MARKETING LIBRARY SERVICES ONLINE: STRATEGIES AND CHALLENGES FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

By

Syed Salim Agha
Assoc. Professor and Chief Librarian
International Islamic University Malaysia

INTRODUCTION

The dynamism of the higher education scene in Malaysia continues to have a catalytic effect on the Institutions of Higher Education, both public and private. The competition between and among these institutions is immense. There is an inevitable push by most institutions to reform, to improve and to set and establish higher standards in all fields of endeavour. The demand for quality services from the public, university students, academic staff and management is driving academic institutions to change and change for the better. This same demand is being felt by academic libraries for increased, relevant, useful and sophisticated library services.

Academic libraries in Malaysia particularly from the public institutions continue to remain competitive and relevant to their clientele. Almost all, particularly the more established ones, display continuous development in the various spheres of their development (Abu Bakar, 2002). Integrated library systems have been in place for some time. Staff development in every institution is an on-going process. Many have been awarded the much coveted the ISO 9001:2000 certification. The use of ICT in their processes and operations has increased tremendously. The use of internet and intranet facilities in these libraries has proved its usefulness in a variety of ways (Lee, K.H, 2000 and Kaur, 2000). Access to on-line databases and OPAC's via the internet has seen a surge in the demand for such services. The development of hybrid libraries leading to eventually becoming digital libraries is a definite trend.

The above developments indicate a continuous upward developmental spiral of academic libraries in Malaysia. This naturally has the effect of an incessant and increasing demand by the stakeholders and the user communities for better services and facilities. This becomes all the more crucial with e-learning facilities that are beginning to be used by most of the parent institutions. Responding to these growing needs and demands will remain a continuous challenge to all information professionals devoted to achieving high levels of customer satisfaction.

There is realization that achieving customer satisfaction requires a great deal of study, planning and implementation. Staff training, attitudes, co-operation and teamwork has taken spotlight as a key ingredient in the quest for customer satisfaction. Given all the above, there is a dire need for these academic library professionals to incorporate marketing in their management philosophy. Understanding and applying the marketing process will be essential in achieving customer satisfaction. The increase in the use of

ICT including internet and other technologies in universities adds to the challenge of marketing library services. There is a need to continually adjust marketing strategies and methods to exploit mind boggling features and abilities of technologies that get more and more sophisticated. This is particularly so in the use of internet and intranet which can be used innovatively in so many ways to achieve desired results. Librarians and other information professionals have used internet with such imagination that they have come up with some amazing results. This includes online marketing of library services. This paper will make a quick overview of what marketing is before delving into how online marketing of library services can be put to practice.

MARKETING THE LIBRARY – WHAT IS INVOLVED

In spite of books and articles on the marketing of library and information services, the concept of marketing is still not fully understood by many librarians. In order to appreciate online marketing of library services, a knowledge of what library marketing entails would be useful. In essence marketing encompasses the following:

- Know the purpose of the library
- Identify the core business of the library
- Understand the changing relationship between the library and its immediate and broader environment.
- Know enough about library customers to establish meaningful and mutually beneficial relationship with them.
- Assess and monitor the information needs of library customers periodically.
- Determine the products and services that would best meet the information needs of customers.
- Plan and design identified products and services within the limits of available resources.
- Create awareness among the customers on the existence and availability of products and services.
- Monitor the use of products and services.
- Evaluate products and services periodically.

Viewed from another perspective marketing a library is a process where research, strategy and action are continually taking place at various stages of the process with the purpose of achieving customer satisfaction. Regular interaction with customers enhances greater understanding of customer information needs. Purposeful action to increase the visibility of the library and its services creates constant awareness among customers, which in turn encourages greater use of the library. Regular monitoring of library use and customer feedback help to understand customer preferences and expectations. This then enables a library to go beyond customer demands and expectations leading to the path of achieving customer satisfaction. To consciously practice marketing librarians have to be convinced that marketing is good for libraries. They should be aware that marketing definitely improves and increases the effectiveness of libraries.

