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# Marketing of library services: a case study of selected university libraries in Kenya

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## Abstract

Regardless of the type, libraries are under pressure to justify their existence and funding through provision of customer- or market-oriented services. This requires a shift from product or service orientation to customer or need orientation. Different marketing concepts provide libraries with the tools for collecting and analysing useful data about information needs of customers, which assists in designing, developing and delivering appropriate services. This paper examines the methods used by university libraries in Kenya to market their services to different categories of users and the problems experienced therein. It concludes that, although efforts have been made to achieve this, more emphasis must be put on promotion of the already existing services and therefore on the need for university libraries in Kenya to adapt more systematic techniques in collecting data on their user needs, if they are to design and deliver services that fit user requirements.

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## Review of relevant literature

Regardless of the type of the library, the need to develop customer-centred and strategic market planning has now become part of effective library management (Lee, 2000). It has been observed that, unlike in the past when libraries have failed to market their services largely because of the notion that libraries were the natural places to which to turn to fulfil information needs, today they are under pressure to justify their existence through provision of quality services based on customer orientation (Leisner, 1995). Libraries have also been accused of equating marketing with activities such as promotion, advertising and public relations which are aimed at convincing their users that the existing services are inherently good for them rather than finding out and satisfying users' real needs (Borchardt, 1997). On the contrary, marketing involves finding out what the users want, then setting out to meet those needs, and implies that, although librarians have in one way or another engaged in assessing the user needs, there is need to embrace the total market function involving market research and analysis, service planning and promotion.

Kotler (1997) has defined marketing as the: ... analysis, planning, implementation, and control of carefully formulated programmes designed to bring about voluntary exchanges with target markets for the purpose of achieving organisational objectives ... [and] ... heavily dependent on designing the organisation's offering in terms of the target market needs and desires and on using effective pricing, communication and distribution to inform, motivate and service the market.

Another definition of marketing is that offered by the UK Chartered Institute of Marketing, which states:

... marketing is the management process which identifies, anticipates and supplies customer requirements efficiently (Nicholas, 1998).

Weingand (1998) has described marketing as a process of exchange in which "elements" of value are exchanged between a producer and a consumer and which begins with a community

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analysis to determine the needs of the consumers and ends with the library's communication to the community relating the products created to respond to those needs. This has been echoed by Olson and Moseman (1997), who propose that marketing includes determining market niches, defining products and services, setting prices, promoting services and building good public relations.

All these definitions emphasize the various elements of the strategic marketing approach: it is a management process, involves planning, requires analysis of customer needs and ways of satisfying those needs and is geared towards mutual benefit for customers as well as the organisation. It involves "customer satisfaction engineering", meaning that it is the result of a systematic process of planning and implementation based on effective design, measured inputs and defined outputs (Hawcroft, 1998). It is different from selling or promotion in that it involves the whole process of satisfying the customer by creating goods and services that consumers want to buy and benefits both the consumer and the organisation because they are based on known user needs. In the light of this, in the university library setting marketing implies that: first, the library identify its objectives, second, identify its target users and their particular needs and, third, develop products and services aimed at these categories. In this way the university library becomes a market-oriented organisation in which all operations including acquisition, processing, storage and service are focused on the needs of users and which embraces not only the satisfaction of demand but also creation, awakening and increasing the existing demand.

The relevance of strategic marketing to libraries has been discussed widely in the literature. According to Leisner, the basis for library marketing is the need first, to enhance the quality of services and, second, to improve the perceived value of these services and thus achieve the highest level of customer satisfaction which ensures survival of the organisation (Leisner, 1995). He argues that, although profit or increased funding could be a result of the marketing process, that alone is not a reason to implement marketing programmes but rather it follows that increased customer

satisfaction will result in willingness to use and pay for services offered and therefore enhanced perception of value of the library will result in increased support and usage, which are necessary for its continued survival and existence.

Weingand has observed that customers normally gauge the usefulness of a library by their past experiences and an awareness of the quality and types of services on offer (Weingand, 2001). Therefore the kind of communication done with them, the quality of past experiences both in library use and with library staff will determine how the service measures against customer expectations. The university library can therefore use marketing to promote awareness of changes in physical facilities, materials and services offered by the library and the quality of professionals available.

