

INFORMATION MARKETING IN SRI LANKAN ACADEMIC LIBRARIES

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ABSTRACT

Describes a study that investigates the marketing of “free-based” information services in five selected academic libraries in Sri Lanka. A total of 5 senior librarians were interviewed and 250 library users answered questionnaires. The study revealed that all the academic libraries offer free information services to their clients with the exception of photocopying and document-delivery services. The academic libraries should aggressively market their services/products and must move from the provision of traditional library services (book loans) to a more IT based information services (Internet).

Keywords: Information marketing; Free-based information services; Academic libraries; Sri Lanka.

INFORMATION MARKETING AND LIBRARIES

Although the practice of marketing originated, evolved, and developed in the business and profit sector, new trends of management has focused the attention an adopting these marketing principles to the non-profit sector. The implication of the term ‘profit’ has been broadly expanded and, even in the commercial sector, profit is believed to be not only the financial achievement but also the achievement of welfare, goodwill and other objectives of the organization. Financial profit is not the sole objective but essentially is the condition for survival in the competition. Profit is a potential for survival, but the success of the organization depends upon the overall performance related to the company. Non-Profit Organizations (NPO) such as hospitals, libraries, educational institutions, charity clubs and other social bodies do not have profit potential, but they deal with financial allocation, resource management, manpower handling, and strategic planning for their tasks. Aims and objectives of these organizations are based on their performance, and they cater to social needs rather than commercial needs. Thus, in order

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to accomplish these aims and objectives, non-profit organizations have recently adopted marketing techniques, which were once used in the commercial sector.

As the transition from industry based socio-economy to information-based economy occurs, the term marketing has been extended to include the library and information sector. Information has become an important commodity required daily and there is an apparent shift of power in today's society from industrial ownership to information ownership. Consequently, information is subjected to various economic measures and values. Thus, information can now be sold, exchanged, borrowed, transmitted and dominated with a financial context.

Johnson (1994) stated that librarians could not live in the past, even though some have been guilty of this, but must look to the future and anticipate what another decade may bring. Modern libraries have to be managed according to modern practices, considering market forces and the current economic climate. Libraries are still regarded as library heritage centers by many people outside the library profession and it is important for libraries to justify their existence in modern society. If librarians were to take the future of their services seriously, they will have to plan for it, allowing for current trends and predicting future trends that will affect library services.

Organizations engaged in marketing whether they know it or not, but with varying degrees of success (Chivers, 2000). Marketing represents an integrated way of offering library services that includes adjustment to environmental influences, analysis of the needs and goals of current users and potential users, imaginative design of services, targeted communication, attractive and conveniently located facilities, and value of service that exceeds the user's cost of attaining it. A library is a non-profit organization that is based on theories and philosophies and their objective is to serve the people and function in a framework of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling their activities under general or specific management strategies.

The marketing concept was developed in the early 1960s. Kotler (1985) describes it as a situation where "most human societies work on the principle of exchange which means that people become specialist in the production of particular products, and then trade them for the other things they need". The term marketing has been developed as a discipline where various theories, principles and strategies are introduced to achieve efficiency and effectiveness of the process of exchange. Organizations vary according to their objectives and purposes. Initially, the practice of marketing principles were mostly seen in profit making enterprises which had been established and organized to achieve financial success. Nowadays, marketing principles and strategies are used in both the

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profit making business sector as well as in the non-profit/service organizations such as hospitals, libraries and postal services. However, some adjustments are needed to suit those principles in the non-profit sector. For example, within the library sector, the aims should be for user satisfaction and the fulfillment of objectives rather than earning a profit. Libraries practice stock control, plan, provide services to target groups, charge membership fees, and fines for overdue books. Therefore, the concept of marketing is not new for organizations like libraries. Library managers have to follow modern marketing principles. Coffman (1995) noted that “while libraries have been closing or struggling to stay afloat, enterprising companies have begun to discover the commercial potential of what libraries do, and are competing with us to sell much of the information the public has declined to pay for through taxes”.

Today’s library professionals need to undertake market research and market planning to implement library and information services targeted to a well-defined segmented market. Some libraries seem to succeed in their efforts to recover costs and implement profit marketing. Although, the concept of information marketing as a discipline is new for some under-developed countries, it is well discussed as a subject in developed countries such as the United States, Canada, and the United Kingdom. Some librarians and information professionals have consciously practiced marketing principles and strategies at their work place. For example, some academic libraries have undertaken user surveys, user education programmes, and current awareness services targeted towards a particular user group. Strategies such as market research and market segmentation are well-established marketing principles. Most library, provide these services without any conscious knowledge of marketing principles.

