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Marketing Information Services and Products: Implications for Special Collections

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Abstract

It is imperative that special collections meet the in-depth research needs of users in a tertiary institution. While librarians have for a long time taken for granted the fact that library users will always be there for them, the twenty-first century librarian have come to the realization that only satisfied special collection users will come back. Hence the need to market an otherwise obscure but information packed division of the academic library. This chapter focused on the concept of special collection in academic librarians and the definition of marketing in librarianship. Also critically reviewed are the services and information products particular to special collection, tools for marketing special collections, ways of marketing special collections as well as professional skills and competencies required of the modern day librarian for marketing.

Keyword: Marketing, Information Services, Information Products, Special Collections

1.1 Introduction

The main objective of special collections in any academic library setting is to meet the in-depth research needs of users. The information resources available in special collections are collected because of their special nature, rarity, type, focus, subject as well as origin and they always serve as very good information sources for researchers. Narayana (1991) stated that the survival of such a collection depends among other things on the collections' image in the minds of the users. This image relies heavily on the outcome of the quality and effectiveness of the services offered, the ability to anticipate the desires of actual and potential users of the collection.

It is a well-known fact that only satisfied customers come back. Kumar Das and Kumar Karn (2008) stated that for a long time, librarians had enjoyed a supplier's market and lost interest in working to retain the interest of customers (users), librarians want users to come back again and again to use the library, however, they (the librarians) have put little or no effort to make sure that users return to use the library. As long as this situation persists, there is a great chance that a dissatisfied user will find some other suppliers of information to meet his or her information need. Here is where the concept of satisfying and retaining users' interest in a library's collection becomes important. Marketing is the instrument through which this objective can be fulfilled (Madhusudhan, 2008).

1.1 Objectives of the Study

It is the objective of this paper is to:

- i. Explain the concept of special collections in academic libraries
- ii. Define marketing in librarianship,
- iii. Explore *marketing strategy for libraries*,
- iv. Determine the need for Marketing Special Collections,
- v. Spell out special collection services and information products,
- vi. Explore tools for marketing special collections,
- vii. Determine the Ways of Marketing Special Collections and
- viii. Determine professional skills and competencies for marketing

2.1 Review of Related Literature

The traditional mission of academic libraries has from the beginning been to select, collect, preserve and create access to intellectual resources that can promote academic studies and research. It is in furtherance of this mission that special collections are set up in most academic libraries. They seek to preserve and provide access to a wide range of primary information sources and materials in their original formats to support researchers both within the University environment and beyond.

According to Apeji (1989), the development of special collections in Nigerian University libraries dates back to the establishment of the first university, the University of Ibadan, in 1948. Because it was the highest institution of learning and because there was no national library in existence, the university library was designated the national depository for Nigerian publications (Nigerian Publication Ordinance of 1950). These deposits formed a substantive part of the first university special collections. The fundamental difference between any general collection and special collection in an academic library is the question of material

accessibility to the collection itself.

Most general or open access collections are on open stacks while almost all special collections are on closed stacks. The library user if conversant with the library catalogue can, gain direct access to materials in the open collection without bothering any of the library staff, on the other hand the special collection circulation desk is the ultimate key to the information sources in special collections (Apeji, 1989).

Love and Feather (1998) described special collections information sources as materials which are distinguished by their age, rarity, provenance, subject, or some other defining characteristic. Echezona (2010) pointed out that it often includes United Nations publications, Africana, Archives, and Government publications. Focusing on the use of its resources by patrons is of importance to libraries; as a result, *the University of Maryland Libraries* (2015) explained that *special collections* have characteristics which set them apart from other types of collections in libraries. These special aspects may include:

- **Rarity:** books, manuscripts and other materials that are old, scarce or unique.
- **Format:** photographs, slides, films, audio recordings, maps, artworks, artifacts and other objects that need special handling.
- **Comprehensiveness:** accumulation of materials that are individually not unique, but collectively make up an important resource because of their relevance to a particular topic or individual.

Furthermore, these characteristics also mean that special collections are not readily replaceable and require a higher level of security and special preservation environments to insure their survival. In contrast to museum collections assembled for visual display, special collections focus on

research as their primary mission. Thus, they complement general research collections and are often located in institutions that house both kinds of collections (*University of Maryland Libraries*, 2015).