Morgan and Noble (1992) have argued that adopting marketing as a fundamental management process is critical to library survival. According to Weingand (1995), the technological changes witnessed recently in information and communication create the need for customer focus and inclusion of marketing and planning in the library management process, all of which are critical to meeting the organisational objective of meeting the customers' needs and enhanced profitability. In this case profitability in the library setting may be equated to:

... the extent to which the host organisation's goals and objectives are met and continued support ensured as well as by the extent to which client needs are effectively satisfied (Hawcroft, 1998).

In other words planning sets the conceptual framework, while the marketing process implements the planning directives as well as creates the desired environment (Weingand, 1994). This integration of the planning and marketing processes is critical to logical management decisions and creating an operational structure that responds to the community needs as opposed to getting entangled in:

... reactive coping with existing and emerging crises.

In the face of inexpensive and easily attainable information offered by interactive technologies the university library is challenged to remain an

important and valued source. Powers (1995) contends that it can no longer be assumed that libraries are valued but rather they must be able to demonstrate that the information service they provide can contribute to the achievement of the organisational goals. To achieve this there is need for a shift from product to customer focus through identifying target user groups and specifying their unique user needs, developing and carrying out marketing strategies to meet these needs and ensuring a constant evaluation of the effectiveness of these strategies (Bushing, 1995).

The strategic marketing process in the university library setting starts with determining the desired future position, which is encapsulated in the library's mission statement and reflects the values and the service philosophy (Lee, 2000). According to Weingand, the development of a customer-oriented service philosophy is embedded in the mission statement and then is reiterated throughout the library-planning documents including the marketing plan (Weingand, 1997). The mission statement identifies the core business and purpose of the library service, the customer base as well as its contribution to the teaching and research process of the university. On the basis of this the library managers are able to identify targeted user groups and their unique needs through market segmentation, develop marketing strategies to meet the needs, carry out promotion and advertising and at the same time engage in ongoing evaluation of the entire marketing process.

Market segmentation is based on the customer rather than the product service and has the goal of providing services that satisfy individual rather than a generalised service. It involves research to determine the quality of the library service and its contribution to the mission and the objectives of the parent organisation, taking into account the various market segments and their needs. Data are collected on the users' awareness and attitude to the library service, customer satisfaction levels, and the major strengths and weaknesses of the library in terms of staff, resources, programmes and facilities (Nicholas, 1998). This marks a departure from promotion of

existing service towards a package of services designed to meet the various target groups in the university such as academics, researchers, and undergraduate as well as postgraduate students. Studying the organisation and users helps create appropriate library services and programmes as well as guide the planning of the right marketing strategy (Cram, 1995).

There are various approaches to collecting information on these issues such as image analysis, and customer satisfaction studies. Image analysis helps to determine the library's image to the university authorities and various categories of users by measuring the perceptions held by particular user groups and the way they perceive the services offered (Bryson, 1999). The different categories of users are surveyed in order to determine their attitudes, awareness, interests and desires in terms of the services provided. Customer satisfaction studies provide evidence whether academic staff and students are satisfied with the current services and can be used to evaluate the services of the library as a whole or individual services or components of those services (Roswitha and Boerkhorst, 1996). Both methods are useful in the university library setting in revealing the quality of services and the users' perception of the whole or individual services offered by the library service such as opening hours, quality of collections, lending procedures, study facilities, reference services, and information literacy and can be a good basis for restructuring operations, human resource planning and arguing for maintaining or increasing existing levels of funding, depending on whether the results are positive or negative.

The development of an effective marketing strategy requires the specification of the marketing mix which incorporates the four "Ps" of marketing: product, price, promotion, and place, and, according to Lee (2000), it is:

... the blueprint for the development, implementation and evaluation of specific services and initiatives.

There are diverse views on what implication the four "Ps" have on library marketing. However, product could refer to the various services offered by the library designed for specific user groups such as databases, information skills

programmes, SDI activities, whose quality depends on their usefulness to the users' information needs (Hawcroft, 1998).

Place could refer to the efforts the library makes to make the services available to the target user groups and includes channels of availability, coverage, locations, inventory and document delivery systems. Hawcroft (1998) suggests that place in the library context is to do with access and therefore includes issues such as providing multiple copies of works in high demand or providing Web-based access to distance learners. Price has been taken to refer not only to monetary cost of services but also to obstacles encountered by the users in accessing the service such as time spend, and unsuitable or user-unfriendly equipment or software (Weingand, 1995). Promotion includes all the activities undertaken by the library to communicate its resources and services to the target user groups through advertising, public relations and direct selling, and the benefits accruing for the library from these activities include increased library usage, increased value in the organisation, better awareness of the information services available and a positive perception (Nicholas, 1998).