OBJECTIVES

The study aims to examine the nature of information marketing in academic libraries in Sri Lanka. Focus was on understanding how libraries provide their services and products for existing users and how they attempt to market their services to potential users. The objectives of the study are :

- a. To identify the users of free-based information services
- b. To investigate the nature and extent of existing and potential market for academic libraries in Sri Lanka
- c. To understand the product/service potentials of academic libraries in Sri Lanka
- d. To determine marketing strategies employed by the academic libraries and identify ways in which academic libraries advertise promote their services, and
- e. To identify problems encountered in the marketing of library and information services.

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Subsequently, the study hopes to answer the following research questions :

- a. What are the free-based information services available in academic libraries in Sri Lanka?
- b. Which free-based information services can be marketed efficiently?
- c. What are the marketing strategies adopted by the academic libraries?
- d. Are the users satisfied with the free-based information services provided by the academic libraries?

METHODOLOGY

The sample was drawn from five academic libraries and two hundred fifty users in selected academic libraries in Sri Lanka. The sample survey method and the descriptive analysis approach were used to generalize search results.

The study concentrated on the application of marketing principles to academic libraries and related information services, but the findings can be applied to any type of library. The main concern of the survey is to renew the existing position of the market and potential services related to academic libraries. However, the study has two limitations :

- a. Only five academic libraries and 50 users from each academic libraries in Sri Lanka would be sampled to gain information about their libraries, and
- b. Only information services provided by the library are included and other profit making services such as book selling, renting of the auditorium, and canteen services provided to the users, are excluded.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

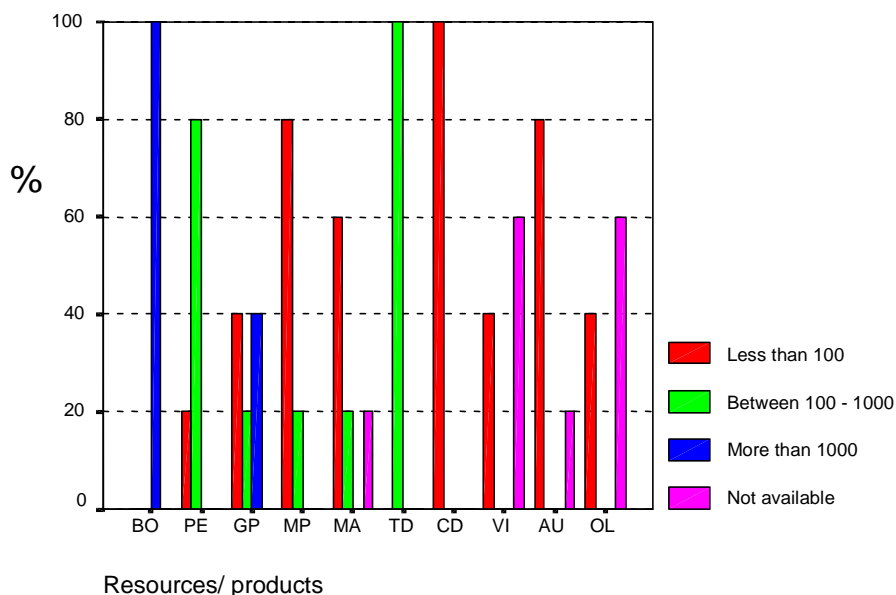
(a) Availability of Resources.

Libraries should have a resource collection that is sufficient enough for the users or market to the extent that they are satisfied. This resource collection must be comprehensive, updated, properly organized, weeded frequently, and should be easily and readily accessible to the client or market. Resources in the library can be of various types such as print materials, microform publications, electronic media products, and audiovisual or any other form of material that helps to provide information to users. The library produces and output services using these available resources. The success of resource management is very important for the proper use of the library so as to ensure the effectiveness of library services. A library's strength is generally determined on the basis of the resource collection, which plays a major role since it provides raw materials for the library products , i.e. information service provision.

