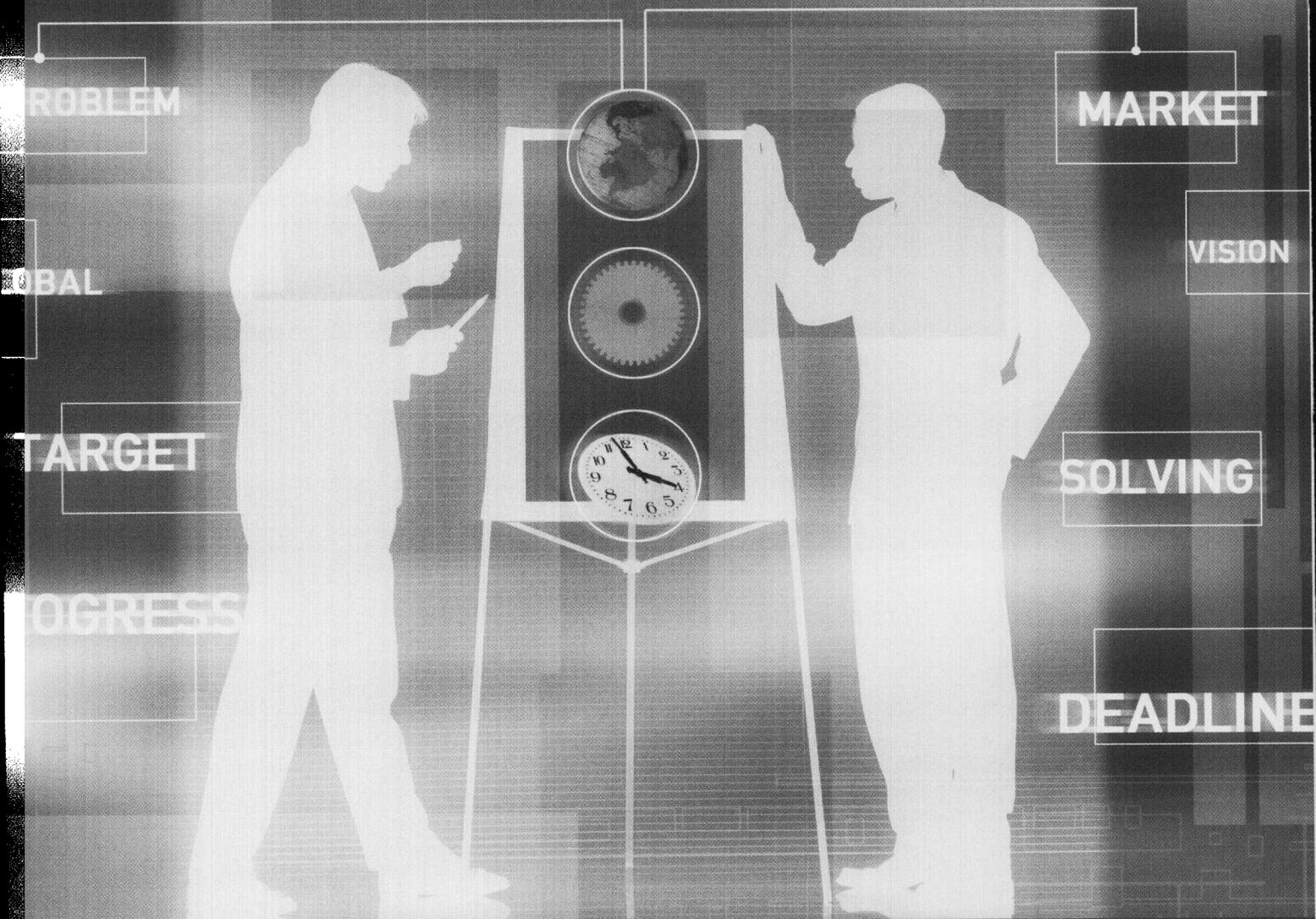
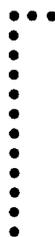


What Is Marketing in Libraries? Concepts, Orientations, and Practices



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WHAT DOES MARKETING MEAN FOR LIBRARY AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS?

In recent years, marketing has been gaining importance in libraries throughout the world. Self-support policies, increasing competitiveness in the marketplace, rising customer expectations, and widening access to information are some of the main reasons for this trend. To survive in such an environment, library and information centers must identify their users' needs and integrate this information into the everyday workings of the library.

The first requirement for successful marketing in library and information services is a clear appreciation for what marketing is and what it can do. Although marketing is not new to library and information services, there are many opinions about what role it plays. Some people equate it with the pursuit of sales rather than customer satisfaction. Others view it as the production of brochures and other low-level marketing communications.

The term "marketing" is established in our vocabulary, although it has been less than three decades since marketing was first applied to the field of library and information services. The premise of marketing is simple and appealing: The customer is at the center of every library activity. This idea is not new—library science thinkers and philosophers were advocating such a philosophy as far back as 1880.