The final step in the marketing process is evaluation, which measures the outcomes of marketing strategies, and provides feedback into the marketing process for future marketing initiatives (Kotler, 1997). Weingand recommends two levels of evaluation: program monitoring as the marketing campaign progresses and a final evaluation when it is complete (Weingand, 1998). In either case, evaluation should address questions whether the marketing programme met its goal, its strengths or weaknesses and above all whether it has resulted in improved library services to the various user segments.

## Methodology

This is a case study of the practices of library marketing activities in selected universities in Kenya. The objective of the study was to investigate to what extent university libraries in Kenya are carrying out library marketing programmes. More specifically the study aimed

at, first, identifying what forms of library marketing are carried out by university libraries in Kenya and, second, to explore some of the problems they face in carrying out library marketing activities.

Kenya has six public universities sponsored by the government and five chartered private universities operated by religious or commercial enterprises. Given the qualitative nature of the study, limited finances and time available to the researcher, it was not possible to survey every university in Kenya and it was decided to concentrate on a selected number to produce a case study. Two public universities, namely, University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University, and two private ones, United States International University-Africa and Catholic University of Eastern Africa, were selected and included in this study. These institutions were chosen for their range of enrolment levels as well as courses they offer.

Data for this study were collected through interviews based on an interview schedule with the chief librarians of each of the four universities included in the study. Key questions were:

- (1) How would you assess the role of marketing in the effectiveness of university libraries in Kenya?
- (2) Has your institution in the last five years carried out any of the following marketing activities?:
  - Performance measurement/evaluation.
  - User satisfaction survey.
  - Image analysis.
  - SWOT analysis.
- (3) Does your library use any of the following promotional tools?:
  - Brochures.
  - Newsletters.
  - Notice-boards.
  - Library manuals and guides.
  - Internet home pages.
- (4) For each of these tools mention the target group and assess their effectiveness in communicating with stakeholders.

This study relied on qualitative data collected from a limited number of university libraries.

Information gathered was analysed, combined and presented as a single case study, whereby areas of uniformity and difference are discussed.

### **The need for marketing approach in Kenyan university libraries**

We can identify four basic reasons why university libraries in Kenya need to adapt a strategic marketing approach:

- (1) declining level of budgetary support;
- (2) increased competition from other sources of information such as the Internet;
- (3) changes in educational system; and
- (4) changes in information technology.

Inadequate funding and its accompanying effects such as poor facilities, equipment and resources is a major hindrance to the provision of library services to university community (Republic of Kenya, 1999). University libraries, especially in the public sector, do not have sufficient funds to purchase reading materials such as journals and monographs, equipment such as computers, and enlist the services of qualified staff. This decline in funding has been partly blamed on lack of appreciation of the role played by libraries in the educational process by the academicians, students and those in administrative positions in the university (Lisbeth, 1993). Those responsible for resource allocation in the university do not appreciate the rationale on which reading materials should be purchased yearly and, as such, obsolescence of information and the need to purchase new information to support new courses are not fully understood. This influences attitudes towards library budgets, as they are among the first to be affected by budget cuts in the university, denying both students and lecturers access to appropriate academic support materials. Through this process university libraries in Kenya like other developing countries seem to have fallen into a vicious cycle, whereby, given the political nature of budgeting and competition for scarce resources, budgetary support for libraries is rarely perceived as an essential institutional infrastructure warranting constant support (Raseroka, 1999). Consequently, receiving no direct personal

benefit from library collections, these stakeholders have devalued the library's contribution to their academic progress. With time this has led to a crisis of "self-reproduction and relevance" and the university library has become marginalized from the core business of the university (Zezeza, 1997). In this context of deteriorating support from the parent organizations, university libraries need to re-assess their objectives by engaging with the various stakeholders to find out their real information needs and expectations, so that they can improve the quality of their services to meet these needs.

