

The Theoretical Fundamentals of Library Marketing

Ionel ENACHE

Department of Library and Information Science

University of Bucharest

Keywords: marketing, library marketing, functions, principles, factors.

Abstract

This paper tries to bring some elucidations regarding the fundamentals of library marketing. The definitions, functions, principles and factors that influence this new field are presented.

This action is very difficult because of the great number of articles, the abundance of ideas and opinions, but also because of the many controversies and scepticism of some specialists in librarianship and information.

E-mail: ionel_enache@yahoo.com

*

Marketing has enjoyed an increasing interest lately, in the use of its principles, methods and instruments in the most varied domains, beginning with economy where marketing emerged and developed, up to non profit-oriented cultural fields. The autonomy growth, the raising competition on the market and the greater expectations of the clients as well as a more varied access to information are a few of the main reasons which brought to this tendency.

Philip Kotler, a representative figure in the field, has introduced ever since 1969 the idea of an extended marketing in the extra economic domains in view to improving the activity of the organizations which mostly carry out social services, meant to cover the needs of the community without gaining any commercial profit¹.

¹ Philip Kotler, *Strategic marketing for non-profit organisation*, New Jersey: Prentice Hall, 1982, p.12.

The non-profit organizations become more and more aware of the necessity of using marketing methods and techniques in their activity under circumstances in which financial resources are not enough and the competition is tougher. Marketing helps them focus their attention on the essential aspects of their activity, decide how to achieve their goals and especially how to identify, anticipate and satisfy the needs of the clients in the best way possible. Library marketing appeared as an improvement of general marketing and implicitly of the cultural one.

It seems odd to talk too much about marketing in the library. Marketing – they say – is a matter of economic structures whose basic activity is production and whose main purpose is to gain profit. Libraries are cultural institutions, free public services, whose activity is mainly an intellectual one where quality prevails over quantity and consequently there is no need of such a discipline. This kind of reaction ignores the changes which occur in all the domains and implicitly within libraries and the success of this concept as well

Although there is much confusion and even a certain resistance, specialists think that the orientation towards marketing brings about change and improvement and they also claim that marketing is a transforming and adaptation factor of the documentation offer to users' needs.

Even though the usefulness and the facilities of marketing are incontestable, certain awareness is still necessary within marketing activity. Strategic choices are being imposed; adjustment, the establishment of the elements that have to be taken over and the giving up of inappropriate ones depending on the circumstances. In this respect J.M. Salaün thinks that: the fundamental marketing principle must be changed considering the role of the documentation services and the establishment of an adequate

strategy that is altering the relationship of the library (documentation centres) with its users and the community it works for.

The term “marketing” has already become part of our vocabulary, although it has been less than 30 years since it has been used in the libraries and informative services. The marketing principle is easy; the client is in the centre of each library. The idea is not new, the specialists in library held such a philosophy even before 1880. Thus, in 1876 Samuel Green, in his lecture on the occasion of the foundation of the first American Library Association (ALA) was talking about the improvement of the relationship between libraries and their users. A few years later, in 1896, at an ALA conference, Julien Stern showed the necessity of publicity for libraries. Ever since the beginning of the 20th century Andreas Schack issued the concept of “extension work” as a means to attract readers, especially children. Even the classical laws of Ranganathan in the 1930s took into consideration the improvement of the relationship between library and readers.

At present, there is a permanent concern in defining marketing in general and also library marketing. The majority of library specialists agree with the fact that library marketing wants to reveal rational means of communication among those who offer library services and those who ask for them.

Our specialists are more and more concerned with the new field. Thus, Camelia Boca suggests the following definition: “library marketing is an activity oriented towards an effective and efficient information.”¹

In a wider sense library marketing means:

¹ Camelia Boca, “Marketingul în bibliotecă universitară” (Marketing in the University Libraries), *Biblios* 6 (1998): 50.