MARKETING CHALLENGES IN THE TWENTY FIRST CENTURY

The pace of development and change have had the effect on libraries of coming to terms with a new environment. There is therefore a need to change and to adapt to the new environment or be left behind. Marketing as well is no exception. It has to change and indeed is changing (Tapscott, 1999). Regardless of the change, the result of the marketing effort should add value that is demanded by the organization with economics of scale and scope, more efficient processes and effective utilization of resources.

To keep ahead of competitors, organizations should create and push products and services successfully through innovation and knowledge management. In doing this those involved in marketing should learn new skills as given below:

- To build knowledge and focus.
- To develop interpersonal skills.
- To manage relationship with customers.
- To measure and track work performance of various processes.
- To be more customer focused.
- To know how to make processes more market driven.
- To learn project management skills

For marketing to succeed in the twenty first century the following challenges have to be faced.

- All departments have to participate in the marketing process.
- The need to develop dynamic websites.
- Know about and get involved in the e-commerce processes.
- To know and practice customer relationship management (CRM) and possibly e-CRM.
- Practice knowledge management.

Marketing is becoming more holistic. Everybody in the organization is a marketer. All must pay special attention to who their customer is and the products and services that are being delivered to them.

MARKETING ON THE INTERNET

Many books and articles abound on internet marketing. Many views have been expressed by those who have gone through the experience. As the web continuously changes with new tools being constantly developed approaches to marketing on the internet will have to be adjusted accordingly. Some views are expressed below.

Nature of the Internet for Marketing

It is fast, changes rapidly with new tools being developed quickly. All kinds of new users join in. It is always changing. To keep track internet statistics and growth

websites such as *Global Reach* (www.gkreach.com), *CyberAtlas* (cyberatlas.internet.com) and *Internet World Stats* (www.internetworldstats.com) provide interesting information.

Internet Culture

People who use the internet often are also known as Internauts. They expect a lot of information in the websites they visit. They generally want to receive free information. They expect websites to have good content. They do not appreciate unsolicited mail.

Concepts Regarding Content and Users

Everyone can be a publisher on the internet. To ensure that a site is visited frequently the content and design should be given due attention. There has to be the realization that the internet is a one to one medium and not a one to many as in radio and TV i.e narrow casting as against broadcasting. Marketing on the internet is essentially a pull activity.

Some Do's for Internet Marketing

- Determine web strategy by thorough marketing and competitive assessment.
- Prepare for the speed and reach of the internet.
- Screen design should suit web users. Avoid duplication of design used on print and on TV.
- Have one person who manages internet marketing rather than a group of persons.
- Know and use the tools available that can enhance internet marketing.
- Management involvement is essential.
- Promote the internet together with other media.
- Promote on line as well as offline.

The internet can be used effectively for the following:

- Public relation exercises
- Building a good public image
- As a tool for communication
- For promotional purposes
- To keep people well informed
- To carry out market research
- To make known customer services
- For information delivery
- To receive feedback
- As a point of contact
- To conduct surveys

- To receive online orders
- To reduce cost of advertising
- To sell directly to intended parties

When marketing on the web there is a need to ensure that people will visit the site. Having visited the site there is a need to ensure that the site is revisited again and again. Some ways of achieving this are given below:

- Make sure there is sufficient interactivity on the homepage to ensure they return.
- Maintain a dynamic site where there are always items of internet which keep changing.
- Lots and lots of information well presented arouses curiosity which then encourages frequent visits.
- Make the site a gateway to other links and resources.
- Allow personalization of information. This could prove to be expensive but could bring good returns.
- Have special features like an expert column or a forum for the exchange of experience etc.

STRATEGIC PLANNING PERSPECTIVES OF ONLINE MARKETING FOR LIBRARIES

Conceptually there is little difference between online and traditional marketing. In both cases there are attempts at achieving customer satisfaction to ensure regular patronage by customers, attract new customers, retain present customers and win over lost customers. Relevancy and usefulness of products and services to customer needs is required to make sure there is constant and continuous utilization. The approaches to the effective use of technologies in marketing will need to be studied and experimented with (Rowley, 2002). Rather than marketing online only it might be prudent to mix traditional and online marketing techniques and methods to tap the advantages of both and for mutual reinforcement.