In Kenya, it has been observed that the university library has become just one among the several sources of information available to the academic community. In a recent study, Rosenberg has observed that, over the last five to ten years, the relative value of university libraries in Africa including Kenya has declined to a near total loss of faith in their own existence and the feeling that they are no longer at the heart of teaching and research and, increasingly, academics and in particular senior faculty members in Kenya have adopted other strategies to obtain information such as personal contacts in the first world to obtain reports and journal articles, writing for reprints, travel outside the country and development of personal libraries, the purchase of key texts and subscription to journals (Rosenberg, 1997a). For undergraduates there is increasing dependence on lecture notes and hand-outs, purchase of textbooks, all which are felt to be in the end more reliable than depending on the university library. The conclusion to be drawn here is that university libraries are no longer fulfilling the information needs of their users and there is need for them to consolidate their roles by undertaking sound marketing strategies that will enable them to understand what are the expectations of the various target groups.

There have been many changes in the university educational scene characterised by increased enrolment both for undergraduate and for postgraduate levels, and changes in methods of delivery and curriculum. For example, distance education has continued to gain popularity in Kenya with many universities creating programmes that target the big demand for higher education in Kenya. There

has also been introduction of evening courses, which have attracted many students. For example, in Kenyatta University alone a total of more than 2,000 students registered for part-time degree courses (Republic of Kenya, 2002). There have been changes in curriculum such as introduction of new courses, all of which require supporting library and information services. All these create new categories of users, by which through market segmentation libraries can identify their unique information requirements and information-seeking behaviour and create appropriate services.

Like many other African universities, Kenya is witnessing a rapid proliferation of electronic networking and use of computerised databases to access information in their libraries (Rosenberg, 1997b). There is evidence of departure from total reliance on print-based information to the use of electronic and digital techniques in information storage and access (Agalo, 1998). For example, both Catholic University of Eastern Africa and United States International University-Africa have Online Public Access Catalogues (OPAC) systems, while University of Nairobi and Kenyatta University are in the process of inputting their records into computer databases. The four universities examined in this study indicated that they are in the process of integrating electronic and Internet-based sources in their collections. Kenyatta University is reported to have established a vote for the purchase of CD-ROMs, while the Catholic University of Eastern Africa library has switched from print to the purchase of most of its indexing and abstracting journals in CD-format. Examples of these are Humanities Index, Social Sciences Index, Philosophers Index, Education Index and Religious and Theological Abstracts. Major advances are reported at United States International University-Africa, where, by subscribing to the Ebscohost electronic database, the library can access a total of 6,000 journals electronically with full text articles or indexes. In this atmosphere of change there is need for data to be collected on the expectations of the users and their current needs, if they are to make good use of the electronic information sources. There is need to find out what users already know about what the library has to offer in terms of new methods

of accessing information and their experiences with electronic information access techniques, so as not only to design information delivery services but also to mount appropriate information literacy programmes to enable users to effectively use these techniques.

### **Methods used and challenges faced in marketing library services in Kenya**

Interviews with heads of libraries included in this study indicate appreciation of the role marketing can play in the effective management of university libraries. There is a general agreement that university libraries in Kenya in the face of poor funding and poor usage need to aggressively market libraries to university decision makers with a view to obtaining more budgetary support. At the same time university libraries need to increase usage by paying attention to the information needs of various user categories in the university.

However, marketing activities in university libraries in Kenya have tended to focus more on promotional and advertising activities. In the institutions surveyed there is evidence of efforts to make users aware of the library services available by informing them about the collection and services of the library through the use of brochures, newsletters, and notice-boards. Library manuals and guides, Internet home pages as well as printed notices have been used to inform fresh students and academic staff about the library, how to use the library, provide rules and regulations, and of the existence of special collections and special services. The Catholic University of Eastern Africa library has been creating subject-specific accession lists of both journals and books that target academic staff in various departments. Libraries have also used annual reports to inform the administrators of the current state of libraries, the challenges and the plans for the future.

This survey also established that a variety of user education and information literacy techniques are mounted for fresh undergraduate and postgraduate students. These include library orientation, library skills courses and individual instruction and are

geared towards making users aware of the resources available, give them skills in how to use them and therefore create an enduring pattern of use. They are also meant to improve the image of libraries and make users feel welcome to use the varied services on offer and seek assistance from library personnel.

