

Marketing Information Services



Overview

The Riverview Public Library, in a medium-size New England town, has been notified by the town manager that it will sustain another serious budget cut, the second in less than 10 years. Staff are frustrated and demoralized, and administrators are perplexed and angry. “Why isn’t the library *really* appreciated by the community, how can they do that to us?” After all, everyone in the community should know the value of good library and information services that enrich both their work lives and their personal lives.

Faced with what seems to be inevitable layoffs and curtailment of services, the director of thirty years finally decides, for the first time, to bring a few of the staff together with a group of townspeople to discuss issues and plan strategies. After an uneasy start, the dialogue turns to “What can be done?” short of closing the two small branches. It does not take long, in the tense dialogue, to come to an uneasy conclusion that some community members do not know or understand about many of the information services the library offers and others do not have a clue as to what the library is capable of providing. Why? Over the years, the librarians have assumed the purpose and services were being acknowledged by the community. After all, at any one time there are people in the library reading the newspapers, checking out new best sellers, and such things.

A relatively healthy collection-development policy, supported by the town’s budgetary allocations, had allowed the library to become one of the best-stocked medium-size public libraries in the state. Likewise, some automated services had just been introduced through the initiative of a couple of recently graduated professionals who had written a grant to the state library

agency and had received initial funding to put in place some electronic services, including subscription to one well-known database that could provide some good, basic information on social services—health, housing, and educational opportunities—that can be beneficial to the community.

It is obvious that this library is long overdue in addressing questions that are being faced by numerous library and information services organizations in school, academic, public, and special information services organizations. “Why are not our services recognized and appreciated. What do we need to do to address the issue?”

Effective marketing of library and information services is a vital segment in every type of library and information services organization today. Customer-centered marketing is at the core of successful service, and understanding the marketing mix and creating value is vital.

This chapter will present an introduction to the topic of marketing, what it entails, and why it is necessary.

MARKETING—A STRATEGIC COMPONENT

One of the most important yet seemingly elusive concepts of a strategic plan is the development of a marketing strategy, an outcome of the planning process. Basically, the two activities are inextricably tied together. For purposes of discussing this component of information services, marketing can be simplistically described as the process of identifying the wants and needs of the population of library and information center customers and identifying the capabilities of the organization to address those needs and then developing or adjusting services and products to satisfy various targeted segments of that market. This requires knowing the organization’s own capabilities, establishing commitments, and identifying customer needs. The marketing analysis process can facilitate making strategic decisions about product design, promotion, and distribution to satisfy those needs.

This marketing strategy requires primary understanding of the mission and vision of the information services organization. That vision and mission, developed as the primary guiding principle of the strategic plan itself, serves as a basis for initiating and developing the process of communication and marketing within the library’s community. Therefore, the most important guiding principles already have been identified for the library organization. The outcome of a more focused marketing strategy can now fulfill one important aspect of the overall plan: good information services. The rigor necessary for implementing such a plan focuses upon the value of information and knowledge as well as the promotion of information services as a primary factor in customer satisfaction.

Initiative for developing or enhancing this particular segment will have been built into the overall strategic plan, which began by involving the whole community—administration, staff, and users—in the planning process and, thereby, encouraging every segment of the information organization to buy into the outcome of a strategic plan. That basic planning process will have not only identified goals and objectives but also initiated the discussion of means by which the library and/or information center would accomplish them. Just

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as with the strategic plan, this marketing component requires a separate, analytical approach in its own right to ensure a successful marketing effort, and this process starts with a specific mission statement for marketing.

The most likely focus of such a statement, which leads to eventual action, is one of assuring or reassuring an identified customer base that their needs, identified in the process, will be met through organized commitment to the library mission, values, and philosophy of service identified in the strategic plan. That fact ultimately will be translated into actionable terms that can be understood by everyone involved in this marketing-driven process. Specific focus is on implementation of a communication plan promoting the basic priorities of information services.