It is however sad to observe that for a long time, librarians have taken for granted the fact that library users will always be there for them. Due to information explosion and the proliferation of information technologies, most academic libraries are compelled to compete with information retrieval centers for users. Gupta (2003) observed that recent technological developments have created new forms of information, new sources of information and new ways of providing information that seem to bypass traditional institutions like libraries. The author, further, stated that library users are converting into patrons with rising expectations, different kinds of needs and wants, as well as choices.

Information professionals believe that the subject of marketing of information services and products has become more popular in recent years. Shamel (2002) noted that the concept of marketing has widely been discussed in literature and accepted professionally but this acceptance has not found its way into most library schools' formal curricular yet. According to Adekunmisi (2013), libraries have begun to realize that by using marketing principles and techniques, they can understand better their users' needs, justify funding, communicate more effectively with a variety of external audiences and achieve greater efficiency and optimal result in delivering services and products that meet the identified needs of their clients. As service based organizations, libraries are measured in terms of the quality of services they render to their users. Hence, Ikonne, Onuoha and Madukoma (2013) stated that the concept of marketing is not restricted only to profit-making organizations.

2.2 Marketing in Librarianship

Marketing, in its broad sense, is the social instrument through which the material goods and culture of a society are transmitted to its members. The UK Chartered Institute of Marketing defined it as "the management process which identifies, anticipates and supplies customer requirements efficiently" (Chartered Institute of Marketing (UK), n.d.). Similarly, Amritpal (2007) stated that marketing means working with markets to actualize potential exchanges for the purpose of satisfying human needs and wants. It is the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of goods, services and ideas to create exchanges with target groups that satisfy customer and organizational objectives (Kotler, 1996).

From the perspective of librarianship, marketing refers to those instrument through which information (both raw and processed) are transmitted to its members (Sharma & Bhardwaj, 2009). In the same vein, Madhusudhan (2008) adds that the aims of marketing are to identify the client's base, determine and fill its needs, wants, and demands which could be achieved by designing and delivering appropriate services and products. Gupta and Savard (2010) convey the idea that without a marketing orientation, a high-tech library or information service would not necessarily be successful. They further stated that to effectively reach this broadened group of potential users, it is imperative that information professionals develop positive attitudes toward marketing and that they should make it to be part of the organizational culture of libraries.

Morgan and Strong (1998) defined marketing as an exchange process whereby two or more individuals (or groups) exchange goods or services for items of value. Stating that, one of these individuals is almost always a librarian, while the other individuals include students, faculty, or fellow employees. The

items of value are information and information services exchanged for a perception of worth – a rating valuing the services rendered, a highly intangible and difficult thing to measure, which user of library services “pays”, not to libraries and librarians, but to administrators and decision-makers. The major responsibility of special collections services is to help her users solve their problems, hence she needs to adjust her services, products and organizational policies and procedures to the demands of the modern day researcher.

2.2.1 Marketing Strategy for Libraries

Applying the *7Ps* (Koontz and Rockwood's *4Ps* plus Rafiq and Ahmed's *3Ps*) of marketing Koontz and Rockwood (2001) suggested that marketing strategy is a comprehensive, integrated and coordinated plan that combines four marketing elements, commonly called the '*4Ps*' they are: Product, Price, Place, and Promotion and *3Ps* of the marketing mix are: Participants, Physical evidence, and Process.

- **Product:** these are Information resources and research services. Seetharama (1998) considers that, without products no organization has reason to exist, there is no task to perform; hence product is the most important factor in marketing. In the case of special collections products cover a wide area which can range from tangible to intangible services and products.
- **Price:** Pricing is the marketing activity that determines the price of the product on the basis of costs as well as market factors such as distribution channels, discount structure, competitors' prices, ability or willingness of customers to pay and so on (Adekunmisi, 2013). In the library, price can be used to express the value of information. For instance, a

physical product like a CD-ROM or membership fee (Madhusudhan, 2008). The issues of free versus fee based library services is still very much under debate by researchers in the library and information science field and for most academic libraries and by extension special collections they could never consider charging a fee for library products and services outside the user registration fee.

