

# Marketing information goods and services in medical libraries and information centers

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## ABSTRACT

Marketing is one of the essential parts of any business corporation in the modern management. One can see the difference between corporations in gaining their goals, considering their marketing methods. Gaining more advantage or acquiring more funds can be of reasons for marketing, but these are not all the reasons. Perhaps the most important reason for marketing is increasing the customer satisfaction. This, in turn, leads to more willingness in payment and using services. Nowadays, due to rapid growth in ICT, changes in budgets, rapid growth in development and use of knowledge, variety of users and their needs, marketing has become an important factor in any library activities. Libraries are now more responsible in this regard, because marketing is now an important tool in improving users' satisfaction in using library services. Hence, marketing is now very important for libraries to survive in the increasing pressures of competitive conditions of the information market. This article is tapping on issues such as information marketing, principles of marketing, marketing techniques, developing markets, and marketing skills. Some recommendations are also presented for marketing in libraries.

**Key words:** Customer satisfaction, Information marketing, information goods, information services, information centers, libraries

## INTRODUCTION

The society which produces and consumes the most knowledge and information is the most powerful society.<sup>[1]</sup> In this society, the economic development, social transformation range and life quality depend on the information and its usage. A society with this characteristic is called information society.<sup>[2]</sup> The most basic characteristic of an information society is that, information is the most powerful economic and social factor<sup>[3]</sup> and its production and

usage has been developed. So, the information industry has been developed in the income and service fields in the past decades.

Although, marketing information services as a new conception, is today supposed as an important realm for the libraries and information centers, because the information as the production of a library is a commerce element and those people and occupation are successful which control the information such as development, access, analysis and dissemination of information.<sup>[4]</sup> Marketing covers the activities which the organizations do for marketing. As Kotler says, some organizations such as museums, universities, libraries and charity institutions need marketing for their offers and products in order to they can gain an economic, social and political support. One of the major existing obstacles to act in information business field is lack of business specialists among librarians and information scientists.<sup>[5]</sup> The libraries and information centers have started to recognize the information goods and services. This part is a complementary for the managing and also an instrument to improve the user's satisfaction and using these services by the potential users.<sup>[6]</sup> The basic factors such as information explosion, technology revolution, the library expenses trans-

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formation and the users with varied needs, have increased the librarians responsibility in developing the information goods marketing. Some information services managers feel that marketing can hurt their activities. Although after increasing the competition in the information world, marketing has become a factor to keep the libraries and information centers alive.

## INFORMATION MARKETING

There are several definition for information marketing that some of them are presented in this article. Tilson says, marketing means planning and managing the relation between the organization and customers. Marketing involves studying target market needs, planning for the suitable goods and services, pricing, effective distribution and relation for information and creating motivation for the market.<sup>[7]</sup> American Marketing Association says marketing is a collection of some activities which handle the process of good and service from production to consumption.<sup>[8]</sup> K. J. Jestin thinks information marketing is a perfect term which involves the process and connections that leads to the users satisfaction and also income for the libraries and information centers, But, the basic meaning of marketing is, a union between the organization abilities and customer needs in order to achieve the aims of two parts.<sup>[5]</sup>

## MARKETING ACTIVITIES

The organizations present their goods with a fixed price and via using the methods of promotion and publicity and also via using the distribution channels, sell their goods and services in different places.<sup>[8]</sup> All above activities are known as the marketing activities which are as follow:

### Market profiling

Market profiling is a very important marketing activity and its aim is to collect the necessary information about the market. It is necessary to recognize the aims of market in order to choose the suitable methods. This profiling must pay attention to the below items:<sup>[5]</sup>

- The Users ability and capabilities
- The range and amount of usage
- The relation between services and users
- Paying attention to the users priorities
- Recruitment

### Product planning

There are different ideas about this question that what is product of a library. But most of the experts think product of a library is goods and the presented services by the librarian which to the users satisfaction and his confirmation of the library.<sup>[8]</sup> Galvin introduce the reference services as the first product of a library. Although an exact view toward the library services background, release some products with a more oldness than the references services.<sup>[9]</sup> According to this definition, product planning means marketing activities which is related to the products development and leads to customers' satisfaction. So the managers should decide to:<sup>[5]</sup>

- Who are the user groups?
- The information goods and services are arranged for whom?
- Which goods and services are better to be produced and market for different target groups?