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Figure 1 shows the types of resources available in academic libraries in Sri Lanka. All libraries surveyed have a book collection that exceeds the amount of 1000 books. Periodicals, including journals, newsletters, annual reports and other such publications, are the next available resource. Only a few resources available are in the form of microfilms, electronic media, audio/video recordings and online searching facilities.

Figure 1: Availability of Resources in Academic Libraries in Sri Lanka



where,

BO = Books

PE = Periodicals by titles

GP = Government publications

MP = Microform publications

MA = Manuscripts

TD = Thesis and dissertations

CD = CD-ROM

VI = Video

AU = Audio

OL= Online databases

(b) Services Available

The major product of the library constitutes services provision that can be purely intangible services or associated with physical products. Libraries use print, electronic or other sources to provide various information services to clients based on their requirements. The study examined a number of factors that are considered potential in the library service. Table 1 indicates the various services that are provided by academic libraries in Sri Lanka.

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Table 1: Types of Services Provided in Academic Libraries, Sri Lanka

Services/products	Available	
	Number	%
Reference services	5	100
Lending services	5	100
Inter library loan services	5	100
Document delivery via: Photocopy	5	100
Fax	2	40
E-mail	2	40
Printouts	2	40
Down loading in.	2	40
Electronic sources:- Online databases	1	20
CD-ROM	2	40
Reproducing/repackaging :- Digest	0	0
Abstracts	0	0
Translation	0	0
Current awareness	5	100
Information consulting	0	0
SDI services	0	0

(c) Library Market

The library should understand its existing and potential market before designing and implementing its services/products. Users, potential users, and non-users differ from library to library. Table 2 shows the market segments for Sri Lankan academic libraries.

Table 2: Types of User Groups/Market Segments for Academic Libraries, Sri Lanka

User group	Existing	
	Number	%
School pupils	0	0
Undergraduate students	5	100
Postgraduate students	5	100
Academic staff of the parent body	5	100
Other staff of the parent body	5	100
Employees from other institutions	1	20
Special researchers	1	20
Media	0	0
Alumni	0	0
Researchers	2	40
General public not included in the above	0	0

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It clearly indicates that the academic libraries tend to focus on serving the internal market rather than attracting external market segments.

(d) Pricing of Services/Products

Organizations need to value their services/products with the aim of obtaining a financial return from them. The value exists as the price of the products and this price can appear in various forms. Libraries can price their services/products in the form of membership fees, subscription, searching charges, etc. Pricing of the product is aimed at gaining a profit for cost recovery for the organizations. A library as a non-profit organization does not sell their products for profit but for recovery, maintenance and other related costs. Table 3 shows the extent of charging undertaken by academic libraries in Sri Lanka.

The majority of academic libraries do not charge for their services. Only 20% of the libraries sampled charges for inter-library document delivery. Generally, these libraries do not show substantial interest in cost recovery or profit potential of information services.

Table 3: Types of Cost Recovery / Profit Potential of Academic Libraries, Sri Lanka

Services/products	Yes (charge)		No	
	Total	%	Total	%
Reference membership	0	0	5	100
Lending membership	0	0	5	100
Bibliographic searching	0	0	5	100
Database searching	0	0	5	100
Reservation of library materials	0	0	5	100
Document delivery	1	20	4	80
Inter library loan	0	0	5	100
Information consultancy	0	0	5	100
Repacking/reproducing information	0	0	5	100

(e) Distribution of Products

An organization must arrange means and ways for the distribution of their products/services. Clients for the distribution can vary and modes of distribution are the means, which convey the products to the end users. Successful marketing is dependent on the potential for distribution. Library distribution channels are established through branch libraries or any other agents that distribute the services/products of the library. The services of a library are distributed through outlets such as the issuing counter, OPAC, information desk and the staff (professionals/paraprofessionals/others). Thus, opening days and hours are important measures for the library to disseminate information. Service

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hours must be convenient to the majority of the user segments and must be compatible with their needs. Table 4 shows the operating hours of the sampled academic libraries. All the academic libraries extend their opening hours during the examination weeks.

Table 4: Opening Days and Hours of the Academic Libraries, Sri Lanka

Opening hours	All weekdays				All weekends			
	8.00am to 8.00pm	%	8.00am to 7.00pm	%	8.00am to 6.00pm	%	8.00am to 5.00pm	%
Number of academic libraries	3	60	2	40	3	60	2	40

(f) Promotion/Communication of Products

Libraries should promote their products/services through advertising, publicity, and other promotional programmes. In other words, the library should communicate what it has to the customers.