- to put into practice the needs of real and potential users;
- to permanently improve and adequate the users' needs in order to please them thoroughly;
- to keep in touch with them;
- to estimate their expectations in order to be able to do at once the necessary changes in the informative offer.

The Indian specialists Dinesh K. Gupta and Ashok Jambhekar suggest the tackling of the market library on different perspectives (fig. 1)¹:

1. marketing as philosophy
2. marketing as metaphor
3. marketing as a set of techniques
4. marketing as a means of access

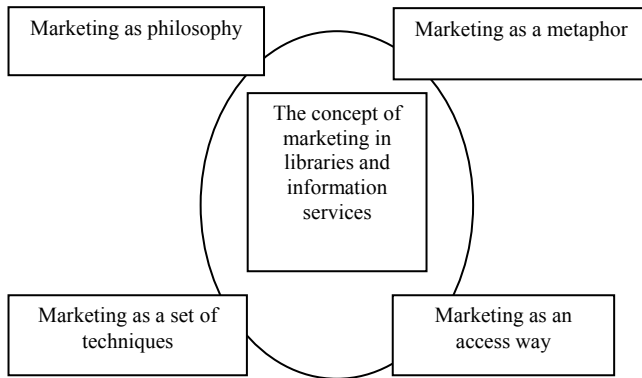


Fig. 1. Perspectives of library marketing

Marketing as a metaphor

There has been much debate whether the concepts derived from the business world could be transferred to organizations which offer public services such as

¹ Dinesh K. Gupta and Ashok Jambhekar, "What Is Marketing in Libraries? Concepts, Orientations, and Practices" *Information Outlook* 11 (November 2002).

universities, hospitals or libraries. An argument against this idea is that these structures have different financial support, different goals and operate in a different background. If in the past, libraries could answer less promptly to external influences, now they are as active as the commercial organizations by adopting a strategic marketing and a commercial prognostic. Examples of this activity are: the increase of interest in marketing techniques, the restructuring of services and publicity production. At the same time, the librarians are focused more and more on a good reputation and a positive public image.

The client's satisfaction is the main concern of the marketing process. The users will come back for other services as well if they are satisfied, otherwise they will look for other sources. That is why the organization will have to constantly evaluate the client's satisfaction and each librarian will have to play a certain role to maximize the client's satisfaction. A library will have to understand its existent and potential users in order to be appreciated by them. This appreciation arises from increasing the users' profit. In this way this could be a certain orientation of the client who wants to know what is the value of the library today and what it will be in the future. This is more important in marketing than even knowing the clients in view to making sources, services and informative technologies available.

Marketing as philosophy

Philosophy is the search for truth. The philosophy of the library includes the fundamental principles on which practices, techniques, the activities of the libraries and of the informative centres are based. These principles represent a guide to the library success and they are means to problem solving at the same time. The integration of marketing in library services is welcome because it emphasizes and

reiterates the basic values and beliefs of the profession in this permanently changing environment.

The most important theory about libraries is that their main purpose is to give correct information in the shortest time possible. The fulfilment of this purpose requires the cutting of information access barriers, to increase access to information and also the authorization of the users to have their own access to information especially through using modern technology.

The tackling of marketing from a philosophical point of view can help any organization fulfil their goals. Within libraries and informative services, marketing can help clear up some working aspects such as:

- focusing on the users' goals and on their guidance at any level;
- focusing on assuring a proper environment for the users to work and study;
- the belief that each user has his own needs and experiences when visiting the library;
- supporting the users to develop their searching skills in looking for the information from different sources.

The marketing of library services is not only a matter of money but also of the attitude of the staff and of the whole organization. The goods are used, but services are experienced. The public image of the service is born mainly from the people's experiences who were specially appointed. The image is gradually improved.

The staff of the library represents the most important resource in marketing. The essential factors of success are the attitude of the staff and the commitment of the clients, managers and employees. The implementation of marketing requires that the top management establishes the marketing concept and shares the responsibilities among the main departments and the rest of the organization. The marketing concepts must guide all the functions and the departments of the library and must be understood by everyone, from the library manager to the librarian. This process must also include the planning of an efficient measurement system of the client's satisfaction.