A comprehensive marketing program encompasses not just the strategic plan's primary concern of "what are we here for?" It also requires a follow-through to market many of the goals and objectives of that plan. The marketing plan has several subgoals, including validating or changing perceptions in terms of developing products and services, delivering those products and services in an efficient and effective manner, and analyzing use and satisfaction with those identified products and services to confirm success or as a signal to adjust systems and processes to ensure success. Such a plan becomes the showpiece of a wide range of activities that are involved in meeting the needs of customers and giving value to those efforts. In that sense, the marketing component is obvious in every aspect of the strategic plan. Otherwise, once a strategic service goal is identified and implementation is begun, how do customers know it exists and how can its success or failure be validated? Viewing strategic planning and marketing in the same context strengthens both the major plan and recognizes marketing as a necessary process for the plan's success.



Try This!

1. Think of a library you are familiar with that has a good marketing strategy.
2. List two outstanding examples of outreach services that impress you.
3. Think of a library that is failing to live up to its expectations and potential, then identify two public relations activities they are lacking.
4. How do these two libraries differ?

A clear strategy determines what resources are available or will be available, and how all the resources and energies of the library organization will be applied to achieve the goals set out by the marketing initiative. It provides the checks and balances approach in offering the services and products. This is necessary because it is of little value to have a strategy if either the resources or the expertise to implement the program are not available. Clearly, this strategy determines how all the resources and the energies of the library will be applied to achieve the goals. Several components can be identified as necessary in the development of such a marketing strategy. In this process, an old reliable method, commonly identified as the "marketing mix," can be considered.

Some call it a cliché of describing the process around the Cs (customer, convenience, and communication) and Ps (product, price, place, process, participants, and promotion) of the mix. Those critics maintain that working through this approach is passé. However, it does provide a legitimate structure for developing a marketing strategy. Basically, the overall marketing plan, inherent in those catchwords, focuses upon structuring a strategy to achieve a desired primary marketing outcome.

How does one begin to address those basic philosophical questions of service? In the strategic plan, and this integral marketing component, a process of marketing research is required to identify the demands for services or products. Effective marketing commences with understanding users, their expectations, the patterns of access by seekers and their preferences, and the barriers that exist in attracting potential customers. It also requires establishing an ongoing relationship that links information services with that primary user population and, just as vital, a larger public, including donors and potential donors, governments, the media, taxpayers and others who might have a financial interest, or public/organizational opinion about the library's success. The beginning of this identification process is an integral part of the environmental scan conducted as part of the strategic plan that identified the strengths and weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) set in the political, economic, social, and technological (PEST) climate. Parts of that initial phase, most often identified as the marketing audit, should have been introduced in the community analysis and user needs components of the strategic plan. Therefore, revisiting the initial analysis of the market situation identified in that process can now help develop specific marketing objectives and provide a solid base for a marketing plan. If that has not been done, however, it must be accomplished at the beginning of a marketing strategy.



What Do You Think?

John D. Rockefeller once said, "Next to doing the right thing, the most important thing is to let people know you are doing the right thing."

Do you agree that is most important? If so, how should it be accomplished?

There are two important components in the total marketing strategy, starting with the one of internal marketing, which includes good internal communications and a unified concept of customer consciousness among all staff. In other words, staff must be aware of and embrace the value of customer satisfaction. Only when this happens can an effective strategy be developed to address the second component, one of customizing services to meet community needs. In today's information-intense electronic environment, with access to databases, including journals and other information resources, and even customized portals, such customization becomes much more important with the virtual library partly existing outside the physical library.

MARKETING—THE AUDIT

A follow-up focused marketing audit, emanating from that strategic planning process, identifies the needs and activities necessary to promote those systems and services. From the marketing perspective, answering “Who?” “What?” “When?” “Where?” and “How?” provides guidelines for developing the necessary marketing strategy. Each of those basic questions must be answered through the analytical process of identifying the market and its various segments, ensuring that the organization can provide the necessary services, developing a responsive schedule of when the service can be provided, and then developing an infrastructure for success. All of this activity is related to the primary goal of developing a strategy to enhance an ongoing relationship between the users and the providers of information services.

The strategic planning process, leading into this specific segment of a plan, will have identified the more philosophical question of “Why?”—that being the essence of the library’s existence. From that base, the library and/or information center will have identified the mission of information services for that particular organization and in that process will have addressed the philosophical question of why there is a need for marketing.

For marketing purposes, the most important reasons can be enumerated:

1. Competition for customers and resources; recognition that the library may no longer be the primary, and certainly not the only, information source available and that this fact brings new meaning to the need to promote the library’s value in a crowded arena.

