

P⁴AC – A Refined Marketing Mix Ratio for Academic Libraries

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Abstract. This paper highlights the use of marketing strategies in advocating the use of library and information services. Elaborates the 4p's of marketing mix and suggests a new marketing mix ratio for enhancing library and information services.

Keywords: marketing mix, marketing library and information services

Introduction

Over the last decade, overwhelming paradigm shifts have been witnessed in academic libraries worldwide. Libraries, including university libraries, are, as Ranganathan said, “public institutions that serve the society.” University libraries are knowledge and learning institutions that collect, organize, manage, store, retrieve, disseminate and preserve knowledge and wisdom of all generations: past, present, and future to shape and build the image of the society and develop nations in a sustainable way. Paterson (1999) stresses that “A library is an investment in humanity in its progress and its struggles and its traditions” University libraries are responsible for providing relevant, comprehensive, and up-to-date information to diversified users. They are crucial for the future of the parent institution and for the nation as well. Change across all facets of society including demographic, technological, and economic change has the potential to greatly impact higher education and the academic library.

Academic Libraries in Transition

The present day Libraries are facing paradigm shifts from traditional document oriented to the digital information or knowledge oriented. These shifts are identified as

- Libraries as a physical space containing printed documents (physical building) to libraries as a social space.
- Owners of information to providers of access to information
- Change in the philosophy and roles of library.
- Reference services to information delivery centres.
- A center for merely creating informed citizens to producing communicative citizens.
- Library as service-oriented to user-oriented centres.
- A shift from library cooperation to library consortium.
- Information literacy to information overflow.
- Shift from “here and now” to a more virtual information services providers that will cross the boundaries of time and distance.

Marketing of Library and Information Services

In principle, libraries provide information services mainly in two ways: proactive information services and reactive information services. Specially, promotion of library's information resources and services help both information providers (libraries) and information users. Marketing of library and information services paves the way to serve users in a proactive manner and makes users able to identify available relevant information easily, thus saving their time. Some of the modes of marketing of Library and information services are

- displaying new arrivals;

- sending newly acquired book titles accession lists and e-information resources (e-journals) via email and print formats to staff;
- posting information on notice boards in and around campus;
- producing brochures to promote e-information resources (mainly e-journals) and
- development of Library Website which can be accessed locally.

A definition of marketing that is very applicable to non-profit organizations like libraries is defined by Peter Drucker, the famous economist, consultant and management writer, who describes two principles of marketing, the first of which is:

“ first we need ‘marketing’ which looks upon the entire business from the point of view of its ultimate purpose and justification that is from the point of view of the customer (or rather the ‘customers’ since every business and every product has at least two, and usually many more quite different types of customer to satisfy.

Generally, marketing relates to defining an organization's target audiences, communication of messages intended to position the organization in a market or market segment, encouraging product recognition, promoting the organization's products or services, fostering patronage of and loyalty to the organization's products and services, and establishing venues for the delivery of those products or services. The related area of public relations involves the development and maintenance of an organization's public image, and using venues such as media outlets. In today's information era, marketing is becoming crucial for librarians of all types, who are compelled to know their customers and potential customer.

Marketing mix

Academic libraries can enhance their image as the intellectual centre for the university's faculty and students by applying marketing concepts. The prominent marketer, Jerome McCarthy, proposed a Four 'P's classification in 1960, which has since been widely used by marketers throughout the world. The 'four Ps' consist of the following:

Product - A product is seen as an item that satisfies what a consumer needs or wants. It is a tangible good or an intangible service. Typical examples of intangible products are service based like the tourism industry or Library and information services.

Every product is subject to a life-cycle including a growth phase followed by a maturity phase and finally an eventual period of decline as sales fall. Marketers must do careful research on how long the life cycle of the product they are marketing is likely to be and focus their attention on different challenges that arise as the product moves through each stage. The marketer must also consider the product mix. Marketers can expand the current product mix by increasing a certain product line's depth or by increasing the number of product lines. Marketers should consider how to position the product, how to exploit the brand, how to exploit the company's resources and how to configure the product mix so that each product complements the other. The marketer must also consider product development strategies.

Price – The price is the amount a customer pays for the product. The price is very important as it determines the company's profit and hence, survival. Adjusting the price has a profound impact on the marketing strategy, and depending on the price elasticity of the product. Often, it will affect the demand and sales as well. The marketer should set a price that complements the other elements of the marketing mix. When setting a price, the marketer must be aware of the customer perceived value for the product. Three basic pricing strategies are: market skimming pricing, marketing penetration pricing and neutral pricing. The 'reference value' (where the consumer refers to the prices of competing products) and the 'differential value' (the consumer's view of this product's attributes versus the attributes of other products) must be taken into account.

Promotion - represents all of the methods of communication that a marketer may use to provide information to different parties about the product. Promotion comprises elements such as: advertising, public relations, personal selling and sales promotion.