Marketing as Metaphor

There is continuing debate as to whether concepts derived from the business world can readily be transferred to public service organizations such as universities, hospitals, and libraries. It is argued that conventional organizations are funded differently, have different objectives, and operate in a different environment. But while in the past libraries might have been slow to respond to outside influence, they are now as active as their business counterparts in adopting a strategic marketing and commercial outlook. Examples of this activity are the growing interest in marketing techniques, the revamping of services, and the production of corporate videos. At the same time, librarians are also more concerned about having a good reputation and a positive public image.

Satisfying the customer is the primary concern in the marketing process. Users will only come back for more service if they are satisfied; if they are not, they will find a different resource. Thus, the ethos of the organization should value satisfying the customer, and everyone should have a role to play in rendering maximum satisfaction.

A library has to have sufficient understanding of existing and potential users to create superior value for them. This value comes through increasing the benefits to the users. One way to do this is at a customer orientation, which requires that the library understand value to the customer as it is today and as it will evolve over time. This makes marketing more than just finding customers for the available information sources, services, and technologies. It makes marketing a partnership with the user, who becomes a central part of the total service efforts.

Marketing as Philosophy

Philosophy is an inquiry into truth. The philosophy of librarianship encompasses the fundamental principles on which the practices, techniques, and activities of libraries and information centers are based. These principles serve as guidelines for successful librarianship and as a means for resolving problems. The integration of marketing into library services is helpful because it reinforces and reiterates the basic values and beliefs of the profession in a changing environment.

The most widely held belief about library services is that the primary aim is to provide the right information to the right user at the right time. Achieving this goal means reducing barriers to access, enhancing the use of information, and empowering users to access information on their own, particularly through the use of modern technologies.

Approaching marketing from a philosophical standpoint can help any organization achieve the objectives for which it was established. In library and information services, marketing can help us clarify the following aspects of our work:

- A focus on the users' goals and on helping users articulate these at every level.
- A focus on providing an environment in which users can study and work.

- The belief that each user has unique needs, requirements, and expectations when her or she visits the library.
- A commitment to helping the user develop skills to acquire information from various sources.

Marketing library service is not just a question of money, but of the attitudes of the staff and the entire organization. Goods are used, but service is experienced. The public image of service is born primarily out of the experiences of the people who receive the service. This image crystallizes gradually.

We who work in the library are the most important marketing resource. The deciding factors for success are our attitude and our commitment to our users, clients, customers, patrons, or employers. Implementing a marketing approach requires that top management establish the marketing concept and that the frontline departments share responsibility for the customer with the rest of the organization. The marketing concept must guide all functions and departments of the library and must be understood and accepted by everyone—from the chief librarian to the circulation clerk. This process must also establish carefully designed measures of customer satisfaction.

We must remember that marketing library services is not a separate function—it belongs to everyone: It is a way of working and a way of living.

Marketing as a Set of Techniques

Marketing is a series of techniques that make the whole process possible. The process entails defining the objectives of the library, devising the overall strategy to achieve these objectives, making short-term plans and taking action. The following are the key elements:

- An assessment of who the customers are, what services they want now and in the future, and what benefits they are seeking.
- An analysis of the library's strengths and weaknesses.
- An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses of competing library and information agencies.
- An understanding of what the real differences are between this organization and the competition.
- An action plan that draws on this understanding of the marketplace and sets out measurable actions to achieve the objectives.

To successfully use these techniques, you will need market research, pricing strategies, product development, distribution management, and communication.

This approach is oriented toward competitors, which means you must know the short-term and long-term strengths and weaknesses of other libraries and information agencies that are in the same type of business.

Marketing as an Approach

In marketing services, everything—human skills, service



attitude, and information resources—is closer to the customer than in manufacturing. In manufacturing, there is a clear distinction between the manufacturer and the distributor, and between those who sell the product and those who buy it. But in services, customers are often physically exposed to the service operation and usually interact with employees. Purchasers of goods rarely see the factory where the product is manufactured; purchasers of services, by contrast, often visit the factory to consume the product.

There is an extreme interdependence between marketing and the trinity of library and information services (acquisition and organization and delivery. The service trinity includes the following key relationships:

- A library's service strategy must be clearly communicated to its customers.
- The service strategy must be communicated to all employees, from circulation clerks to top management.
- To maintain consistency in services, the strategy must include systems to run the day-to-day operations of the library.
- Organizational systems must support the service staff, and their impact on customers must be understood.

Common Threads

Many individuals within the library organization—not just the frontline staff—are responsible for creating value. A marketing orientation requires that the library draw upon and integrate its human and physical resources effectively and adapt them to meet user needs.

Despite the variety of perspectives on marketing, there is consensus on several points: (1) marketing is essential to survival; (2) an organization that has marketing insight has a greater chance of success; and (3) marketing is an ongoing, essential process for library and information services.

