. In fact, all the library resources in the Reference Library must be on his finger tips. Aliu (2009) described the job of the Reference Librarian as tasking as most times he would have to meet all shades of users, some awkward in their demand, while some will be appreciative, others will never be satisfied. The Reference Librarian must be someone who have a larger heart of urbanity and patience. The role of the Reference Librarian is extremely important in modern library as its reputation depends upon the quality of reference service provided.

Reference Librarian is to interpret the library resources to the users. In the performance of his job, the Reference Librarian is expected to use the total resources of the library and also the sources available outside the library. The Reference Librarian is always on hand to assist in providing guidance on which reference materials is to best suited to help readers in their quest for information. The Reference Librarian is to establish contact between the readers and the book by personal service, the emphasis on personal service to each user to help him to find documents, which would meet his requirement.

Public relations is about doing something new worthy that you want to communicate, and tell your audience (or very likely, several audiences) what you have done. Public relations, then, can be thought, as the process that delivers your news or message to the people you want to reach through a broad, influential, and far reaching news media community. As cited in (<http://tidp.org/LDP/Linux-media-guide>). There are some important terms that may help you understand public relations, news media refers to all the places where people read or hear about news, including newspapers, magazines, television, radio and the internet.

It went further by saying that, you have news to share information that would benefit the desired community. You have some idea of the people you want to reach with your news. Now the problem becomes: how to reach them in the most effective way? The better the communications between you and your audience, the higher the profile of your organization. Generating publicity is not as complex as you might think. Most of the success of public relations centers on knowing what to do and when implementing these initiatives can dramatically increase awareness of your business.

Therefore to drive the point home, the subject matter of our discussion: public relations are the activities.

### **What is Public Relations?**

Public relations are the activities geared toward human relationships to enhance good services, since the library serves human beings the role played by the public relations officer of an organization can be said to be similar. Public relations, according and as cited in (<http://LDP/Linus-public-realtions>) is defined as a

communication technique or a kind of advertising or publicizing activities. According to the World Book Encyclopaedia (World Book, 2002) public relations is an activity aimed at increasing communication and understanding between an organization or individual and one or more groups called publics. It goes further that public relations work consists of two main activities:

1. Research and communication; and
2. The methods used to achieve these are research and opinion survey to obtain information from the public.

Public relations is said to use four principal methods to communicate with the public, namely, advertising, lobbying, publicity and press agents. Publicity and press agent are the methods mostly used by libraries to promote their public relations activities. These agents promote the library by obtaining favourable coverage in the media. In essence, the library can communicate its existence to the appropriate audience, to the people for whom it has so much to offer. It is therefore necessary for academic librarians to present to their clientele the basic objective of the library, so as to create a personal interest in users.

### **Objectives of the study**

The objectives of this study are to:

- (i) Examine the work of a PRO and the circulation librarian, considering the effect of the circulation librarian's function on job performance and how it can affect positively or negatively on the library users in an academic library.
- (ii) Examine the roles played by the Circulation Librarian.
- (iii) Investigate how good public relations in any library setting can enhance library's publicity and usage.

### **Duties of Public Relation Officer**

The public relation officer has the responsibility of planning and conducting public relations programmes designed to create and maintain a favourable environment. Public relations officer has four (4) basic functions which are (i) image making (ii) even management (iii) media relation and (iv) community relation.

**Image making:** It is the duty of the PRO to portray good image of the organization he serves. He blows the trumpet of the organization to the public according to (Collier's 1998). The PRO counsels, interprets the public to his client, and the client to the public. He gives advice to his clients on attitudes and actions to win public favour and informs the public of the client's activities or products.

**Event Management:** Programme manager, that is manager of events. He markets events. He is the master of ceremony.

**Media Relation:** PRO has direct link with the media houses to promote the services or products of the organization he serves. Advertising usually refers to the use of purchased space in publications or other media or purchased time on Radio and Television for commercial notices of goods and services for sale. Publicity is one way activity which seek to promote an individual, a group, or an organization. It does this by disseminating news, facts and points of view to communications media such as Newspaper, Radio and Television; which pass them on to the public.

**Community Relation:** It is the duty of the PRO to expose to the public, the activities or services of organization he serves. The organization must has a cordial relationship with the community it serves. World Book (2000) affirmed that, the

basis of any effective public relation campaign is public benefit. If an organization does not serve the needs of the public, the public will not support it. Public Relations experts then establish policies that reflect concern for the public's interests.

