

# Marketing in the Library & Information Context

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## Abstract

The paper justifies the absorption of marketing approaches in the information context as a means to help the libraries and information centres (LICs) achieve their basic objective of providing right information to the right user at the right time and at a right cost. It also advocates that by bringing in marketing orientation in the LICs, librarians and information managers (LIMs) will ensure: (i) increased information awareness or consciousness among their clientele; (ii) optimal utility of the rich learning resources base of their LICs; and (iii) sustained development of their LICs, through revenue generation.

## 1. MARKETING ORIENTATION

Marketing aims at: (i) identification of the client base; (ii) determination of the needs, wants, and demands of this client base; and (iii) fulfilment of the same through designing and delivering appropriate products and/or services, more effectively than competitors. The main focus of the concept, thus, is the clientele, and the goal is clientele satisfaction. A marketing exercise in the library and information context should be carried out with an aim to integrate library goals and objectives with organisational goals and objectives. These goals and objectives describe the desired future of the organisation and its library. The libraries will thrive better if their goals and objectives support the organisational goals and objectives.

An efficient marketing audit which considers the mission, goals, and objectives of a library vis-a-vis its organisation leads to better examination of the library's activities, its needs and capabilities.

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Library is traditionally a non-profit organisation and only recently such organisations have become aware of the need to market their products and services. Library and information products and services (LIPS) are now getting recognised as saleable and there is a growing market for these. Like all other saleable products, LIPS have to be what the clientele want and in a form that they can be easily used. The only difference in LIPS and the other saleable products is that the former are self-regenerating. In other words, even after having being given/sold once, both giver as well as receiver retain it and the process goes on and on. As such, one time buyer of LIPS can become competitor of the one-time seller, in cases.

Given the intangible nature of the information, it is rather difficult to sell LIPS. LIPS will, however, sell well if the generators create a high level of confidence among the clientele in terms of the: i) benefits; ii) credibility; and iii) reliability of their LIPS. Also, since the value of information varies from clientele to clientele as well as from circumstance to circumstance, right information to the right user at the right time is worth a fortune. The role of information providers has, therefore, to be more aggressive.

In the field of marketing of LIPS, the providers can only promise a certain amount of clientele satisfaction. User surveys are essential to give feedback at regular intervals concerning the expectations of the clientele. Their involvement as 'friends of the library', and as 'advisory bodies' can reveal a feedback that would result in better LIPS.

In other words, feedback becomes useful in modifying LIPS to meet the changing needs of the clientele.

## 1.1 The Challenge

The profession of librarianship has come off age. Gone are the days when the profession and the professionals used to do just what they were asked to do. The profession today, is being geared to aim at something beyond that. Something beyond that—in the context of library and information centres (LICs)—means that the librarians and information managers (LIMs) will have to be more pro-active. They have to:

- (i) look for needs, wants and demands of their clientele;
- (ii) design, develop and provide information products and services tailored to meet such needs, wants and demands; and
- (iii) extend/reach-out to the clientele with the information rather than wait for them to ask for the same.

## 2. NEEDS FOR MARKETING

The reasons for this shift-over are several and include the following:

### 2.1 Information for Development

The present age is rightly characterised as the age of information. The fact that information is a key resource for the economic, socio-cultural and political development of a nation is gaining increasing acceptance. This being so, availability of right information at right time and at right cost becomes all the more critical. It means that LIMs will have to chip in, accept the challenge and make it happen 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 i.e., the LIMs

will have to bring the user and information closer.

### 2.2 Information Technology

Information Technology (IT) has ushered in a variety of media that can help LIMs in efficient and effective acquisition, organisation and dissemination of information. 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. By virtue of 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. However, 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:

- (i) efforts in identifying and reaching out the target clientele are inadequate;
- (ii) level of information awareness or consciousness is still low among the users and there is a need to raise it further;
- (iii) 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.

In keeping with this scenario, LIMs have, in all earnestness, started taking active interest in building a strong image for their LICs as well as in the marketing of their products and services. This approach is finding increasing acceptance among the library authorities as well as library users who are now, all the time, subjected to the pressures exerted by several factors.