- **Place:** Place is the process of getting the goods or services from the producer to the consumer. In this case it is a matter of access to the collection. It is the channel that links product and consumer (Patange, 2013). Services are intangible; they cannot be normally stored, transported or inventoried. Personalized services like SDI are provided to the selected users by collecting what are the areas in which they require information. Furthermore, based upon knowledge of the market of a library, place of service is essential in order to identify users and their discrete information needs and wants. To expand the service area, the library may have branches, bookmobiles, or electronic access with which to encourage use of the collection (Sharma & Bhardwaj, 2009).
- **Promotion:** this is another important phenomenon in marketing. Promotion stimulates demand and increases sales. Essentially, promotion is the means of informing users what special collections has to offer. In essence, it involves mechanisms that inform the target groups about the resources available, services and products offered by the libraries or the information centers (Sharma & Bhardwaj, 2009). According to Adekunmisi (2013), this is the activity that covers all aids to sales. Promotion stimulates demand and increases sales.

- **Participants: this has to do with all** human actors who play a part in information services delivery. The success of any programme depend on the feedback of the participants hence the staff involved in promoting and marketing of the products and services of the collection, will provide feedback that will improve the services.
- **Physical Evidence:** This is the environment in which the information services are delivered. Patil, and Pradhan (2014) stated that evidence for the service can be both peripheral and essential. Physical evidence can make the service tangible. Physical evidence can support the marketing programmes by providing adequate service to the library users. It can make the service tangible.
- **Process:** process consists of process planning, control, operation planning, facilities to be available with users, scheduling, quality of services etc. The procedures, mechanisms and flow of activities by which the reference and information services are acquired.

2.2.2 Need for Marketing Special Collections

Komolafe-Opadeji and Haliso (2012) stated that marketing library services is alien to librarianship in Africa until very recently, when it was becoming fully integrated as part of library package. In librarianship, services are intangible; therefore marketing in librarianship would need developing products. As a result of fragility and rarity of the information resources kept in special collections need to be properly handled and guarded, hence the control to access the materials. However the materials still needs to be used by researchers. Hence, users are mostly not aware of the quality of information

resources in special collections. Consequently, there is need to market information resources in special collections. These needs include

- To promote the awareness of available information resources within the collection among library users.
- To maximize the use of information resources.
- To maintain the relevance of the collection.
- To maintain the relevance and value of the librarians to the library users
- To encourage gifts and donations from government agencies and government organizations.
- To improve the image of the library.

2.2.3 Special Collection Services and Information Products

Special collection is a hive of many services and products that requires marketing. According to Komolafe-Opadeji and Haliso (2012) in business parlance, services and products that are not marketed effectively may not be profoundly patronised. In librarianship, services are intangible and there is the need to develop marketable services and products. services and products which provide benefits for users and which answer users' most important needs are the core business of the library and information service (De Aze, 2002). The question is what library product has special collections? Special collection offer tangible and intangible services that add value to the library.

Information Services in Special Collections

- Selective dissemination of information
- Notification about newly published research
- current awareness services

- Indexing services
- Abstracting services
- compilations services
- Translation services
- Literature search services
- Photocopy services
- Reference services
- Interlibrary loan
- Repackaging and condensation services

Information Products in Special Collections

Special collections maintains a variety of unique and rare information resources (works) representing works of cultural and historical significance to their locality. They include but not limited to:

- Manuscripts and archives.
- Rare books
- Theses and dissertations
- Historical publications
- Speeches of presidents and notable individuals
- Photographs and objects.
- Gazettes
- Maps
- Special government publications
- Biographies and autobiographies
- Publications from local and indigenous festivals and coronations
- Oil companies publications
- Official publications of the parent institution

Tools for Marketing Special Collections

Having identified the information services and products, it is important that these be made available to users. Special collection users require competence, reliability, responsiveness, timeliness, honesty and a caring approach. They want assistance with use both of the library and of the resources. They want what they need, when they need it and they want information content for

assignments, research or knowledge acquisition. They want assistance with assignments and research support (Schmidt, 2004). To achieve this goals successfully, users must first be aware of the information services and products that are available for them in the special collections section of the library. The following marketing tools are needed to help sensitize special collection users:

- Library
- orientation programmes
- Efficient and friendly staff
- Fast and reliable internet connection
- A special collection website
- Social media
- Pamphlets
- Handbills
- Postals
- Brochures
- Advertising in the university bulletins
- Personal letters
- Professional
- associations