Figure 6.1—Ten Reasons for Marketing Library and Information Services

Ten Reasons For Marketing Library and Information Services
1. Competition for customers
2. Competition for resources
3. Maintaining your relevance
4. Stop being taken for granted
5. Promote an undated image
6. Visibility
7. Valuable community resource
8. Rising expectations
9. Survival
10. Beneficial to library image

Source: “Library and Information Services Marketing” (September 2003), compiled and annotated by Marianne Steadley at the University of Illinois Graduate School of Library and Information Science and the University of Illinois Libraries, *UI Current LIS Clips*.

2. On a benign level, libraries, “like motherhood and God,” are good. Therefore, by certain segments of the population, they have been taken for granted. However, neither library staffs nor the users of their services can any longer assume that complacent attitude. An aggressive strategy is required.
3. At a different level, many libraries remain virtually irrelevant to funding authorities because those who hold the purse strings do not perceive the value. There appears to be a misplaced perception of “stuffing loads of money into a rat hole, and for what?” This attitude requires better public understanding of why libraries are vital.
4. With changing social trends and technological development, the needs and expectations of seekers of information are constantly changing. This changing scenario requires libraries to create an infrastructure, both physical and personal, that is responsive and conducive to customer satisfaction. It also requires educating the public, with information entering cyberspace, of the importance of accurate and authentic information—or misinformation—in society.

It must be understood that marketing is not just publicity or promotion, product creation, public relations, or even pricing and distribution. Rather, each of those is but one component of the overall marketing process to be developed through this detailed internal marketing audit and assessment. The ultimate success of this comprehensive process is customer satisfaction, the primary goal of every information services organization. With the library's mission statement addressing information delivery as a primary objective, the institution already should be prepared to develop an effective and efficient marketing plan. Marketing collects and uses demographic, geographic, behavioral, and psychological information to fulfill the organization's mission and inspires public awareness and educates.¹

A primary step is to revisit the assessment of the organization's capabilities, the strengths and weaknesses as well as the opportunities and threats that would have been originally identified as the components of the SWOT analysis of the overall strategic planning process. This specific exercise, as already mentioned, for marketing purposes is commonly called the marketing audit. By examining the organization's profile, one is able to assess its capabilities to develop a marketing program. What systems and services are already in place, how might they be adjusted if desirable, and what new ones might need to be developed? Can the organization afford the development of a new or greater program with current resources? If not, what is the likelihood of additional resources being allocated or sought through donations or redirection of existing resources? What technological capabilities are in place to ensure success of expanded efforts? What other organizations compete with or, more desirably, complement those services? What expertise is present among the staff to effectively, efficiently, aggressively develop such a program? Recognizing the importance of this complex yet valuable process, many large libraries and information centers now have dedicated management

staffs—with various titles, including director of marketing and publishing, development officer, or public relations coordinator—to coordinate activities relating to marketing and fund-raising.

MARKETING—THE VALUE FACTOR

In some ways, marketing presents a relatively new challenge as well as an opportunity for many librarians who have traditionally recognized the public good of information services and have assumed an automatically agreeable, willing, and eager public. Now, greater political, economic, social, and technological pressures, those PEST components of every librarian's life, mandate a concerted effort to demonstrate the organization's value. This can be accomplished through several ways. It requires:

1. Determining what customers and potential users want and how they perceive the library as the most appropriate instrument for meeting those needs. This process is usually accomplished through a variety of means: for example, surveys, interviews, and focus groups.
2. Segmenting the population so that specific services can be identified and tailored to the needs of those specific groups. The market segmentation process categorizes customers by identifying unique characteristics and common needs, such as location, technical competence, profession, age, and so forth. The common thread is access to information.
3. Recognizing and enumerating what it will take to provide these services in terms of staff, expertise, physical layout, access, collections, technology, and so forth.
4. Developing affordable strategies to satisfy information-delivery goals and objectives based on the results of that audit and research. Price and value are both components in this mix, with a balance between the two being required. In this reasoning, one can paraphrase Oscar Wilde's comment, "In these days people know the price of everything and the value of nothing."
5. Detailing the place(s) that is the most convenient location of services from the perspective of the customer. This also includes directions for use, including displays and signage directing potential users to the services—in-house, through media, or at locations that are remote from the primary facility.
6. Promoting the results of that effort through identified channels so that users and potential users know what products and services are available. Those include, among others, personal skills, print on paper, and electronic; that is, a description of "what we do and how we do it." Promotional approaches to users include advertising, public presentations, working with media outlets and other public relations efforts, direct marketing, publications (including such things

as flyers and newsletters), book sales, friends' groups and other lobbying groups, Web pages, and so forth.