Public Relations Officers duties consists of two main activities-research and communication. Research is a vital part of Public Relation because an organization may not know the public's opinion about it. What people think and why they have such opinions about an organization are important in helping management establish policies and practices. Public relation experts use research and opinion surveys to obtain information from the public (World Book, 2000).

### **The PRO and Circulation Librarian**

The PRO is a bridge who brings together organizational activities being done in isolation. In the same vein, the Circulation Librarian coordinates the services of the library at the service point, Circulation Desk, making sure that the library, through the library officers, library assistants discharge their duties by serving users either by helping them search files or titles on the shelves or by charging out books for a period of time.

From the analysis, the PRO deals with isolated activities so as to bring them together, whereas the Circulation Librarian acts as an intermediary between the library and the users, coordinates services and makes them available to users.

The PRO tries to blow his organization's trumpet through the provision of information. The Circulation Librarian disseminates the already acquired information to serve users. The PRO is a link between the organization and the outside world, to make known the activities of the organization. On the other side, the Circulation Librarian links the users with the information available in the library, or links the information with the users through selective dissemination of information and current awareness services and also points clientele to the use of reference materials like encyclopedia, year book, gazetteers and host of others.

The PRO advertises the organization likewise the Circulation Librarian also advertises the library by employing public relations tools such as library location labels layout; catalogue; shelf arrangements (and shelf guides); exhibitions; media talks; notice boards for both staff and students; bulleting boards; suggestion boxes, public information desk, et cetera.

Some academic libraries have the information unit as part of their public relations programme. This make the Circulation Librarian's job easier. These tools can help the library to serve users better. It will promote readership and library usage.

The PRO systematically gathers information related to the activities of the organization. The information is then organized for publication purposes. Likewise, the Circulation Librarian through other technical departments, gathers book or journal titles useful to bring about the fulfillment of the objectives of the library.

The PRO tries to make the product of the organization known to the outside world, likewise the Circulation Librarian welcomes fresh students into the university library environment via orientation. Anunob (2002) remarked that freshmen in the university environment often come with enthusiasm. The notion of moving from a low academic setting to a citadel of learning provides a sense of pride and curiosity in the mind of many. It is the duty of the Circulation Librarian to catch them young through library orientation and to make library as their workshop, a place where they would not afford not to visit in a day.

Mookerjee and Segupta (2002) (<http://www.google.com.ng/search?Client=fivefox-ajorls=org.mozilla%3Aen-->) remarked "Two functions of university libraries may be emphasized- the store house functions and the workshop, or laboratory function consists in making its resources to be regarded primarily as tools rather than treasure.

### **How the Circulation Librarian can Enhance Library Publicity and Usage**

Library labels layout: the Circulation Librarian should make sure the description how the library could be easily located should be well spelt out, in the handbook in each current academic session, which is usually given to both old and fresh students during orientation or registration period of the students, As Aliu (2009) explained: John Harris Library is situated at Ugbowo Campus along the main drive between students' complete and the students' halls of residence and opposite the new clinical students hostel. This ultra-modern library building is centrally air-conditioned and supported with package unit air-conditioners.

Catalogues; can be defined as list of books, arranged in a systematic order. A catalogue can be further explained as, be it manual or electronic as guide to library stock reported by Aliu (2009). According to him "the catalogue is to library users what a map is to a traveler" "and also what a compass is to a pilot".

Shelf arrangement (and shelf guides) books are shelved on the shelves according to the classification scheme. Like Library of Congress Classification Scheme books are arranged on the shelves from A-Z in order of the classification number. Like 'A' which is general works, books carrying this notation would be shelved before books on philosophy which is class 'B'. This systematic arrangement will continue on the shelves until we get to the last symbol which is 'Z' which is Bibliography and Library Science. Every effort will be made to avoid "Cross classification and through shelf reading any broken order could be detected and corrected accordingly.

Shelf guides are usually provided to help library users to locate desired materials as quick as possible. At the outer angle of each shelf, guides are usually provided, which will indicate the symbols and its interpretations of the books shelved on each shelf. For example J = political science, K = Law, L = Education, P = Language and Literature, Q - Science, R = Medicine. It can even be more detailed and narrower like :RA - Public aspects of medicine; RB = Pathology, RC = Internal medicine, RD = surgery et cetera.