Librarians must know that the marketing of the library services is not a separate position but it belongs to everyone. It is a way of working and also a way of life.

Marketing as a set of techniques

Marketing includes a series of techniques which make the whole process work. This process supposes the definition of the goals, the choice of the strategies in view to fulfil these goals, the establishment of the short term goals and of the necessary actions. The key marketing elements are:

- an evaluation of the clients and of their expectations, regarding the services for the time being and for the future, what benefits they expect;
- an analyses of the strong and weak points of the library;
- an evaluation of the strong and weak points of the libraries and other competitive informative agencies;
- a clear understanding of the real differences between organization and competition;
- an action plan elaborated on the basis of market agreement and a set of measurable actions to the fulfilment of the goals.

The success of using these techniques needs the investigation of the market, price strategies, the development of the products, the management of distribution and communication.

This approach is oriented towards competition, which means that the library must know the short and the long term, the strong and weak points of other libraries and informative agencies involved in the same field of activity.

Marketing as an access way

In marketing services, human skills, the attitude of the service, the informative resources are much closer to the client than in the industrial output. In community production there is a clear distinction between the producer and the deliverer and between the one who sells the product and the one who buys it. As part of the services the client is involved in doing the service and he usually interacts with the employee. The buyer seldom sees the factory where the product has been made however, for those who buy services the performance takes place simultaneously with the consumption.

There is a great deal of interdependence between marketing and the main processes in a library (acquisition, organization and communication). The specific services of those processes include the following relationships:

- the strategy of the library services must be clearly let known to the clients;
- the strategy of the services must be known by all the employees with the librarians involved in the circulation of the top management;
- the maintenance of the services' consistency, as well as the strategy must include systems according to which the library operations develop permanently;
- the organizing systems must support the staff, and their impact upon clients must be understood.

Although a young domain, library marketing established its own functions and principles. The general functions of marketing can be adopted and adapted by library marketing excepting the maximization of the economic efficiency (of the profit) which mainly distinguishes library marketing from commercial one. Nevertheless, library marketing has its own specific functions: the knowledge of the informative requirements of the users, the adjustment and adaptation to those requirements, the communication and the promotion, the retroaction.

We cannot talk about library marketing without referring to the principles of documentary marketing which guides the whole process:

1. The library must anticipate the users' needs, it must not wait for them to ask for any requests;
2. The relationship between the library and its users must be open and helpful, based on communication and fruitful exchange;
3. The permanent evaluation of the informative needs and requests through research, questionnaires, meetings;
4. The elaboration of adequate products and services;
5. The documentary offer must not be limited to the internal funds, but it must appeal to external sources through networks;
6. The library must stress innovation, creativity, initiative;
7. Strategic marketing must retroactions, re-evaluation, adaptations of the whole process.

There are several factors which influence library marketing. Among these, new technologies, information as goods (commodities) and the profit operate with the strongest force.

The new technologies

Besieged by the pressure of rising prices, by budgetary restrictions, by labour complexity, libraries have been attracted by new technologies.

The technological progress has been spectacular, especially in the computer field, including stocking possibilities and facilities of data retrieval. Libraries have quickly come to see technology as a real panacea. Although technology did not prove to be salutary, it is definitely important. Owing to technology, libraries have immense possibilities of processing the publications; it has become a precious tool in the management of information, especially in stocking and retrieving activities.

In a library environment it is quite difficult to recognize the flows of technology, because the main purpose of information management (gathering, processing, memorizing, retrieving and sending information) is accomplished. A critical point of view on technology and on its flows was brought into subject owing to the pressure of the budgetary compulsion.