## Pricing

Pricing is, marketing activity which fixes the product price according to expenses and the market factors such as the distribution channel, discounting infrastructure, competition prices, the customers ability to pay the price and etc.<sup>[10]</sup> Pricing is an art and the pricing decisions reflect insight, experiences and complicated analysis. Pricing is a dynamic and polyhedral process and can not be done in vacuum. This activity not only reflects the organizational aims but also is an element of marketing strategy. A suitable pricing can lead to a permanent income process, on the other side, a low pricing can create business but can not cover the expenses.<sup>[11]</sup> One of the most cases in marketing is deciding about the expenses of presenting the services for the users. The managers face some sensitive conditions. On one side, the customer's expectations and needs and the big amount of information make them to present the services with maximum access and on the other hand, the budgets which are mostly fixed or decrease, the ever-increasing inflation, increased expense of purchase and the information resources sharing make them in a bad situation.<sup>[9]</sup>

When do pricing, the below questions consider:

- How much is the expense of producing the services and products?
- Which factors have a role in fixing the prices?
- Should the information goods and services be free, if so for whom and why?
- What effect will have the free products on the product value?
- What criteria is suitable for pricing?

Pricing can have varied aims involving:<sup>[11]</sup>

- Request control
- Expenses cover
- Harmonizing with competitive prices
- Improving and keeping the presence in the market
- Maximizing the benefit and returning back the investment
- - Strengthening the current situation

The economic texts involve several pricing processes. Some of them are as below:<sup>[11]</sup>

- Pricing based on the expenses: It is base on analyzing the total expenses of producing goods and then pricing regarding to returning the expenses back achieving benefits.
- Pricing based on request: It is according to this fact that increase in request leads to increases in prices.
- Pricing based on competition: It follows the current conditions of the prices for the products or services.
- Optimum pricing or pricing based on the value: It involves several factors to fix the price including the good value, the customer needs and market divide.

## Promotion

Promotion is one of the most important activities in marketing. Some people suppose it as a synonym for the communication or public relations.<sup>[12]</sup> It is an activity to sell the products and present services. Promotion encourages the users for more request and the increases the sale. Promotion usually leads the product toward the customers and involves the solutions

which inform target groups about the presented services and available goods by the libraries.<sup>[5]</sup> This activity emphasis on informing aspects in marketing and via it, the customers know about the product's benefits and its usage.

The below methods can be used to achieve the promotion aims:<sup>[9]</sup>

- Advertising: Introducing the good or service via the media
- Sale promotion: Involves the short- term motivations to purchase or sell a good or service.
- Verbal method: A face to face relation in transferring the information about the goods and services to convey the costumers to buy the products or use the services.
- Public relations: Concern with the relation between the organization and different groups which have relation with the organization.<sup>[8]</sup> On other hand, public relation means a knowledge by which the organizations try to do their social responsibility and also achieve the support of people who are important for the organization.<sup>[13]</sup>

The existing questions regarding to promotion:

- The promotion items are sent for whom?
- What should be the subject of delivered message?
- Which promotion methods are available?
- What points should be noticed in designing the promotional package?
- What is role of library personnel in promotional activities?

Finally it is mentionable that you should be aware that your customers prefer to handle their business with you via what type of method. Do they like to connect you with email, web site or face to face contacts?<sup>[14]</sup>

### Places or distribution channel

Distribution is a marketing activity in relation to goods distribution from the producer to the customer. Via distribution, the goods and services will be available and simply purchasable.<sup>[5]</sup> Place is a range of the library services and materials. Today the word "Place" is not only used to the physical place of the library but also the range in which the library services are available. The word "library" for some people is considered isolated place and for others the closed shelf. But today there is a big change in the existing point of view about the meaning of library. According this change library is a virtual place which regarding to it the new services are presented (e. g. the virtual reference services). So the library is made by a collection of the past concepts and new facilities.<sup>[1]</sup>

In order to distribute the information, it is necessary to be aware of customers' needs and interests, update their knowledge of distribution of the suitable and related information. The aim of this distribution is to meet the specialist's needs.