Ways of Marketing Special Collections

When the information sources in the special collection section of any library are not optimally utilized, it is equivalent to waste of resources and manpower. In an earlier study by Akporido and Ikolo (2014), it revealed that most researchers are not aware of some of the information resources available in the Special Collections Division of the Delta State University Library, Abraka. Hence, the essence of marketing in special collections. According to Patil and Pradhan (2014), the literature on marketing shows that every person who receives poor services mentions it to at least seven other people, while good service leaves a lasting impression. Promotion and marketing for special collections can be done by:

I. Developing new services and products

that depicts the information age: The information age has ensured that the library services and products that were offered ten years ago are not enough to attract users to the library. Hence, the need for special collection librarians to introduce new information age compliant services and products. For instance services like information navigation, browsing and filtering of electronic information services from the digital information sources will be useful for researchers. Also, creating a product like special collection digital repository will serve a multiple purpose of preservation, archiving, and dissemination of information for knowledge sharing amongst users.

ii. Communication: communicating special collection products and what services can be rendered is a sure way of getting users to use the information resources. Also giving out handbills and leaflets to users, publishing the collection's services and products in institutional bulletins and websites. Attending university and post graduate functions is another simple but successful mechanism where the special collection librarian has the opportunity of promoting the products and services of the collection. Post graduate defenses, seminar presentations, exhibition events, convocation lectures, orientation sessions are good starting points for marketing of the library and its services. Blogs are also a simple and efficient way for librarians to stay informed and for libraries to disseminate information in a timely manner. Blogs offer the special collection librarian the opportunity to be more responsive, to reach out to the faculty and researchers. Communication cannot only be one way. Communication must ensure that there is room for feedback from users in the form of suggestion and query.

iii. Surveys: from time to time the special collection librarian may be required to conduct surveys of the users in order to know their needs and requirements, and make

recommendations to the library management.

iv. Personnel selling: this has to do with the special collection staff; the commitment of the staff towards achieving the goals and objectives of the collections. Komolafe-Opadeji and Haliso (2012) are of the opinion that since academic libraries do not employ sales representatives all professional librarians have to become salesmen for the library through their interactions and socialising with the academic community. They must talk about the services of the library everywhere and anywhere they find themselves in the university community. This could be a very tedious task, but, the impact on the use of services may be great. Such interactions with the immediate community can draw out information about users' needs, and the librarian on the other hand has the opportunity give details about how the library's services/products can meet the user's needs. Hence, there is also the need for training and retraining of the special collection staff in marketing strategies.

v. Copying ideas: good ideas and best practices from commercial companies can be adopted. For instance applying the use of the magic words, the *Sorry, Glad, Sure* regime. It helps defuse a situation to say, "I am *sorry* you have had a problem with our service today, or, I am *glad* you have talked to me, and I am *sure* we can do something about it." The customer adage *The customer does not care how much you know, until he/she knows how much you care* has also been taken to heart – and action. These polite comments will ensure that researchers feel cared for and will definitely want to come back another time.

Professional Skills and Competencies for marketing

According to Kumar Das, & Kumar Karn (2008), libraries do not require a good marketing person to run marketing operations, like a business firm. However,

certain skills are essential to promote special collection activities. These attributes are very much desired for the successful information service provision by librarians. The special collection librarian must exhibit skills such as:

- a firm belief in service and customer's satisfaction,
- a clear understanding of special collection's overall aims and objectives,
- an ability to assemble and interpret information for the benefit of the user,
- good communication skills, both oral and written,
- good interpersonal relationship,
- enthusiasm and commitment,
- Ability to take criticism, not always constructive.
- Technical knowledge, such as ability to use the Internet and other electronic resources and databases
- Knowledge of various marketing strategies for promoting information skills
- **An End-User trainer/educator:**
- An information literacy facilitator

Conclusions

In today's academic environment, information is everywhere, but the special thing about special collections in academic libraries is that the information resources the collection houses are most times not common and cannot be got from just anywhere. However, very few researchers are aware of such a vital gateway to information in their academic libraries. In recent past, marketing approaches have proven to be effective in assisting academic libraries to adjust to changes in its client base and ensure that services delivered continue to fit the needs. Through improving on the services and products provided by special collections and engaging in marketing and promotional activities, the relevance of special collections and the entire academic library as a whole is

assured for a long time to come.

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