Table 5: Factors to be Considered in the Marketing of Library Services/Products

Factors	Mean	Std. Deviation
Quality of the services	4.00	.00
Profit	2.00	.71
Speed of the services	3.80	.45
Expressed user demand	3.20	.45
User satisfaction	3.80	.45
Advertising	2.20	.84
Possibility to approach new customers	3.00	1.22
Gaps in the market	1.80	1.10
Personal relationship	2.80	1.30
Customer care	4.00	.00
Popularity of the library	3.40	.55
Cost effectiveness	2.60	.89

Table 5 shows the various factors that should be considered in the marketing of library services. However, the study found that the academic libraries are in adept at conducting promotional activities, which are crucial for successful marketing campaigns. Most of the libraries used traditional modes of advertising: newsletters, journals, user education

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programmes, current awareness programmes, organizational letterheads, exhibitions, presentation and demonstration. None of the libraries advertised using newspaper/radio/television advertisements, bookmarks, logos and posters.

(g) Problems Encountered in Marketing

Academic librarians in Sri Lanka apply marketing principles poorly in their work. Thus, it is crucial to identify and understand the problems that affect their marketing performance. The study was able to identify various problems encountered by the academic librarians (Table 6).

Table 6: Problems Encountered in Marketing of Library Services by Academic Libraries

Problems	Yes		No	
	Total	%	Total	%
Lack of trained staff	5	100	0	0
Marketing of information is not cost effective	2	40	0	0
Lack of legal administration from the parent body	4	80	0	0
Lack of proper technology	5	100	0	0
Investment for the library insufficient	5	100	0	0
The place where the library situated is not convenient	2	40	2	40
There is no demand for available information	2	40	2	40
Information market in the country is poor	1	20	0	0

(h) User Satisfaction With Library Services/Products

User satisfaction level seems to be in very low in terms of the provision of library services/products in academic libraries in Sri Lanka. Most libraries tend to conduct traditional services/products such as book loans, book reference services, periodicals and government publications. In line with the development of information technology, there are now more user-friendly electronic services in libraries e.g. online databases, CD-ROM, microfiche, electronic libraries, and the World Wide Web. These newer library services have more potential to satisfy users. Thus, library personnel must conduct surveys to determine their users' satisfaction with the information services offered in the academic libraries. Table 7 illustrates the users' satisfaction with the services currently available in the libraries. Services with a mean value 2.50 and above are traditional library services. Those with a mean value of less than 2.50 are the so-called marketable services.

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Table 7: User Satisfaction Level about Academic Library Services in Sri Lanka

Products /services	Mean	Std. deviation
Books loan	4.62	.60
Reference collection	4.62	.59
Books reference	4.58	.58
Periodicals (journals, newspaper, etc.)	4.37	.64
Thesis/ Dissertation	4.22	.84
Government publication	4.11	.61
Photocopy service	3.80	.85
Reference desk	3.56	.98
Manuscripts	3.38	.80
Document delivery	2.94	.75
Inter library loan	2.87	.69
CD-ROM	2.35	.48
Microfiche	2.29	.89
Discussion room	1.98	.99
Internet	1.94	1.24
Video	1.54	.73
Online searching facilities	1.53	.71
Audio	1.51	.69
Online database	1.50	.67
SDI service	1.27	.59
Information consultancy	1.00	.00

(i) Current Pricing Practices

Pricing the library services/products is more helpful for the maintenance and the development of the library services/products. Due to limitation of funds, the libraries find it very difficult to further develop their organizations. All libraries surveyed do not charge for library membership. Thus, all Sri Lankan academic library services are free for their clients. But, all academic libraries charge for photocopy services and only 20% academic libraries charge for document delivery (Table 8).