## THE METHODS OF INFORMATION DISSEMINATION

As the people and organizations are different in their needs and financial levels, so the information is disseminated via different methods. These methods, regarding to their media and resources are divided in two groups including electronic and printed methods:

### Printed dissemination of information

In this method, the different printed information is disseminated by hand. They involve the below items:

- The new resources list distribution
- The selected dissemination of information
- The selected dissemination of resources
- The resources circulation
- Book fair
- Individual relations

### Electronic dissemination of information

Electronic dissemination of information is done via varied methods and by using the different tools. They are as follows:<sup>[15]</sup>

- Internet
- Intranet
- Extranet
- Email
- Tele-text
- Video-text
- Fax

Using each one of them depends on the library type, its facilities and the user's situation.

## MARKETING MANAGEMENT PRINCIPALS

The libraries and information centers services had better to be based on the following marketing principals:

- The libraries should have positive attitudes toward the market. It is not expectable that a product is purchased so simple. The managers should always study the market, encourage the customers to buy, increase the product quality and arrange the distribution system.
- Marketing should be important as much as other duties such as administration, production and financial parts.
- The marketing duty should be integrated. This principle means the marketing notices should be applied by managers.<sup>[5]</sup>

The libraries and information centers should market their services effectively. It must be their basic purpose to register the name of their library in the yellow book, and it can be only possible via a correct marketing management.<sup>[16]</sup>

## MARKETING TECHNIQUES

The managers needs to use the special techniques in marketing which usually come from the industrial practical experiences and social sciences such as economy, statistics and applied psychology. The marketing techniques can be divided in four groups:<sup>[17]</sup>

- The techniques and skills which are used to achieve information about market.
- The techniques and skills which are used to encourage and create request.
- The techniques and skills which are used to analyze the expenses and other marketing factors.
- Other practical techniques and skills.

So having known the marketing techniques, the library manager can realize the user needs and finally meet their needs.

## CREATING A MARKET

Having used the effective and correct marketing techniques, we can create a market which leads to the bellow results:

- Changing a dull market to alive and active market.
- Creating the requests which have not been before.
- Increase in the current sale volume can lead to a market.

So, the goods are produced and the market is created by a result of marketing techniques.<sup>[5]</sup>

## PROFESSIONAL SKILLS FOR MARKETING

The library staff needs the skills and information about information marketing and the library services. Some of them are below:<sup>[18]</sup>

- Understanding the user's needs and ability to receive feed back from the users.
- Technical information e.g. ability to use the Internet.
- The different marketing techniques to improve the information skills.

The subjective concept of information makes the marketing so difficult. The information value depending on the purpose, time, place, different concept of information, public and private information, the unclear value of information and independence of the information expenses is varied, and this is an obstacle in designing the information marketing benefits.<sup>[19]</sup> Besides, the librarians unwillingness to choose and set up the marketing, increase the existing problems.

## SOME ADVICES FOR MARKETING IN LIBRARIES

The changes which have been appeared in the information market after passing the time, should be presented in our attitudes. These changes which have been developed more and more by using the information and communication technology, have transformed information needs of users, the methods of express, and searching for these needs and their exceptions. Today, the information is presented so fast and with an extended range; so it is not possible to control and organize them by the traditional methods of library resources organization.<sup>[9]</sup>

Mere use of the traditional methods would lead to defeat and also losing the market control. So we should try to design the techniques that not only measure the customers satisfaction about the library services and goods but also as a powerful instrument, can help the managers to create the new services.

Today most of the users are enough educated to use the electronic information resources. They need the services and resources which are perfect, with a good design and so simple to use. Regarding to the new commercial producers of the information, this problem can lead to a competitive market. The libraries can complete the theoretical principles and professional ethics with the modern technology and compare with the commercial part (who just pay attention to their benefits). The libraries should search about the new needs of users and plan their services

according to them. The commercial organizations presence in information fields can be a promise for the libraries. It is possible to develop in this field via using the marketing techniques and advertising. One characteristic of a high competitive market is speed in presenting the good in to the market. The libraries pay attention speed much as accuracy in presenting their services.

## CONCLUSIONS

A library and its user can be respectively supposed as a market and information consumers. Information is a necessary resource for national development, and produce and develop science is the necessary condition for staying in this present age. So, duty of the libraries and information centers is to collect, organize and disseminate information resources. The librarians should be careful that collect, organize and disseminate information must be all done according to the new meaning of marketing. In this way the users can be satisfied and marketing can present an opportunity for the librarians to do some changes in the physical facilities, resources and presented services for the users.

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