

GUEST EDITORIAL

Information Marketing

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In the present age of information which the world is witnessing towards the end of the twentieth century, information is held as a key resource for the economic, socio-cultural and political development of a nation. Organisations make greater use of information as an economic resource to introduce innovation and to increase their effectiveness and competitive position. People, in order to ensure better standards of living, use information more intensively in their day to day activities so as to firm-up their choices between alternative products and services.

This being so, availability of right information for the right user at right time and at right cost becomes all the more vital. The scenario has posed major challenges to the information sector whose prime function is to satisfy the complex and increasing demands for information products and services. Times, when the Librarians and Information Managers (LIMs) used to remain busy (and satisfied) with functions aimed at acquiring, organising and providing reading materials only when there was a request for the same, are over. The profession today is being geared to aim at something beyond that. Something beyond, in the context of Library and Information Centers (LICs) means that the LIMs will have to chip in and accept the challenges by playing a more pro-active role.

LIMs will have to appreciate that just having information and storing it will serve no purpose unless it is put to effective use by those who need it. LIMs will have to bring the user and information together. However, increasing technological advancements are putting more and more pressure on LIMs. First, the technology of information work is vastly extending the scope of their work. It is now possible to gain access to and process much greater quantities of information than was possible only five years ago. Computers and CD-ROMs have found increasing acceptance in LICs; multimedia has shown much potential for LICs; and information networks have broken down time and space barriers. Second, user expectations are rising constantly, creating a demand for ever more sophisticated, high-quality information products and services¹.

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In the same breath, it is also appreciable that information is becoming increasingly expensive and so is its packaging and repackaging. Value addition to the information, makes it even more expensive. There is a further rise in the cost of information when IT (acquisition and upgradation) is to play its role in designing and delivering information services and products. Further, the age-old concept of certain social services like health, education, justice, etc. being made available, free of cost, is becoming irrelevant as the time goes by. This is true with library and information services (LIS). Institutions engaged in all such services are being asked to become self-sufficient, if they are to survive in cost conscious and competition oriented social and environmental set-up. Public funding for such purpose is being questioned.

The other side of the coin is that the LICs have, over the years, spent enormous amounts of money, expertise and other valuable resources to come up to a stage where they are at present in terms of service delivery. They continue to do so, even as of now. Mobilising resources, particularly the finances may not be now that easy an affair as it has been in the past. But, in the demands and expectations from their users, there won't be any looking back. In such a situation, not only will mere survival of the systems to the expectations of their users be a major challenge for the LIMs but *their sustained development will be a big question*. The only way out seems to be that the development of LICs will have to be only in accordance with more exact and specific needs of their users. Towards this end and keeping the concept of a resource constrained regime in mind, the services offered will have to be internally efficient and externally effective.² It is true that by using a variety of IT tools and techniques, LICs are now able to generate various kinds of information products and services in addition to performing the routine tasks. But, it is a little unfortunate that these remain largely underutilised, or even, in cases, wholly unutilised. The reasons cited are several and include the following:

- ❑ efforts in identifying and reaching out the target audience are inadequate;
- ❑ information products and services are 'generator' driven rather than 'user' driven and in that there remains a 'linkage gap' between the generators and users of such products and services; and
- ❑ level of information awareness or consciousness is still low among the users and there is a need to raise it further.³

Given the above scenario, efforts have to be undertaken, to enrich the information environment of the LIMs, so that they are able to:

- ❑ identify and understand their potential users (internal as well as external) in relation to their resources and facilities;
- ❑ understand the information needs of such users more accurately and precisely;
- ❑ generate information products and services that are tailored to meet the exact needs of such users; and
- ❑ remain cost-effective in the process of generating information products and services.

It is therefore in these contexts that this special issue has attempted to address the following few marketing concerns:

- ❑ marketing in the library and information context;

- ❑ marketing mix (4 Ps, i.e., Product, Price, Promotion & Distribution) in the context of information products and services;
- ❑ library and information service marketing experience in Indian context; and
- ❑ information products and services as sustainable source of revenue generation.

REFERENCES

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