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Table 8: Charges for Library Services in Academic Libraries in Sri Lanka, N = 250

Service / Products	Fee		Free		Not applicable	
	Amount	%	Amount	%	Amount	%
Lending service	0	0	250	100	0	0
Reference service	0	0	250	100	0	0
Periodicals, journals, newspaper	0	0	250	100	0	0
Manuscripts	0	0	250	100	0	0
Thesis / Dissertation	0	0	250	100	0	0
Video	0	0	100	40	150	60
Audio	0	0	200	80	50	20
CD-ROM	0	0	250	100	0	0
Online databases	0	0	100	40	150	60
Internet	0	0	100	40	150	60
Reference collection	0	0	250	100	0	0
Online searching facilities	0	0	100	40	150	60
Microfiche	0	0	0	0	250	0
Document delivery	50	20	200	80	0	0
Interlibrary loan	0	0	250	100	0	0
Information consultancy	0	0	0	0	250	100
Reference desk	0	0	250	100	0	0
SDI service	0	0	50	20	200	0
Photocopy service	250	100	0	0	0	0
Discussion room	0	0	150	60	100	40

j. User Attitude about Free or for a Fee Library Services

Before marketing a product, it is very important to conduct a survey on the users' attitude towards the product. Library services cannot be equated with other consumer products. If customers/clients do not like to pay for some services/products, charging for it will be meaningless. Table 9 shows the reasons given by users for free-based information services/products. The study showed that 58% of the users sampled do not like to pay for library services/products, 34% like to pay for library services/products and 8% do not have an opinion on this matter.

Table 9: Users Opinions about Free or Fee for Library Services in Academic Libraries

Users opinions	Percentage
Library services should be free in a country where education free	30
Poor student cannot pay for library services	10
Unwillingness to pay for unsatisfactory services	20
Willingness to pay for satisfactory services	18
Library services should be developed accordingly with advancement of information technology, in this case some services can be charge	22

CONCLUSIONS

Based on the study, the following conclusions can be made about Sri Lankan academic libraries :

- a) Academic libraries in Sri Lanka have a substantial amount of resource collection. Printed materials exceed electronic and other information sources in these libraries. All these resources can be combined to generate more information services/products.
- b) All academic library services in Sri Lanka are provided free for their clients. However, all academic libraries impose a charge for photocopy services and a further 20% of academic libraries charge for document delivery.
- c) There is a potential market for more sophisticated information sources, which have a broader potential for service provision. However, the academic libraries are more concerned with the acquisition of conventional library materials, and this is further supported by the users' satisfaction with conventional library sources.
- d) Although academic libraries have adequate resources and sufficient level of markets, they seem to conduct conventional library services rather than the more innovative, advanced and diversified services/products.
- e) Services that are available in academic libraries do not focus on potentials but the libraries tend to maintain the normal services for their existing user market.
- f) Most users are willing to pay for better library services/products.
- g) Distribution of products is an important factor in marketing. Libraries can make use of many distribution channels. This study included service hours because opening days and hours play a great role in the distribution of library services/products for libraries. The study indicates that distribution channels of academic libraries are very high. All academic libraries are open on weekdays and weekends. Yet on weekends, they tend to limit their service to fewer hours than weekdays.
- h) Very little attention has been given for the promotion of services in academic libraries. Most of these libraries use general and traditional programmes such as current awareness activities, user education, newsletters, letterheads, and personal promotion (presentation) for the promotion of services.
- i) The users rate the conventional libraries services/products as highly satisfactory.
- j) User satisfaction level in academic libraries in Sri Lanka is very low. Yet the adoption of marketing principles and strategies for service provision is poor. This can lead to under-utilization of these libraries.

Thus from this study, it can be concluded that most of the academic libraries are unaware of the importance of marketing in libraries. A lack of understanding of the marketing

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process hinders marketing in libraries. Marketing is only carried out “unconsciously” in the academic libraries in Sri Lanka. Instead of product orientation, the library service should be based on customer orientation, where customer needs are given priority when the library performs its acquisition, service planning, dissemination and handling of information services.

Therefore, in order to overcome the problem of under-utilization of academic libraries in Sri Lanka, there is a need to adopt marketing practices for the provision of services. Thus, it is recommended that :

- a) Library services/products must be re-oriented from conventional services to innovative, advanced and diversified services.
- b) Library personnel should be made aware of the concepts and principles of modern marketing. This can be performed through the holding of workshops, seminars, short-term courses, foreign training, and other related programmes on the subject.
- c) Position related to marketing management should be created in the library cadre. This post may be designated as the librarian/marketing or any other position with academic/management qualifications.
- d) Academic libraries must conduct users satisfaction survey of their services/products.
- e) Library personnel must be convinced of the profit and cost recovery potentials from the library and information services. There is much potential for the implementation of fee-based services in the library.
- f) Libraries should take advantage of modern information technology for the augmentation and innovation of library services significantly.

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