Advertising covers any communication that is paid for, from cinema commercials, radio and Internet advertisements through print media and billboards. Public relations is where the communication is not directly paid for and includes press releases, sponsorship deals, exhibitions, conferences, seminars or trade fairs and events. Word-of-mouth is any apparently informal communication about the product by ordinary individuals,

satisfied customers or people specifically engaged to create word of mouth momentum. Sales staff often play an important role in word of mouth and public relations (see 'product' above).

Place - refers to providing the product at a place which is convenient for consumers to access. Place is synonymous with distribution. Various strategies such as intensive distribution, selective distribution, exclusive distribution and franchising can be used by the marketer to complement the other aspects of the marketing mix.

Many authors discuss a variety of marketing mix. In the context of Library and Information services, it is proposed to have P⁴AC as the marketing mix to enhance the use of library and information services. They are Product, Processes/Procedures, Personalisation, Predictive Modelling, ambience and Clientele.

P⁴AC – A proposed mixing of mix for marketing Library and Information Services

Product

Traditionally, libraries are considered as store house of Knowledge. Human thought and experience that are tacit knowledge are recorded and converted into explicit knowledge and available as products in Library and information Centers. They are made available to all either free of cost or at nominal cost.

Processes/Procedures

Knowledge has become an indispensable tool for any achievement. Traditional libraries have adapted to classification, cataloguing and reference service to enable the knowledge embedded in documents to reach the knowledge seekers. In modern libraries, OPAC, digital repositories have become the tools for knowledge storage and dissemination

Personalization

Personalization technology enables the dynamic insertion, customization or suggestion of content in any format that is relevant to the individual user, based on the user's implicit behaviour and preferences, and explicitly given details. Academic libraries cater to the information needs of various categories of users. The user behaviour may vary in their information seeking as well as their psychological behaviour. For example a scholar may require information on a specific topic and then, on receipt of it he/she may use it for making power point presentations. Here the librarian's job is to design a personalised information retrieval system which can satisfy the needs of the users.

Professional Skills and Competencies

Marketing is nothing but a way of doing business, which does not require good marketing persons, but certain skills or attributes, which are in no manner different from other service organization (Coote, 1994). Hence the librarian is supposed to have certain marketing skills such as

- a belief in service and trying to achieve customer's satisfaction;
- a clear understanding of the organization's overall aims and objectives;
- an ability to assemble and interpret information for the benefit of the clientele; good communication skills, both oral and written;
- enthusiasm and commitment; and
- ability to take criticism which are not always constructive.

These attributes are very much desired for the successful information service providers. To serve the clientele the librarian should serve as host, as advocated by Dr.S.R.Ranganathan. Ranganathan provokes that like a host, the librarian should provide full hospitality to a user - as a supreme guest at the premises of the library. According to Ranganathan (1961):

- Give service with full attention and sincerity.
- Give him/her service to the best capacity at your command.
- Give him/her service in all modesty and in full freedom from any touch of prestige or ego.
- Give him/her service in full measure there should not be any offence to the laws of library science.

Clientele

Library and information professionals should strive hard to gain a far vision of 'who our customers are', 'what they want', and 'what are their social characters, values, desires, and aspiration.' The advancement of information and communication technologies (ICTs) has enabled education and technology in self-help and do-it-yourself activities in libraries. The 21st century clientele will place high value on self-reliance, adaptability and survival under difficult conditions and the ability to do things on his/her own.

Ambience

The implementation of ICT alone cannot encourage the clientele to visit the library frequently. A library having good ambience will naturally attract more readers to the Library. In order to achieve this, many libraries are changing themselves from traditional look to the development of Learning commons. Learning commons in the libraries address the user needs, bringing together the technology, content and services in a physical space that results in a different environment. The technology in a learning commons is intentionally more pervasive than in most traditional academic libraries. Another major difference between the learning commons and traditional libraries is the way in which they accommodate groups. Traditional libraries used to have few rooms for group study which are considered to be the peripherals of the library. But in the learning commons, much of the space is configured for use by small groups of students, collaborative learning and combining social interaction with work.

Marketing mix in Academic Libraries – A Proposed Ratio

Libraries and other non-profit organizations have only recently become aware of the need to market their products and services. Library and information products and services are now being recognized as commodities that can be sold, exchanged, lent, and transmitted. Though the components of proposed marketing mix P⁴AC are equally important, they can be organized in the order of preference in the following manner

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|--------------------------------------|-----|
| • Professional Skills & competencies | 30% |
| • Clientele | 20% |
| • Ambience | 20% |
| • Product | 10% |
| • Personalisation | 10% |
| • Processes/Procedures | 10% |

Conclusion

Academic libraries rely on their host organizations for operational costs. To gain some self-sufficiency, university libraries should think seriously about not only recovering the costs incurred but also making a profit through their services. Whenever librarians meet and chat among themselves, the main theme is the changing trend in the user approach and the environment in which the libraries work. What ever may be the case, the librarians should give prime importance to the major share of marketing mix – Professional skills and competencies, to prove their identity.

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