Marketing requires strategic planning. Limited resources have to be maximized. Decisions have to be made as to the best course of action in a given situation. Outlined below are some strategic perspectives that should be given due consideration.

- Maximize on the strengths of Internet and Intranet for marketing.
- Study on how best online and traditional market approaches could be used together for maximum effect.
- Identify methods and approaches for marketing which are cost effective and within the limits of capability.
- Train and prepare staff to carry out marketing related activities.
- Integrate marketing activities into the mainstream functions of the library.
- Determine indicators which denote the effectiveness of the marketing effort.

- Review periodically methods and approaches to marketing for appropriate read justment.
- Explore and consider co-operative marketing and other forms of affiliations and alliances to enhance marketing effectiveness.

ONLINE MARKETING ACTIVITIES FOR LIBRARIES

The potential that online infrastructures offer to marketing are tremendous. Knowledge of the technology, its tools, strengths and limitations combined with lively imagination make possible innovative ways of marketing on the internet. Some suggestions and ways of how library services may be marketed online are given below.

Membership Registration

Online registration for library membership makes it easy for people to apply for membership. The registration processes should be simplified requesting for pertinent information only. An automatic response to the receipt of the application could be made followed in quick succession of membership acceptance providing supporting membership information and other relevant instructions, if any.

Working on the psychology that at the time of registration most applicants are more willing to provide information sought by the library about themselves, the library should take advantage of this. In the interest of wanting to serve customers better, request the applicant to fill up a questionnaire providing necessary data about him, his information needs, the services he expects from the library and other related information. Such information is a goldmine for a variety of purposes including the assessment of information needs and segmentation.

Conducting Surveys

There is a need for feedback flowing in continuously from the customers to the library to be aware of how the customers view the library, its services and facilities. One method of obtaining feedback is to conduct surveys from time to time on specific aspects of the library and its services. To get people to respond to surveys the questionnaires used should be short restricted to a specific aspect of the library. Since conducting and analyzing surveys could be time consuming and demand a great deal of staff time, some libraries have resorted to outsourcing this to agencies willing to offer such services. Online surveys can easily be conducted. A good example, is the Leeds University Library (**http://www.leeds.ac.uk/library**).

There are agencies that offer to undertake online surveys. Some of them are as follows:

- www.custominsight.com
- www.informatix.com.au

- Free Online Surveys.com
  www.freeonlinesurveys.com
- Zoomerang
  www.zoomerang.com
- Advanced Online Surveys
  www.advancedsurveys.com
- Sy Surveys
  www.sysurvey.com
- Cyber Echo
  www.davinci-innovation.wm/cyberecho.htm

Library Bulletins

As is common knowledge library bulletins enable regular communication between the library and its customers. The publishing of a library bulletin in print form is time consuming and has its attendant costs. To save on the cost and time online library bulletins should be resorted to. Of course some time has to be set aside for the creation of each issue of the bulletin and its setting on the screen. The advantages of easy access to all customers outweighs other arguments against it.

Forms and Templates

There is a need for availability on the library homepage of standard forms or templates for users to make book requests, document delivery requests, complaints, suggestions, contributing book reviews and the like. These are helpful devices which make communication more efficient.

Maintaining a Dynamic Homepage

The normal customer reaction to a static homepage is that he will not visit it again. Homepages must be kept current. The layout must be attractive. Some of the content should be updated regularly. Information alerts, interesting new books, the introduction of new services and various items of customer interest will keep them coming back for more. Interaction of this nature will develop a healthy relationship between the customers and the library.

Make Available Book Talks and Other Lecturers

Digital recording of book talks, special lecturers by well known scholars and other such multimedia presentations which have no copyright may be made available for viewing. `

Creative Use of Pop Up Windows to Advertise Library Products

It is a common feature today on the internet when unsolicited pop up windows make their appearance advertising a variety of things. Since such pop up windows are

intrusive and sometimes a nuisance one has to be careful on how this facility is to be used. If such pop up windows could appear on the Institutional Intranet advertising a new library service occasionally then perhaps there will not be any objection to such forms of advertising. In any case, one can always close the pop up windows immediately.