Marketing must be understood and implemented in a comprehensive way. The basic stages—advertising, organizing the marketing sector, and strengthening the market ori-

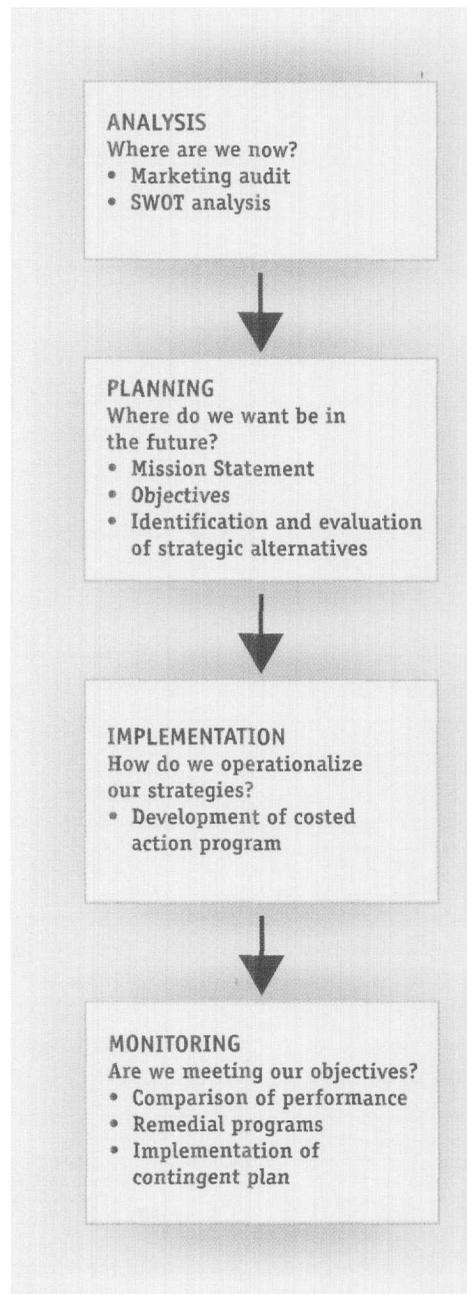
entation of individual divisions of the library—are not enough in today's environment. Rather, all activities must be oriented toward customers. Ecological and social requirements also must be taken into consideration. These requirements might have been voluntary or optional in the past, but they are compulsory now. In order to survive in such an environment, library and information centers need to evaluate their activities in the context of the external environment, get in touch with the users' needs and integrate this analysis into everyday working of the library.

No single conceptual model of marketing can embrace all libraries and information services. Much confusion arises because people do not always realize that these marketing concepts are interrelated, and one cannot be practiced effectively without the other. Also, these techniques lose a lot of their value if they are used by an organization that has not fully embraced the philosophy of marketing.

While there is no particular sequence in which these concepts must be applied to library and information services, Christian Gronroos (Lexington Books 1990) suggests the following order of importance:

1. An attitude or philosophy guiding the overall thinking in the organization, in decisionmaking as well as in execution of plans.
2. A way of organizing various functions and activities of the organization.
3. A set of tools, techniques, and activities, to which customers and other publics of the organization are exposed.

Marketing as a philosophy and the marketing concept must guide all functions and departments of an organization; libraries can no longer afford to maintain barriers between functions and sections. The marketing philosophy must spread throughout the organization, and organizational solutions must support this philosophy. Thus, marketing is a set of ideas that must be integrated throughout the entire organization and overseen by top management.



Successful marketing requires an organized library. Various functions and sections of the library have to be able to compare notes and coordinate planning and execution.

Where Do Capabilities Reside?

Marketing alters the ways in which libraries provide services and information to users, and a library that recognizes marketing concepts will be close to its users. To achieve this closeness, libraries must attend to the following aspects of marketing:

1. Libraries must apply the marketing philosophy to real-world business situations, including issues relating to free service and pricing, basic and value-added services, staff assistance and self-service, in-house and outreach services, and mass customization and individualized service. On the organizational front, libraries must be global and local, differentiated and integrated, tight and loose. They must plan for the long term yet stay flexible. Workers should on the one hand be more autonomous and on the other more of a team. And we must not be confused by the seeming contradictions; we must reconcile the opposites instead of trying to choose between them.

2. Customers, resources, systems, and people are the most important parts of the library environment. When they are considering what sorts of innovations to embrace, library managers must assess how each of these factors might affect the overall capacity of the organization to change.

3. The values of an organization are also important: All employees at all levels must make decisions based on these values.

4. The marketing concept is also important with regard to resources such as information, brand, design, and relationship with suppliers, customers, and end users. Marketing cannot be independently considered without considering resources such as information, brand design, and relationship with suppliers, customers, and end users. Considering these factors will not only improve our image, but will help us identify, understand, and meet their demands. Good marketing efforts take care of all resources and how they can be used efficiently.

5. The organizational systems include well-defined routines and processes, particularly with regard to acquisition and organization. Less visible work processes (such as those performed by library support personnel) can also have a great impact on the organization's performance. These processes are very much influenced by each person's capabilities and disabilities.

6. Our work requires ever-increasing skill levels and better information technology. Within the context of a marketing orientation, our users will benefit from these

improvements in every sphere of library services.

The reasons for adopting marketing in library services are many. At this juncture, there is a need for consensus among information services professionals on marketing concepts, orientations, and practices. We must look at marketing as a way of doing business and an approach that will help us manage better. ☪

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