

Marketing Strategies of Library Services

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Abstract

As librarians we should be actively marketing and promoting our library services. This paper aims to clarify marketing for librarians. Practical solutions are provided on how to implement a marketing strategy, with particular emphasis on the value of using electronic information resources. It also shows the link between promoting library services and raising the profile of the library.

Keywords: Library marketing; Strategies; Promotion; Services.

Introduction

Marketing is frequently viewed as a set of strategies and techniques that belong to administrators outside of librarianship. However as librarians we are all involved in the process of marketing. The definition of marketing by Philip Kotler states: "Marketing is the management process which identifies, anticipates and supplies customer requirements efficiently...". Thus the essence of marketing involves finding out what the users want, then setting out to meet those needs. As librarians we all participate in this process of assessing our users needs and trying to fulfil them. Thus, we are already marketing our library information skills. However, in order to do this effectively librarians need to embrace the total marketing function involving market research and analysis, service planning and promotion.

Market Research

Market research involves the "systematic gathering, recording and analysing of data"

relating to the demand for a service or product.[1] The parent organisation needs to be analysed in terms of funding sources, the contribution the library makes to the mission of the parent organisation, resources available and the needs of the users. There are two basic functions of market research: (i) To reduce the uncertainty of the decision-making process of marketing (ii) To monitor and control the performance of marketing activities.

The information gathered through market research will provide the basis for making marketing decisions.

Market Plan

In light of the information gathered from the market research the conclusions should be summarised and stated as the basis upon which the market plan is based. The market plan is the actual process which will establish the library's business goals and objectives and figure out how to achieve them. Katz (1988) describes "marketing action [as] most effective when the relevant activities are planned and co-ordinated". [1] The marketing plan is the tool which will ensure that the library services and products are viewed in a focused and clear way.

Objectives and Strategies

Once user's needs, future trends and

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resources available have been established the librarian is in a position to plan the marketing objectives, the resources to be used, the place and the time scale of the operation and the strategies required achieving them. The process of setting aims and objectives will serve a number of purposes. It will provide a focused overview of the library service and give direction and guidance in achieving the objectives. If possible objectives should be quantifiable in order to ensure effective evaluation. Once objectives have been set the strategies necessary to achieve them can be planned. If any of the objectives change over time then the market plan will need to be updated.

Promotion

Essentially promotion is the means of informing your users what you do and what you can do. The benefits for those who promote their library services include: increased usage, increased value in the organization, education of users and changed perceptions.

The promotional plan emerges from the marketing plan. It is to do with how to achieve the objectives that have been forecast. It involves:

- a description of the service requiring publicity;
- description of the audience at which publicity is targeted;
- details of the campaign method to be employed including type of publicity to be used and method(s) of distribution;
- execution of campaign;
- analysis of campaign performance.

The setting of clear promotional objectives will also ensure that the success of the advertising campaign can be evaluated. From time to time it should be accepted that promotional activities have not met their objectives. At this point the marketing strategies need to be re-evaluated in the context of the feedback received.

The Medium

Promotional activities can take many forms and the promotional media will depend on the nature of the target audience and on promotional objectives.

Personal Skills

Your manner whether in person or on the telephone, will affect your users' rating of the library. You need to be professional and use quality procedures but you also need to smile and establish a personal relationship with as many of your users as possible. If you react positively to complaints, people will be encouraged to tell you about other things they would like changed. Instead of defending your position think about their suggestions. Make yourself highly visible, visit the staff room, memorize names, learn research interests of staff. Make a point of visiting staff rather than waiting for them to visit you. Establish the key players and the people who can and want to help.

E-mail

Where a large proportion of the users are on e-mail it is an easy way of reaching them, quickly and cheaply. It can be targeted more precisely than most other methods and so is effective at reaching specific audiences. I have found that staff respond quicker to e-mails than any other medium. By maintaining up-to-date address lists different user groups can be targeted with different versions of the advertising 'message'.

The Internet

The Internet has the power to improve the library's image and to allow the library to offer enhanced services. Although it takes time to set up and maintain services on the Internet, it can reap rewards in terms of user satisfaction and recognition. A Library Web home page serves as a promotional tool advertising in-house library services and electronic information resources on the web. The pages should include an e-mail link to the library

making the librarian easy to contact.

Newsletters and Leaflets

Newsletters and leaflets are both a means of delivering information. A newsletter can be used to list interesting new web sites, new journals and online services, and perhaps more general science news of interest. It does not have to be long but should be produced on a regular basis. Leaflets and guides can be handed out, and displayed on notice boards. The library notice board should be in a prominent place.

The Message

Once you have decided upon the advertising medium you need to consider how to convey the message you want to get across. The wording and layout of the advertisement are critical.

The advertisement should be uncluttered with the text printed against a pale or white background making it easier to read. White "space" is powerful.

Use good quality print.

Do not print texts in capitals as it is harder to read.

Use illustrations and pictures.

Keep the layout interesting, with bullet points, sub-headings and so on.

Use bold colours and catchy headlines and large print.

Express the service/product in terms of readers interests.

Use short sentences, short paragraphs, and avoid long words. Avoid jargon.

Give examples.

Look at other peoples advertisements and judge for yourself what is attention grabbing.

A good advertisement attracts Attention, arouses Interest, creates Desire and stimulates Action, known as the A-I-D-A sequence.

Attention

You need to get a reader's attention. Within two seconds most readers give up and move on so your job is to grab their attention in those two seconds, and keep them reading. The most important thing about a headline is that it should emphasise the benefit of the service to the reader.

Interest

Once you have got the readers attention the next thing is to turn that attention into genuine interest. The first paragraph should encourage further reading. The advertisement should stress how the users will positively gain from the new service or product.

Desire

The next crucial ingredient in your advertisement is desire. As you have been writing the advertisement you should have been cultivating a desire in your reader to own the product or take advantage of your service. However, be honest and do not exaggerate. Continue expressing the service in terms of readers interest.

Action

The desire needs to be converted into action. Tell the reader what to do now that you have persuaded them to use the service - 'reminder call', "note in your diary", "Act now". Encourage action and involvement. The easier you make the process of contacting you the more likely they are to do so.

The time and cost involved in advertising needs to be considered. Whatever you do to promote your services will entail costs, even if it is only the cost of your time, therefore you need to make sure that you get full benefit for the cost incurred. It is also important to advertise at the right time and with the right frequency.

Conclusion

As librarians we should be actively marketing and promoting our library services. The basic aim of marketing is to know and understand our users in order that the library is able to satisfy those needs in an effective way. A marketing plan is an essential tool which will enable us to focus our efforts. The market plan should assess where you are now (market research), where you are going (objectives) and

how you are going to get there (strategies).

References

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2. Julie Nicholas. Institute of Astronomy. Cambridge, U.K.: University of Cambridge; 1988.