Managing and Advertising Events

If a library is active and engages itself in the organization of regular events then the use of online messaging and communication will enhance the awareness process.

Image Building Activities

Every organization should do all it can to continually put across positive images of itself in the eyes of its customers and other stakeholders. This requires planning and awareness of activities that are carried out, which contribute to the image building of the institution. At every stage of the library's online presence a certain level of quality must be maintained. Language used should be proper and suited to the matter being portrayed. Content should be precise and meaningful. The approach must be one that is helpful with the intent of benefiting the customer. Positive approaches reflect well on the institution.

Online Reference Services

Providing online reference services will be a bonus to customers who are not able to come the library and yet would like to gain access to badly needed information. Many libraries in the west have provided such services either on their own or co-operatively with other libraries. The general hesitation in providing such a service will always be there because of the uncertainty as to how many people would resort to using such a service. The fear is that if there is an overwhelming demand for such a service the staff available may not be able to cope up with the demand. When that happens the service will suffer as customers would get disenchanted having to wait long for a response to the enquiry made. Regardless, the experience and advice of those who have embarked on such a service would be useful (Broughton, 2001; Francoeur, 2001; Patterson, 2001; Diamond, 2001).

Online Library Tours

Creative online library tours have made their appearance on many library home pages (Hickok, 2002; Yi, 2000). This has to effect of saving on staff time to conduct guided tours around the library particularly in a university library. Visitors and guests would be impressed with such a tour without having to actually go around the building.

Online User Education Courses

The hybrid library which dominates the library scene to-day provides information via OPAC, in-house databases, online databases and the internet. Each information

resource or database is unique to itself thus making the process of efficiently and effectively searching for information a little difficult. Current methods of overcoming this problem is to provide special user education courses designed to help library customers conduct their searches quickly and with good effect. Having to do this in a University Library setting has its problems as the library has to deal with a large number of users. Further with the growing popularity and existence of distance education compounds the problem further. Well designed online user education courses for various levels of users may well be the answer to the problem faced (Dennis, 2000; Yc, 2000).

Institutional Electronic Conferences

Since chats are popular on the internet, the possibility of being host to electronic conferences on topics of mutual interest to groups is a distinct possibility. Such a facility will promote the sharing of information and the development of new approaches and ideas on the subjects being discussed. As a host the library could establish terms and conditions on the conduct of such conferences.

Establishing Subject Portals

Building on the expertise or the knowledge capital that the institution possesses a library could decide to establish a knowledge portal on selected subject or subjects. Since a portal is a recognized gateway to a variety of knowledge resources on the chosen subject establishing such a portal enhances the credibility and expertise of the Institution. Enlisting the help of the experts of the institution would strengthen the authority of the portal.

National Gateway to Selected Internet Resources

It is common for libraries to-day to select useful Internet sites on the subjects of interest to their respective institutions. This helps researchers and scholars in saving time searching for information on the Internet. As is common knowledge websites on the internet are not permanent features. For a variety of reasons some websites are closed down while new ones make their appearance. This means that libraries have to continually review the selected sites at regular intervals to update the access to the subject resources. This of course, has the implication that since the process is time consuming the number of subject resources that a library can develop and maintain are limited.

It on the other hand libraries in a region or country decide to cooperate in such an endeavour that the number of subjects that the libraries could cover collectively increases manifold. The establishment of one national or regional gateway to a wide range of subject based sites will have a tremendous impact on the national or regional communities. The positive impact of libraries on society would be more visible.

Managing Institutional Knowledge Resources

For far too long libraries and librarians have limited their functions to published information resources. This is indeed a limitation that has affected their impact on the communities they serve. The organization of knowledge containers differs from the organization of knowledge itself. Libraries should begin to participate actively in the management and organization of the information resources of their parent institutions co-operatively with the creators or owners of the information resources concerned. Such a symbiotic relationship will be mutually beneficial and satisfying.

