



MARKETING MIX IN THE CONTEXT OF COLLEGE LIBRARY

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Abstract:

With entry of information technology and communication channels libraries are forced to change their traditional attitude and introduce new resources and services in the library. The broad concept of marketing which includes satisfaction, exchange of values and objectives are helpful in giving improved services to the users. Marketing mix with seven elements shows its usefulness and application in the library functioning. In this paper these elements are discussed in the context of college libraries.

Introduction:

Introduction to Marketing:

Marketing as generally understood as an act of persuasion or convincing people to buy particular product or service. Marketing techniques were introduced to increase and promote sale and earn profit by reaching to prospective customers. Primarily designed for business houses, the principles of marketing has become an integral part of all organisations who are involved in dealing with customers may be in commercial or service sector and equally important for non profit making service institutions like libraries. So marketing is no more directly linked to the sale and profit (monetary terms) of the organisation. Rather it is offering the best of you to your customers to meet their needs and give them satisfaction to the fullest extent. In other words it is mapping the satisfaction of the customers through planned activities. Management guru Kotler (1985) defines Marketing is defined as “the analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programs designed to bring about voluntary exchanges of values with target markets for the purpose of achieving organisational objectives. It relies heavily on designing the organization’s offering in terms of the target market’s needs, desires, and on using effective pricing communication, and distribution to inform, motivate, and service the markets”. Values and objectives of the organisation are given stress in this definition. Libraries are set up to serve

people to achieve the same. Hence marketing strategies are equally important for libraries to enhance quality and effectiveness of the service. Marketing is now viewed in a broader social context as “a customer-satisfying process, not a goods producing process”(Levitt, 1981) Marketing involves efforts made by the organisation to give its best to satisfy its customers in a planned manner. Customer’s are at the focal point.

Marketing involves series of planned activities like marketing plan, market research, market segmentation, product design, pricing, distribution, product promotion and marketing audit. Other elements are also present in the marketing process. But the above mentioned elements are core elements in marketing. Products and services, place, price, promotion, people, physical evidence and process together comprise marketing mix.

Need and benefits of marketing:

The traditional role of librarians is changing from librarian to information officer with the application of technology of communication in the information science. Other factors include information explosion, rising cost of resources and shrinking budget, increase of user based services, complexity in information requirements, competition among database vendors, and effect of internet.

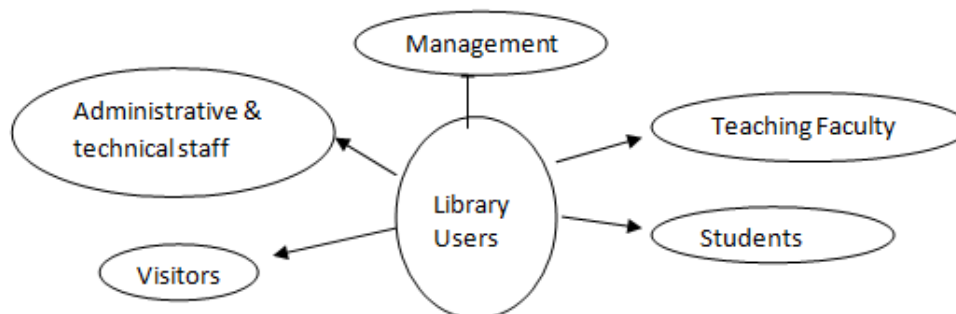
Marketing can give more satisfaction to the users. It may convince potential as well as non users of the library to use it. This will promise better and effective use of existing resources. It helps the libraries to focus its limited resources for better management. Marketing analysis, user analysis, marketing mix etc are helpful in developing marketing approach which in turn helps to study user’s wants and needs. Products can be prepared as per the need. Library services are intangible, inseparable, variable and perishable. These special characteristics should be considered with due respect before drafting any marketing program.

Library science has provided guidelines for functioning of all types of libraries. The procedures and rules are to be drafted as per the library needs. Each library knowingly or unknowingly uses various marketing techniques to study user’s demand, to start new service or improve the quality of service.

Application of marketing mix for college library:

Library is a non profit making service institution set up to satisfy information needs of its members. Public, special and academic libraries have their own framework of objectives and functions. But they have common goal of satisfying information needs. They do not manufacture any product for sale rather they purchase different information products and make it accessible to their members on demand. A perfect blend of marketing mix ingredients is essential to meet user’s need and give satisfaction to them. Books, journals, databases, CDs etc are some examples. Many times library staff produce information products like bibliographies, newspaper clippings etc from their collection. Just as in marketing customers satisfaction is the main aim, the library is for meeting the needs and satisfaction of the users.