It is notable that all the libraries reported to have written down mission and vision statements, which explain their existence, define the audience and kind of services they provide to the university community. They also have stated goals and objectives, which include sets of activities that they hope to undertake to fulfil their mission. United States International University-Africa library has been involved in the five-year strategic planning activity of the university. This enables the library to grow at the same pace as the entire university in terms of buildings and equipment, as well as collections and services.

However, none of the universities examined in this study was reported to have been involved in any formal marketing research strategy such as market segmentation, customer satisfaction studies, SWOT analysis, image analysis, or other formal techniques in collection of data about the user's perception, awareness or usage of the available services or their specific requirements. It is true to say that librarians are aware of some of the strengths and weaknesses in their services, although they have not conducted market surveys; however, it implies that decisions on service organisation and provision are not based on firm data on customer needs, or resources available, but rather on a generalised idea of what these are. Notably absent is a consistent collection of statistics on the various aspects of library service such as library expenditure, collection growth, lending, and interlibrary loans, which would be useful in making sound management decisions.

In the course of promulgating and executing the above-mentioned marketing activities, university libraries encounter various problems. As already mentioned, public universities and to a large extent private universities in Kenya are facing the problem of inadequate funding and its accompanying effects of poor facilities, equipment and information resources, which is a major hindrance to the provision of access to and timely library services to their target

populations. There is therefore concern that any marketing initiative is likely to lead to higher user expectations and bigger demands on libraries, which in the face of present financial constraints they may not be able to meet. Indeed, the absence of adequate funding, which applies to the entire public university system and to some extent the private sector, makes the already stated mission and objectives a dream that is hard to realise. In spite of awareness of particular demands, libraries have been unable to meet the need for up-to-date print materials, maintain journal subscriptions, increase the number of computers for accessing the online catalogues or the Internet or even invest in digital media collections such as CD-ROM.

The concept of marketing of library services, though not new, in Kenya is relatively poorly developed as a professional specialisation. Most of the schools of library and information science do not have curriculum courses and units of study in this area of specialisation within librarianship and where they exist they are not part of the core courses. There is therefore a shortage of professional human resources to manage and co-ordinate strategic market planning. This also limits librarians' ability to come up with forward-looking programmes aimed at providing adequate services to their target populations based on sound marketing approaches.

## Conclusion and recommendations

University libraries in Kenya need to justify their support by parent organisation by demonstrating that they are relevant to the teaching and research of the university and that they contribute to meeting the institutional goals of teaching and research. If they fail to do this they risk being perceived as irrelevant and lead to becoming more and more marginalized in the university educational process. If they are to develop information services that adequately respond to the needs of both academic staff and students, university libraries in Kenya need to be more aggressive in collecting relevant data from users about their needs and expectations.

Marketing approach is useful to understanding users, so as to satisfy their needs

in an effective way. However, as this paper has shown, university libraries in Kenya have tended to concentrate more on public relations and advertising, thus defining marketing in terms informing users about the services already available instead of finding out what are their expectations from the information service. This is not to down-play the role of these activities in the whole marketing strategy. Indeed there is a need for university libraries in Kenya to make their services more visible to customers by creating better awareness of these services as well as of library policies. However, to be useful, promotion activities need to be done within the broader perspective of marketing process, which includes defining the institutional objectives, contacting research market, carrying out marketing strategies and evaluating these strategies periodically to ensure the achievement of the stated objectives.

There is a need for marketing courses to be taught in library and information education in Kenyan library schools. This is in line with world-wide developments in the library and information service field such as use of strategic planning, and increase in the use of marketing strategy in library management. Possession of marketing skills will contribute to a better performance, more aggressive marketing and professional library and information service. Key areas that need to be covered include understanding and applying the theoretical and practical concepts of non-profit marketing to an analysis of library and information organisations: effective measurement approaches to marketing survey design and public relations activities that reflect marketing research.

In conclusion therefore it is clear that a strategic marketing approach should provide university libraries in Kenya with tools that can assist them in the task of designing, developing and delivering appropriate services. It can enable them to start with customers rather than seeing them as the finishing-point in the supply information chain and shift from product and service orientation to customer and need orientation. This will contribute to better perception of the library role in the university set-up, better use and funding of the facility. The bottom line is that, irrespective of methods used, university libraries in Kenya need to

obtain information from as wide a customer base as possible about their information requirements and assessment of existing library services.

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