Marketing Library and Information Services

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Abstract

After introductory remarks on the definition of marketing, the evolution of library and information services (LIS) marketing is explained. The authors then describe how marketing was applied to LIS over the years. Marketing is also related to other concepts used in the management of LIS. Finally the role of professional associations in diffusing marketing theory is portrayed and the importance of education addressed. The entry ends with a reflection on the future of marketing for LIS.

INTRODUCTION

It is widely admitted that libraries and archives have for a very long time suffered from their image and visibility problems. This is probably why many librarians and archivists now see marketing as a very important topic; for example, in a survey conducted in Canada in 1997, 84.4% of the respondents answered that marketing is important or very important for library and information services (LIS). Similar results were observed earlier in the United Kingdom.[2]

Many also think that marketing is a new issue for LIS, something that only emerged during the last three decades. Although marketing was more formally introduced in the profession after the 1970s it is interesting to know that in North America at least, librarians adopted marketing techniques as early as 1876, as Kleindl (a marketing professor, illustrated how libraries at this stage were innovative in many marketing strategies: segmenting and targeting clienteles, using publicity, direct mail, streetcar signs, telephone solicitation, banners, etc. The twentieth-century library, the progressive library, would throw its doors open to all and encourage them to come in and join in the building of a community cultural center)[3] and Renberg (who traces history of marketing since 1876 and goes till formal marketing starts taking place in 1970, confirms the occurrences of terms such as, advertising in 1896, management in 1897, outreach in 1903, and extension work in 1909, in library literature, mainly in public libraries)[4] demonstrated in their articles.

However, what is true about marketing in general is the confusion concerning the concept itself. Most people seem to see marketing only as the equivalent to advertising or promotion: they do not see “what’s below ‘the tip of the iceberg.’” To use this analogy, what is below the surface in marketing theory includes important strategic components such as evaluating the needs of the customer; planning the various elements of the mix in order to answer those needs; and periodically evaluating the results. While this is the most commonly accepted framework of marketing, over the years, marketing activities have expanded from being assigned to one designated “marketing department” to becoming an overall organizational function. This, in turn, requires the involvement of everyone in the organization, and thus it becomes integral to the philosophy of the whole organization.

MARKETING REDEFINED

Marketing has been defined and explained in many ways by different marketing authors. Though the definitions given by the American Marketing Association (AMA) and The Chartered Institute of Marketing (CIM) have been widely accepted over the years, but are redefined time and again. The National Association of Marketing Teachers, a predecessor of the AMA, adopted what seems to be the first official definition of marketing in 1935:[5]

“Marketing is the performance of business activities that direct the flow of goods and services from producer to consumers.” The AMA adopted the 1935 definition in 1948, and in 1960 when the AMA revisited the definition it was decided not to change it. This original definition stood for 50 years, until it was revised in 1985, as: “Marketing consists of individual and organizational activities that facilitate and expedite exchange relationships in a dynamic environment through the creation, servicing, distribution, promotion and pricing of goods, services, and"
Ideas.” Again in 2004, the AMA the definition was revised to read: “Marketing is an organizational function and a set of processes for creating, communicating and delivering value to customers and for managing customer relationships in ways that benefit the organization and its stakeholders.”

Examination of these three definitions reveals a change of focus over the time. The first definition of marketing embraced all the business activities involved in getting commodities of all kinds, including services, from the hands of producers and manufacturers into the hands of the final consumers. It focused significant attention on the distribution functions. The 1985 modification of the definition was a significant one, turning attention squarely toward the managerial tasks. The emphasis was put on how the individual organizational processes, marketing and developing the strategic dimensions of marketing activities.

In 2004, while there is still an emphasis on process—that is fundamental to marketing—one can see the transition in the focus areas: the use of the words “value,” “managing customer relationships,” and “stakeholders” being brought to the center stage in this definition. Gupta[6] contends that this definition sets many new dimensions to marketing concept—the emphasis is on that:

- Marketing serves as the overriding philosophy in conducting marketing task in the organization as a whole.
- It is a set of processes; process involves interactions among people, technology, methods, procedure, environment, and material (information or information sources in case of libraries), by which any offer comes to the customer.
- Value is the basket of benefits or utilities which a user or customer gets while using a product or service. Value is clearly communicated to customers so that it can be understood easily.
- A long-term relationship is developed among customers and marketers through deep understanding, reciprocal dependency, and mutual trust.
- Relationship is substantially beneficial to both the parties. From the organization’s point of view, relationship is a tactical issue, but for customers, it is just a communication process.

Thus, the 2004 definition not only extends managerial dynamics but also goes on to delimit marketing to a singular focus on the individual customers, stakeholders, and the organization.

Similarly, CIM defined marketing in 1976, as, “Marketing is the management process which identifies, anticipate and supplies customer requirements efficiently and profitably.” CIM proposes to redefine marketing in 2007,[7] as developing relationships, creating good customer service and communicating benefits. By operating customer-centrically, marketing brings positive return on investment, satisfies shareholders and stake-holders from business and the community, and contributes to positive behavioural change and a sustainable business future.