Exhibitions can be explained as collection of things shown publicly (e.g. work of arts, industrial or commercial goods, books for advertisement. Usually, libraries use to stage exhibition, inviting publishers to come and exhibit their materials. Usually in this occasion prices of books are reduced. Both the students, members of staff and even the library, will have the opportunity of buying books at cheaper price. Nwalo (2003) remarked "At the time of an exhibition, a library usually makes available a notebook for people to make comments. These comments are supposed to be on ones impressions of the exhibition. Whatever comments made will help the library assess the success of the exercise and improve on the future exhibitions.

Notice Boards for both staff, students and also Bulletin Boards. Readers service librarian as the PRO his duty goes outside the confines of the library to carve a good image of the library in the minds of the potentials patrons passing information to the university communities through notice board and bulletin boards. Nwalo (2003)

commented "A good number of libraries offered commercial printing, photocopying, bindery and consultancy services. It is the duty of the PRO to inform the university committee about these services; which are usually neat and offered at a highly reduced cost. The PRO, of a library may use handbills to pass on information to people and advertise library services.

**Suggestion Boxes and Public Information Desks.** By given the university communities the opportunity to hear their views, through there suggestions, the Circulation Librarian will be able to present to the management, public opinions about their library, so that, they will look before they leap in their decisions making on library issues, since he is the intermediary between the management and the readership.

### **Computer Application to Aid Effectiveness of the Circulation Librarian**

Computer application will make circulation librarian as PRO, to be more effective in his duty, serving the university community. We are in computer age, this will go a long way in aiding Circulation Librarian in his daily routine activities, such as charging and discharging of books, registration of library users, compilation of statistics, easy detection of library defaulters and host of others. If a library is computerized, especially reader service unit, students and staff are bound to enjoy first class services and also, the services will be provided with ease by the circulation staff, especially when there is uninterrupted power supply and network failure.

Henderson (2004) confirmed that, users of computer systems have found that, they can save time and money by using computer programmes that, other users of computer manufacturers have previously developed, to evaluate trigonometric functions, they can be used again and again.

One way to provide users with common routine is to store such software on a magnetic disk. When a user wishes to use one of the routines, he includes a card in his job which asks the operating system to fetch the desired routine from the disk and attach to his job. Therefore, this simply means, all the routines in the circulation unit in the library could be operated electronically, if required computer programmes or software can be employed, to promote the performance of the Circulation Librarian in his routine activities on the Circulation Desk.

### **Recommendations**

All said and done, this opinion paper which discusses role of the Circulation Librarian in an academic library, as relates to the roles of a Public Relation Officer (PRO). The paper will be concluded with the following recommendations:

- i. Circulation statistics as a way forward; for the Circulation Librarian to succeed in his roles as the public relations officer, he needs to take circulation statistics seriously. This will enable him to be up and doing and relevant in his service to clientele.
- ii. The roles of Circulation Librarian as a professional in a library set-up and a public relations role are inseparable. He should take serious public relations activities.
- iii. Every professional librarian should be knowledgeable in public relation activities.
- iv. All professionals should be trained to ensure skills in public relations or the curriculum of library schools should include public relations activities as a core unit.



- v. Library management should support Circulation Librarian to function effectively through adequate findings.
- vi. Circulation Librarian should be versatile so as to achieve results.
- vii. Circulation Librarian should be surrounded with able library officers and library assistant, those that will be up to the task, because a tree can not make a forest.
- viii. Library management should make fund available for the circulation librarian to attend conferences, seminars and also to organize in-house training or orientation for his staff.
- ix. Library Management/University Management should endeavour to embark on training of staff generally.
- x. Library management should provide a bus for the Circulation Unit, so that the unit could be effective in his shift duties especially where the situation calls for it.
- xi. Library management must as much as possible not to be sentimental, (i.e There must be no room for personal interest or nepotism, allowing things to take its natural course) in appointing Circulation Librarian but rather interest of the organization must be the priority. He/She must be a round peg in a round hole for the sake of capability and productivity.
- xii. Conclusively, for good public relation activities, the services must be accessible; input brings output. Service begins with materials and accessibility. Accessibility means "the process of getting the right books to the right person and at the right time". Making sure positive results happen to the benefit of the users. This is the most satisfactory job of public relations in any library setting. Any library services must be accessible to be worth of its self.

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