

# MARKETING YOUR LIBRARY

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## ABSTRACT

*The paper discusses the fact that our market consists of different user groups and the importance of finding out what their needs are. How and where to advertise your library and relating it all to the marketing experience at the Veterinary Science Library of the University of Pretoria.*

Librarianship is not what it used to be. Today's librarians cannot survive without concepts such as mission and marketing. Generally speaking, the mission of librarians is to bring information and people together (5) and they need to set certain goals for themselves to achieve this mission. They also need a marketing strategy to help them to achieve all these goals. To accomplish this, certain steps must be followed.

## MARKET

Firstly you must consider your target market.

In the traditional library world there was the advantage of a built-in market (2). In other words, you had a ready made market just waiting to be served. Today this market looks quite different. When analysing this market you will find that there are different groups and even different subgroups to be considered. The unique needs of each group must be acknowledged and addressed. What appeals to the one does not necessarily appeal to the other (6). In the academic library for instance you have undergraduate students, lecturers, researchers, technical staff who work in the laboratories, and of course the graduandi who have left the faculty, recently, or a long time ago, but they are still a very important sector of the market

You would want all these people to come back over and over again to make use of your services and expertise.

How do you achieve this?

- You must develop a clear and unique identity for your organisation and you have got to have a core service that meets your clientele's expectations (2).
- You must have services of high quality so that the customer gets value for his money.
- You must be consistent and reliable.
- They must feel welcome and comfortable in your establishment.
- You must try to determine who uses the library and why, also who does not use the library and why not.
- You must strive to create a spirit of partnership with your clients.

It can thus be said that marketing means managing the stepping-stones to customer satisfaction and that you have to learn to speak the customer's language, or as South African marketing fundi Prof Sandra Van der Merwe so aptly puts it "We must jump into the customers activity cycle" (7).

## USER GROUPS

You must thus respond to the needs of the community, rather than just merely selling the services of the library to the community. It is a good idea to start with the client group that is the most likely to use your library.

In the business world there is a rule called the 80/20 rule. In short it means that 80%

or your business comes from 20% of your customers.

That's why it is important for instance, not to reward wrongdoing by having amnesty for fines, rather, reward those without fines. According to Martin Johns (3) users can be categorised into the following grades:

- one-off
- occasional
- regular

The regular customers are your 20%, you have to treat them very well.

Johns also identifies one further grade of customer and that is the advocate. The advocate is the customer who not only always makes use of your services, but also tells everyone else that he always uses you because you are simply the best. The more advocates you can create among your customers, the more your library will thrive. So you must constantly strive *to* upgrade your customers.

#### APPROACHING USERS

To find out what the **Needs** and desires of your community are you can try some of the following approaches:

- You can try the coffee and doughnut approach. In other words, personal communications with department heads or deans to find out about new developments, new courses and current research being undertaken.  
(We started off with inviting our dean and associate dean for an informal cup of coffee in our library and we set the basis for a very good working relationship with the leaders of our faculty. You could of course also invite people to the cafeteria, or a restaurant as people in the real world do.)
- It might also be a good idea to gather an advisory committee of staff and students to give you feedback, support and suggestions.  
(We get lots of feedback from the student who works in the evenings in our library. Not only is he a leader in the student

community, but as he is an attractive guy, he also attracts a lot of students to the library, specially students of the opposite sex!)

- Questionnaires are a good way of getting feedback from your community. Questionnaires tell you what you are doing right, what you are doing wrong and what you should do.

Try to get people to sign questionnaires for it is important to follow up on criticism on a personal basis. Criticism will help you to identify weaker areas of your service and that can then be dealt with before other complaints are made. It is a fact that a customer who complains and is sympathetically dealt with is more likely *to* come back than a customer who does not bother to complain (3).