Automation and adjacent technology undoubtedly allows the stocking of a great deal of data; furthermore, through telecommunication and network, the library has an ever wider access to external databases. Technology offers the most powerful instrument in handling, stocking and accessing data. Thus, the library strengthened its function of an informative centre, of resource for the research domain. In fact, the gap lies between the library needs and the financial resources at hand, because modern technology costs.

Information as merchandise

The new information and telecommunication technologies modify libraries' investments. The more we invest, the greater the number of information is and services become more rapid. Libraries must search and find new methods and strategies to strengthen financial support. Services offered by libraries can be "commercialized".

To have a practical market economy it is necessary to be aware of those new phenomena. The first step forward to market economy is the introduction of paid services. There has been much debate on the principle of totally free services.

Tradition imposes totally free services, which does not mean that the services offered cannot be improved. Even if libraries change, surpassing the traditional stage, they cannot become simple informative services. The library has a special place as a source of information and cultural background with real formative and moral virtues. The reductionist idea, according to which information is merchandise like any other, produces a series of simplifications, and also dangerous deviations

from the library customs, from the universal cultural background.

We must emphasize the fact that the libraries' resources will now be assured by their own activities without damaging the fundamental function of the book as institution and of the citizens' right to free information and free culture¹.

Libraries cannot survive on the principle of self administration alone. Just like other cultural institutions, they need subsidies. It has become more evident that merely by government support or other financial means it is neither possible to assure a satisfactory level of library services, nor to satisfy the ever growing wishes of those who use the libraries. The beneficiary is ready to pay more money for one single piece of information. In our society only few libraries hold such information. In market conditions it is necessary to gather and create information that can become merchandise. At present there are many opportunities for the libraries to trade services. Those beneficiaries who pay for the library services become important; it is particularly them who must be found, as well as their interests concerning information.

The requirements of the beneficiary compel the library to break its professional narrow-mindedness to integrate itself within other institutions in order to improve its technology and to make information accessible to the user.

In opposition with all these changes in the life of libraries, almost everywhere the access to free information was interpreted by the beneficiaries as something they deserved. But many times the prejudice arose: "whatever is free is without value".

Sooner or later it will be understood that information must be paid for, and thus reactions of the following type will arise: to pay for information is immoral..., "yesterday everything was so fine, comfortable and free".

The profit

The present tendency of libraries is to increase their resources by introducing modern marketing methods, which become useful when expanding the libraries' commercial concern on condition that the resulted profit is turned into further resources in order to improve the libraries' activity and not as a means of diminishing and withdrawing public subsidy or financial support.

¹ Emil Vasilescu, "Marketingul în biblioteci" (Library marketing), *Biblioteca* 9-10 (1993): 26.

Marketing methods may influence the reconsideration of the services offered by improving the card indices, by automation and by association with national and international services. It is thus necessary not only to improve the offer, but also to take promotional steps of knowing the libraries' resources and of attracting new groups of users.

The idea that non-profit institutions must not do their best in order to gain profit is obsolete. It is very good for them to gain profit to improve and enlarge their service offers, as people make choices when it comes to the source of information they use. For libraries to survive it is necessary that they should sell their offer and products based on certain needs and wishes which must be correctly identified. In order to be successful in marketing libraries must have superior products and services.

Librarians' professional awareness based on totally different principles is against the new tendencies and hardly responds to the new expressions "the market and the library", "marketing and library". The librarian with a marketing thinking will not be enthusiastic when seeing the beautiful collection of books on the shelf. He will search for the clients, for the persons who want to use the information.

Today it is already obvious that the income will change stereotypes in the relationship between libraries and users, between different libraries and the libraries' employees. Faced with such a complicated future, libraries cannot afford avoiding any idea referring to the way in which libraries should perform their activity in the best possible way.

Libraries should be aware of the fact that the radical changes of financial conditions will bring to a tackling of the activities and services specific to the economy of the enterprise. Hence there is a considerable need of the libraries to justify themselves. Thus, the strategies and marketing measures take over main tasks, which mean that the adaptation of their own services and the informative offer to groups of users properly defined must be part of this marketing activity. Through developing such strategies, libraries will better understand the needs and wishes of their clients. Marketing practices must suit practical conditions. The marketing concept of each library must be elaborated considering local conditions.