### 2.3 Increasing Resource Constraints

LIMs are also deluged with advice as to how to acquire and organise learning resources and satisfy the complex and ever increasing information needs of their users. This situation gets further compounded when the question of a resource constrained regime comes into the picture, even in the context of LICs. LICs, one time very well accepted as cost centres to cater to the information needs of their respective (mostly internal) clientele, are now looked upon

as out-reaching centres and, thereby, revenue generating ones also.

## **2.4 Inadequate Resource Utilisation**

LICs have, over a period of time, build rich learning resource materials. These remain largely underutilised as their use is generally limited to the clientele of the organisation of which the LIC is a part. In such a scenario, while on the one hand, there is an increasing demand for availability of right information, and on the other, it is not possible for everyone to go in for huge investments in terms of developing appropriate information infrastructure. Hence out-reaching is the solution to bridge this gap and it is the absorption of marketing approach which can make it happen.

LIMs will have to take up the challenge of looking out for ways and means to increase their client base in the external sectors and open up their resources, facilities and services to meet the information needs of the clientele in those sectors, of course, without, in any way, jeopardising the interests of the internal clientele. For this out-reaching measure to be a success, LIMs will have to fine-tune their resource development and utilisation policies to meet this challenge.

## **2.5 Increasing Cost of Information and IT**

Information is becoming increasingly expensive and so is its packaging and repackaging. Value addition of 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.

## **2.6 Decreasing Public Sponsorship**

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 also. The 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-ups.

Public funding for such purposes is being questioned.

## **3. FACTORS INHIBITING MARKETING ORIENTATION**

Though there can not be any two opinions as to whether marketing orientation in LICs is required or not, there are some of the following inhibiting factors that stand in the way:

### **3.1 Misunderstanding**

LIMs still feel that provision of library and information services is a social responsibility and adopting marketing approach to them means only commercialisation, publicity or public relations.

### **3.2 Attitude**

LIMs have been expressing satisfaction when they have been able to provide the information to the client as per his/her specific request. Attempting something beyond that is what is required in case the LIMs intend bringing marketing orientation in their LICs. This means a major shift in approach of the LIMs is required for the purpose.

### **3.3 LIC Versus Parent Organisation**

Since LICs generally exist in relation to their parent bodies, they are viewed as a sub-systems of the main system. Hence marketing will find its way in the sub-system only when there is marketing orientation in the main system itself. Within the sub-system itself, the marketing approach has to be accepted by all involved rather than leaving it to be the domain of only public relations staff like circulation and reference. It will yield more encouraging results if everyone involved in the sub-system is groomed to appreciate the client orientation.

### **3.4 Systems and Procedures**

LIMs, because of various well known reasons like physical verification, audit, etc., particularly in our country, have been more concerned with storage and security aspects of the information rather than its use. The methods, systems and procedures followed in the LICs are therefore, more biased towards this aspect rather than the use or user aspect. This

also has to be changed. Systems and procedures should lay more emphasis on the use and the user of information rather than on other aspects.

### **3.5 Products and Concept of Cost Free Services**

The concept that information should be made available free has to go as it costs quite a bit to acquire, organise and retrieve it. In fact, in view of the utility of information, the thinking should change to the one where the client should be happy to pay for it.

Since LICs are service centres, LIMs will have to adopt service marketing approach for bringing in marketing orientation in their respective set-ups. To achieve this, they will have to:

- (i) be conscious and responsive to the mission/mandate of the parent organisation of which their LIC is a part;
- (ii) identify the market i.e., the client base in internal as well as external environment by following time-tested marketing strategy/research methods;
- (iii) identify the needs, wants and demands of the clients;
- (iv) be conscious and aware of the competitors;
- (v) further develop resources and facilities by fine-tuning their resource development policies;
- (vi) identify, design, package and promote tailor-made services and products to meet the needs of the clients satisfactorily;
- (vii) price the services and products to suit the pocket of the client;

- (viii) ensure that the reputation of information services and products offered matches with the organisational reputation;
- (ix) re-design and re-develop systems and procedures to have client orientation in-built in them; and
- (x) develop staff to understand and be responsive to client needs.

## **4. CONCLUSION**

In sum, a change-over, as advocated above, in the LIC context, would call for:

- (i) training and retraining of the library and information professionals in newer ways of identifying and understanding the user and his/her requirements;
- (ii) sensitising top management to marketing orientation/approaches; and
- (iii) constant interaction between the user, producer and provider of information.

## **FURTHER READING**

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