College library is set up by the college to cater to the information needs of the people attached to college. The main objective is to help to fulfil mission of the college. Library procedures and processes are framed to enable users to get required material from the library for their study purpose. Users of the college library can be categorised under members of management, teaching faculty, administrative and technical staff and students pursuing various courses at the college. Students and teachers are the important users of the library. They need library very often for various purpose like preparing notes and lectures, research, assignments, extracurricular activities etc. Library is a service centre which assists its members to meet their information needs pertaining to academic and co-curricular activities.



College library users (designed by the author)

i) Product:

Service product can be looked upon as a bundle of features and benefits, which have relevance to specific target market. In case of library all resources are the products. Library purchases different types of resources for the users. They are procured in anticipation of demand from publishers and vendors. Syllabus of the course is the main source to know the type of books and journals to be added in the library. Teacher’s recommendation is another source. They guide students as to which resource to be used for their studies and assignments. Library can maintain a diary at the circulation desk mentioning the demands of the users. The register showing records of use of library material is helpful to know grade of existing collection in context of usefulness. Library advisory committee plays a crucial role in keeping the resources updated. Products can be divided into textbooks, reference books, general books, and career guidance section, CDs, journals, magazines, theses, online journals and databases. Library can create bibliographies, article indexes, list of new titles, clippings etc. for the users. Products are acquired and developed in tune with the users need. Procurement of latest editions, periodic reviews of vitality of products, weeding of unused material, withdrawal of resources etc. are some of the measures in the hands of the library to provide quality service.

ii) Place:

Place or physical distribution is the most important marketing strategy available to library. Usually in colleges library is situated in the college campus at convenient location. Library may or may not have separate building. In such cases separate space is identified which

is cool and away from the college environment. Here the place refers to when, where and how the products are distributed to the users. The opening and closing hours of the library, storage design, access to resources, rules for document landing, photocopy facility, web services mail, CAS etc influence utilisation of resources to a great extent.

iii) Promotion or Communication:

Selling a service is different from selling a product. One cannot anticipate the kind of service required by a customer. Therefore In case of services users prefer more personal information which is complete in all respect. Majority of the college students use library during their exam time and mostly they borrow text books. They understand library as a place to borrow books. They are not serious about facilities and services of the library. Attracting their attention is an intricate job for the library. Reaching to them and convincing them to use the resources is a difficult task. Hence advertising and promotion is an important marketing mix for the college library.

Publicity of the new service etc can be done during meeting of the staff members. Orientation for the fresher's, display of resources at the seminars and conferences, new arrival book rack, notices, competitions, visit to class room with new titles, establishment of book club, visit to other libraries and book exhibitions, Press notes, library report, library booklet, awards, book bank facility etc are some of the programs which can be used for promotion of library. Personal contact can be used effectively by the library staff. Usually users like to approach library staff directly instead of going to the shelf or browse a catalogue. Communication becomes easy and more effective. Also website, e-mail alert, blogs etc are other tools that can be used for techno savvy college students.

iv) Price:

Pricing of the information services and products is a controversial and complicated issue. Library is not profit making company but the main objective is to provide services. Budgetary provisions are made in the annual budget every year. Resources are added continuously in anticipation of demand. It is very difficult to fix a price for the service which is used over the years. But all libraries have some source of income in the form of membership fees and deposit (refundable). Services like photocopy, printing etc are made available at the nominal cost. Nominal fine is collected for overdue of books from the students.

v) People:

Staff or people working in the library are an important component in the marketing mix. A well defined marketing strategy has to be implemented by the staff for its success. Hence staff should be well qualified and trained to carry the decisions. In colleges librarian is appointed as per the UGC guideline. But to cope with ever-changing technology he should get technical support and training to implement latest developments. Also he should be assisted by technical staff that shall support technical requirements.

vi) Physical evidence:

This refers to physical environment, facilities and atmosphere of the library where services are provided. Exterior of building, furniture, layout, colour, interiors, signage, cleanliness, staff uniform and behaviour, all factors influence the members to a great extent to use library services.

vii) Process:

Process element refers to procedures designed to deliver service to the users. While delivering any service staff cannot be separated from the service in delivering service. At the same time users has to participate in this process to obtain correct product as per his requirements. User should be able to express his query correctly. Library can add value to its services by way of open access system, online catalogue, online journals, question papers on the system etc.

Conclusion:

To sum up elements of marketing mix are to be studied in the context of library function for applying them in developing marketing plan for libraries

Library should promote its services as selling or marketing concept is not suitable for libraries. Also users are individuals whose information needs keep changing from time to time. In college introduction of new courses, change in syllabus, projects, assignments etc calls for restructuring the resources and services. Therefore professionalism is more important based on knowledge of various resources, experience, study of users and their needs are more important to promote library. Wholesome application of marketing techniques may not be a reality in case of libraries but certainly one can explore few of them with proper study.

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