7. Periodically and routinely evaluating the process.

COMMUNICATION—PROMOTION AS A BASIC ELEMENT



What Would You Do?

Marla Mann sits, drumming her fingers on her desk, in the office of Allentown University's main library. As vice president for information, she has to make a tough decision that will have significant impact on information services at the university. Her administrative responsibilities include not only the university libraries but also the bookstore, the computer center services, and the university press. But it is to the libraries that her thoughts now turn.

She mulls over comments made at a recent faculty meeting and later repeated in the monthly university management team's meeting regarding the cost of marketing initiatives to enlighten the university community of the benefits and services offered by the information services units of the university libraries. Marla's attempt has been to create a greater awareness of those services in order to preserve them at an acceptable level and ensure they remain politically viable. She knows that the information services are "the best kept secret in the university." What can she do to get the secret out; to enlighten the doubters?

Ongoing public relations is the best tool for explaining to the public the values that all libraries and information centers uphold.² Previously, marketing communication was a one-way, no-response approach. However, today's interactive media, including Web sites, online services, blogs, and so on, enable librarians to develop and maintain a more interactive, responsive dialogue with their public. Successful marketing requires identifying reasons that customers use and potential customers might use the information services of a particular type of library, in a particular location, at a particular time, in a particular format, for a particular reason. The process of identifying some of those intangible values is difficult, because it requires developing profiles of various user groups, mentioned previously, that are intended to be the recipient base for services. It requires recognizing different needs in different groups that might use information services in different ways. Then it requires developing different products and services to meet those varying needs.

With this analysis in place, various methods can be employed in the process of getting the message across to likely users so that the services will justify the means. Internal motivation of the staff is a primary factor that affects the bottom line. That promotional commitment builds staff morale, enhances productivity, and creates team spirit. The marketing goals and objectives

identified in the strategic plan present an opportunity to move from the so-called push mentality of persuasion to a pull mentality of identifying what is needed, a process that has been carried out in the strategic planning process. This helps organizations manage change in order to stay competitive and efficient. Therefore, success in this effort begins with an informed, positive, dedicated staff committed to information services.

Each of the following concepts forms one important segment of a comprehensive marketing package:

1. **Public relations:** Public relations help an organization and its publics adapt mutually to each other. Libraries must acknowledge various attitudes and values of potential users and the notion that because they reflect the external environment, they also will guide the development of services. Libraries cannot develop a product or service in a vacuum without knowing what is needed and wanted. This requires analyzing and interpreting needs as well as understanding attitudes. It requires interaction between providers and potential seekers of information services. Public relations is an ongoing process, not a one-time activity. It is an attempt to develop an understanding, among users and potential users of information services, about the value of information to people—in their professional life and in the development of the organization of which they are a part—as well as in their personal life, whether seeking pleasure or factual knowledge. Developing an image of the library by inducing those potential users requires some proof of successful “information fulfillment,” some indication of past success or potential success in the product or services of the library. The American Library Associations “@ Your Library” has many public relations suggestions, materials, and so on.
2. **Publicity:** Publicity is a way of creating awareness of the systems and services in place to address various segments of the population’s information and knowledge needs. It is a tool of public relations meant to persuade. Several obvious ways of communicating with those identified primary audiences are through the traditional print-on-paper and broadcasting modes, as well as, more recently, electronically. A positive message is the library’s and the librarian’s most important role as information provider and intermediary, eager to connect seekers with the information and knowledge they seek. Much of the time, this type of marketing is through public sources, not directed by the library. Examples are interviews with staff or externally produced articles in newspapers or online. In-house productions of publicity items include displays, posters, bookmarks, and so forth. Recently, blogging has become an effective publicity tool with the library’s blog Web page, including short, frequently updated postings of what is new. Libraries are using blogs to keep patrons up to date on library events, staff picks, and news.
3. **Advertising:** Marketing is not just advertising, as is so often assumed because it is one of the most obvious aspects. By focusing