#### MARKETING STRATEGY

How do you create a marketing strategy? You start off with lots of ideas. Ideas come from everywhere. You find them by observing, doing, reading, even dreaming but you've got to have an open mind to be able to recognise these ideas as they come along. You've got to stretch beyond the obvious, break the rules and see where it takes you (4).

Discuss ideas with your colleagues and read the professional literature to stay abreast of new marketing trends.

Write down ideas as they come to you and build up a whole file of ideas.

#### ADVERTISING

How and where do you advertise yourself?

- Advertise the library in unexpected places like the cafeteria or the drinking fountain, or what about the electronic flashboard?  
(We kicked off with the following flash: "If you've got a question, we've got the answer")
- Sending a brochure to parents with the annual students accounts might work wonders for your library. Parents who pay lots of money will want to get as

much value as possible for their money and they just might turn out worthy partners for you and your organisation.

- Include humour and lots of graphics specially when addressing students.
- Your faculty or organisation's official newsletter is a great place to advertise and market your library. It saves you a lot of work and trouble for they have to do the compiling, the layout, the printing and the distributing.
- Bookmarks that are colourful and uncluttered with only a minimum of information are a good way to advertise your library. Remember it is not a brochure and not a newsletter, so keep it simple and only add your opening hours and address if necessary.

Nowadays we have the wonder of the Internet and we can do a lot of marketing without the confinements of geographic barriers. So, although we live in one place, the world's our market. Recently we advertised our *Ostrich* and *Rhinoceros* bibliographies and also our conference on the Internet. You have no hassles with posting and people on the other side of the world immediately receive your message,

- If you have the physical facility you should try to accommodate or host other people's events, such as art exhibitions, discussion groups, seminars and meetings. This way you can get plenty of free publicity and exposure and you will get some of the halo effect. We always make our auditorium available for continuing education meetings of post graduate students and we try to put up displays of books and journals that might be of interest to them.
- Congresses, conferences, and symposia are excellent venues to show off your products and services. We recently had the opportunity of advertising ourselves at the World Small Animal Veterinary Association's conference in Durban. We took computers, printers, a video-machine, videos, books, journals, posters and much more.

It is here that you can really reach and impress clients, especially some of the older ones who are not aware of all the new developments in the information world.

## MARKETING

Of course you will need money for all these marketing efforts and most libraries nowadays have a pretty anaemic budget. At our Veterinary Library we try to do all our displays in a basic colour scheme so that we can chop and change our material and create something different each time without spending lots of money. The same goes for brochures, handouts, and application forms. By using the same basic colours we have created a consistent image and style unique to our institution.

Handouts must be short and must look professional. They must be easy to read and easy to understand. People are busy and are not all on the same level of literacy. A carelessly prepared handout could ruin all your efforts.

## PRICING

Pricing is an awkward affair for librarians especially because library services have always been free. You now have to convince your customer of your WORTH. Remember you are not just selling information services, you are selling the idea of the tremendous value that your information services provide to the customer and his needs (6).

It is also no longer only books that you have to offer but a wide variety of products and services. Your library reaches far beyond its walls. You can be linked electronically to other places in the world and information technology is now an ordinary feature of life (1). Ensure that users are fully aware of ongoing service improvements.

## EVALUATION

You must evaluate constantly to see if your marketing strategy is working and if you have reached your goals. In other words what are the strengths and weaknesses of your strategy?

Don't waste time with futile *efforts*. Rather concentrate on the aspects that work well and try to improve on them if possible. Alternatively, try something completely new. There is nothing wrong with making mistakes, but it is vital to understand why the mistake was made and how it can be rectified.

## CONCLUSION

In conclusion we can say that marketing is an ongoing process of attracting and retaining customers and that marketing programmes must be tailored to the audience.

Marketing is building a bridge between you and your customer. This bridge needn't be straight and it needn't be built in the shortest time either.

Finally I want to leave you as animal health information workers with a question that you can ask yourself to measure your marketing success.

Would Noah have sent out a raft to save you and your staff?

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