Maintaining an Institutional Diary of Events and Meetings

It is common in institutions particularly the larger ones to have situations where meetings and events are held on the same day and time involving the same persons. This can lead to embarrassing situations. Further events held may not be well patronized due to lack of sufficient publicity. The library could play its role in maintaining an online diary of events and meetings for everyone in the institution to access. This will not only avoid the problems stated above but strengthen the institutional programmes. The useful role of the library will be acknowledged.

CONCLUSION

The continuous development of technology and associated tools set fire to the imaginative capabilities of the stimulated on the many applications that the technology can be used for and the benefits that can be derived. Combining techno-ability and marketing concepts innovatively can result in achieving spectacular results. A study of the Amazon.com and its marketing approaches is a great source of ideas leading to a fertile imagination and possibly other interesting results.

For libraries in Malaysia wishing to market their services online it is suggested that the approach incorporate the following:

- Have an open mind and a flexible attitude.
- Use a mixture of imagination, curiosity and experimentation in attempting to achieve desired results.
- Determine your purpose for which you wish to market online. This then becomes the motivating force to persist and persevere.
- Be aware of existing knowledge on the subject and evaluate appropriately.
- Encourage and support staff who are comfortable with the technology to experiment and innovate.
- Share knowledge with others as this broadens horizons.

Libraries can be more effective if they incorporate marketing as part of their management philosophy. All staff should be involved in the marketing process. Libraries should resort to mixing traditional and online marketing to reinforce each approach. The survival of the library of the future depends very much on the marketing that is practiced

by it. There is a social cause for which libraries are established. Librarians must be strongly motivated by the commitment to the cause to raise libraries to the level of being recognized as key institutions to impact on social upliftment and a better quality of life.

References

ABU BAKAR, A.B. and Abdoulaye (2002) K. Information resource assessment: a study of digital and traditional library environments. Malaysian Journal of Library and Information Science 7 (2), 25 – 33.

BROUGHTON, (Kelly (2001). Our experiment in online, real time reference. Computers in libraries. 21 (4), 26 – 31.

DENNIS, Stephanie and Kelly, Broughton (2000) FALCON: an interactive library instruction tutorial. Reference Services Review. 28 (1), 31 – 38.

DIAMOND, Wendy and Pease, Barbara (2001). Digital reference: a case study of question types in an academic library. Reference Services Review. 29 (3), 210 – 218.

FRANCOEUR, Stephen (2001). An analytic survey of chat reference services. Reference Services Review. 29 (3), 189 – 203.

HICKOK, John (2002). Web library tours: using streaming video and interactive quizzes. Reference Services Review. 30 (2), 99 – 111.

KAUR K and Singh, G (2000). Malaysian University websites: content and functionality. Kekal Abadi. 19, 1- 6.

LEE, K.H and Teh, K.H (2000). Evaluation of academic library websites in Malaysia. Malaysian Journal of Library and Information Science. 5 (2), 95 – 108.

PATTERSON, Rory (2001). Live virtual reference: more work and more opportunity. Reference Services Review. 29 (3), 204 – 209.

ROWLEY, Jennifer (2002). Information marketing in a digital world. Library Hi Tech, 20 (3), 352 – 358.

TAPSCOTT, Don (1999). Marketing in the digital economy. In 'i' in the sky: visions of the information future edited by Alison Scamwell, London, Aslib,

Yi, Xiao Daniel (2000). Experiencing the library in a panorama virtual reality environment. Library Hi Tech 18 (2), 177 – 184.

Marketing websites

American Marketing Association,	www.AMA.org
Chartered Institute of Marketing, U.K	www.cim.co.uk.
E-marketing,	www.connectionmarketing.com
Marketing research	www.synesis.co.u.k www.mrs.org.u.k
Centaur Publications (produce marketing related magazines)	www.mad.co.u.k
Advertising,	www.ipa.co.u.k
Wireless Marketing Association	www.wirelessmarketing.org.uk

Customer Relationship Management.

AMR Research	www.amrresearch.com
American CRM Directory	www.american.com.directory.com
CRM Community	www.crmdaily.com
CRM Daily	www.crmdaily.com.
ECRM guide	www.ercmguide.com