on advertising, other aspects of the program are often overlooked. The advertising subset should fit with all the other components of a marketing program. Because it is an important part of the program, it is a key to reaching the target population. This is a less common way of promoting library services, because it often requires substantial financial resources to support. The core purpose of such advertising is to communicate information about service(s), sometimes new services or to keep the library in the public's eye or to announce the opening of a new facility. With the dot-com revolution, though, few libraries are forced to budget advertising in their profile promotions. If advertising is used in any format, however, care must be taken to ensure that this subset of the program flows logically from, and is consistent with, other parts of the overall marketing strategy.

4. **Ambiance:** The environment should support the message. Physical layout and design offer libraries one of their greatest marketing opportunities. Attractive and inviting design and layout provide a vision through inspirational spaces that embody the values and qualities of the service, attract and retain the public, and can be responsive to their changing needs. Workplace routine cannot outweigh user convenience, including hours of opening. Other factors, such as availability of public transportation or parking, handicap-friendly entrances, and so forth, are vital.
5. **Fund-raising:** Although this is a primary activity within itself and many libraries consider it too important to be conducted as a subset of marketing, it is mentioned here to support the proposition that it is a process that supports marketing efforts. An alternative term, preferred by many, is *library development*. This involves securing funds, through an organized effort, to augment traditional monies in order to provide additional or special services, programs, or other resources identified as desirable in order to achieve the stated goals and objectives of the library. A number of avenues are available, including foundation and corporate funding, gifts from bequeaths or in kind, endowments, and capital campaigns. Much of fund-raising relates to marketing the library and information services, and common avenues, such as exhibits, newsletters, programming, and so on, tie the two closer together.

EVALUATING—CHECKS AND BALANCES

In this complex and changing world, there is little time for action without a carefully reasoned rationale. In addition, accountability demands evaluative data to document the status and quality of library services.³ Even well-thought-out services, if not appropriately marketed, may fail. How does one measure success? As with all planning processes, a follow-up activity must be integral to a successful initiation, implementation, and evaluation of a marketing program. One can anticipate or even expect certain outcomes of

the process. The most obvious one is increased customer satisfaction that might result in willingness to financially support certain services offered or willingness on the part of the larger organization—local, regional, or national government; university or college; school district; private or public company or foundation—to increase funding based upon demonstrated goal achievements through proactive measures that both create and prove value for the larger community.

One problem with trying to evaluate the success of a library's marketing program is that product—satisfaction of users—is often intangible and difficult to measure. Customers' wants and needs remain somewhat elusive and changeable. Shifting demographics in public library communities, shifting academic programs in higher-education institutions, and shifting company foci in special library customer bases are threats to inflexible programs. In addition, commitment of time, effort, and financial resources in order to address the perceived needs of newly formed user profiles is viewed by some as potentially risky. Change brought about by shifting priorities with a marketing focus, is also threatening. A status quo attitude toward products and services on the part of both customers and staff argues against innovation. Managers cannot afford to let that happen.

CONCLUSION

Marketing information services have moved from being a nice innovation to being a required component in every library organization's program of services. A well-thought-out, well-constructed marketing strategy supports the organization's goals of information services. Marketing is a valuable tool available to libraries in demonstrating their organizational effectiveness; the evaluation of a marketing strategy addresses the question of "How are we doing?" In a way, it is an accountability check. It is one way of ensuring that libraries are responding effectively to what their public wants and needs. It is also a way of establishing a desirable relationship not only with users but also with other segments that have the potential of providing support—governments, media outlets, donors, corporations, and publishers. That is why marketing is so important to the life of the library organization and why it must be valued by both library staffs and seekers and users of information and knowledge.

NOTES

1. Paul Argenti, *The Portable MBA Desk Reference: An Essential Business Companion* (New York: Wiley, 1993), 87.
2. Lisa Wolfe, *Library Public Relations, Promotions, and Communications*, 2nd ed. (New York: Neal-Schuman, 2004), 5.
3. Darlene E. Weingand, *Future-Driven Library Marketing* (Chicago: American Library Association, 1998), 2.