The benefits of a marketing program for a library could be relevant whether within improved public services (the results of an increasing focus on the necessities and interests of target groups served

by the library) or in a rising efficiency in attaining the goals of the library through a systematic revision of the marketing program.

Most of the employees in the library, but not necessarily those from the boarding staff are responsible for creating value. The orientation towards marketing requires that the library should integrate the human resources and the physical ones and adapt them in such a way that they could satisfy the beneficiaries' requests.

Besides opinion differences in marketing, there is an agreement in different ideas:

1. It is essential that marketing should survive;
2. An organization in which marketing was implemented has more chances of success;
3. Marketing is an essential process for libraries and informative centres.

Marketing must be understood and implemented in a comprehensive way. Training courses for promotion, the organization of marketing departments, and the marketing orientation of the staff are not necessary in the present background. All the activities must be focused on the client. Ecological and social aspects must also be taken into consideration. The aspects which were voluntary or optional in the past are now compulsory. To survive, libraries and information centres need a permanent evaluation of their activity in the context of the external environment in order to satisfy the users' requests and to integrate their analyses in the daily activity of the library.

There is no marketing model to be applied to all the libraries and informative services. There is much confusion because people do not always realize that marketing concepts are interrelated and one cannot be effectively applied without the other. Also, marketing techniques are of no use if they are used in an organization which has not entirely adopted a marketing philosophy.

Although there is no definite succession of the marketing concepts which must be applied in a library, Cristian Gronroos (1990) suggests the following according to their importance:

1. An attitude or a philosophy guides the whole thinking within an organization from taking decisions to the plan fulfilment;
2. A certain way of organizing functions and activities within an organization;
3. A set of instruments, techniques and activities to which the whole public is exposed.

Marketing as a philosophy and the concept of marketing must guide all the functions and the departments of the organization; libraries cannot afford too much time to maintain barriers between functions and sections. Marketing philosophy must include the whole organization and the organizing solution must support this philosophy.

Thus, marketing is a set of ideas which must be integrated into the organization and checked up by the top management. The success of marketing requires an organized library. The varied functions and sections of the library must be able to confront permanently the plan with its fulfilment.

Marketing changes the way in which libraries offer services and information to their users and a library which accepts the marketing concepts will be closer to them. To accomplish this approach, libraries must pay attention to the following aspects:

1. Libraries must apply the marketing philosophy of business situations in the real world, including free services and paid services, basic situations and special ones, assistance from the staff and direct access, internal and external services, mass services and personalized ones. On the organization plan a library must be global and local, differentiated and integrated, solid and flexible, especially on a long term. The employees must be independent but they must also work in team.
2. The clients, the resources, the systems and the people are the most important elements of the library environment. The managers of the library must know how each of these factors can influence the changing capacity of the organization.
3. The values of the organization are also important. All the employees at any level must take decisions based on these values.
4. The marketing concept is also important with regard to the resources such as information, brand, design, and the relationship with the suppliers, the clients and the beneficiaries. Marketing cannot be independent from these resources. By considering these factors, not only the image will be improved but also the library will help to find, understand and welcome the clients' requests. A good marketing must take into consideration these resources and the way in which they can be efficiently used.
5. The organizing system includes routines and well defined processes, especially those concerning acquisition and

organization. Less evident working processes could also have a serious impact on the organization's performances. These processes are greatly influenced by the talent and skills of each employee.

6. A high level of training and a better informative technology are necessary. In the context of a marketing orientation, the users will benefit from the improvements in each area of the library and their satisfaction will be greater.

The reasons for adopting marketing in library services are multiple. In the present situation, there is need of agreement among the professionals of the informative services concerning the concepts, the orientation and marketing training. Marketing must be regarded as a means of doing business (even in the library) and also as a possibility to succeed.