While there are differences between the definitions given above it is important to state that definitions of marketing change as a result of environmental changes, or because our knowledge of the subject improves, or indeed through a combination of these two reasons. Marketing as a subject or discipline is therefore evolving as explained by Cooke et al.[8] What is important to remember is the notion of managing the exchange process between an organization and its publics with a view to developing relationships between both the parties is at the heart of marketing. It involves philosophical thinking, strategic outlook, and operational tactics for LIS, thus clearly putting marketing above simple advertising, promotion, or public relations part of marketing.

ORIGIN AND HISTORY OF LIS MARKETING

Early Marketing Efforts in Libraries (Prior to 2020)

Historically, one can easily find the roots of library marketing in the attempts to extend opening hours of libraries in the United States during last quarter of the twentieth century and in efforts to make books available in locations outside the library building. Samuel Swett Green advocated marketing the library through reference services in his article, “Personal Relations between Librarians and Readers,”[9] which appeared in 1876 in the American Library Journal (later known simply as Library Journal). Green also spread his message through the American Library Association (ALA) conferences and meetings. Somewhat later, portable libraries were introduced in the Light-House Establishment and these were provided to all light vessels and inaccessible offshore light stations in an attempt to meet out the reading needs of the community residing in distant locations. The books were carefully selected from a list of books of a good quality appropriate to the families who would use them.[10] Melvil Dewey and others advocated for traveling libraries which were small rotating collections that provided a means for extending library service to rural areas. These small libraries (usually from 30 to a 100 books) were located in a post office or store with a volunteer acting as the caretaker of the collection.[11] Such initiatives that also took place in other countries (India, Canada, France, etc.) can be considered as concrete marketing efforts.

John Cotton Dana was a pioneer in what we now call public relations, marketing, and other promotional activities. He was an early practitioner of needs assessment, defining target
audiences, goal setting, planning, and evaluation that could be quantified. He saw performance in numbers and in customer satisfaction. If readers liked a service he made sure others knew about it. If he added a new service—like creating separate children’s libraries or business libraries—he made sure everyone had an opportunity to learn of it. He used newsletters, pamphlets, posters, flyers, exhibits, newspaper announcements and speeches to groups, and special events to publicize library events and encourage library use. He urged librarians to better understand their institutions from the patron’s perspective—to put themselves in the worlds of actual and potential users.\[12\]

(Reference [12] has bibliography of publications about Dana, important ones include works by John Cotton Dana\[13\] and Mattson and Eldredge.\[14\]) He emphasized for specialized libraries for special kind of users and the concept of special libraries came in the beginning of the twentieth century that led to formation of Special Libraries Association (SLA) in 1909. Dana became the founder President of the SLA and later he became President of ALA. ALA started a Public Relations Award in his name in 1946. It is also important to note that to further the idea of outreach, the SLA in cooperation with other library associations organized numerous activities to celebrate “Library Week” during June 26–July 01, 1916.

Thus, during this period, the books themselves were considered the product, and place was emphasized for utilizing library services through space utilities, extended opening hours, and mobile library services. The open access system started which allowed users the freedom to move around the collection and make their own selection of material to consult on the premises or to borrow. Similarly, librarians started using terminologies related to communication, viz., advertising, publicity, and exhibit. Such development was limited to public libraries. Work related to compilation of bibliographies, documentation, and user-based services started taking place in libraries in early twentieth century, as librarians became more proactive and shifted their focus to individuals and their specific information needs.

From Publicity to Promotion (1920–1969)

By the 1920s the library movement had started in many countries. Many national and international professional associations (including IFLA, 1927) came into existence during this period and their work improved the overall situation of libraries and librarianship world over. There is evidence that special libraries, school libraries, and other libraries started taking keen interest in marketing-related activities.

During this period, a series of articles appeared in the SLA’s magazine Special Libraries. Special library and information professionals themselves started taking interest in marketing their services by highlighting the importance of promotion through exhibitions. In addition to the widespread use of displays, special librarians used public relations to attract help from the authorities and institutions; they also engaged in extension activities and in many other aspects of marketing that served to strengthen library–user relations. Some other themes addressed in Special Libraries include Selling the Special Library Idea; how can we sell ourselves to our organization; budgeting; in inside publicity and exhibit and exhibits.

Several books on specific aspects of marketing were also published during this period, including a 1921 manual by W. A. Briscoe entitled ‘Library Advertising: ‘Publicity’ Methods for Public Libraries, Library-Work with Children, Rural Library Schemes; this book also had a chapter on the cinema and library in 1921.\[15\] This work foreshadows some of the strategies advocated even today, such as targeting library newsletters at different groups, and having tie-ins with films.

Ranganathan’s famous Five Laws of Library Science\[16\] was published in 1931. The Five laws have been discussed in the light of marketing by many authors. Interestingly, these laws can be said to be relatively well aligned to marketing theory. From these laws logical corollaries are derived that can be directly related to marketing. (See Table 1 below.) The reader (sometimes called the customer) is king, and is the focal point of the library; thus the whole organization (resources, services,

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<th>Table 1 Five laws and marketing implications</th>
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<td>Every book its reader</td>
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[12] [13] [14] [15] [16]
facilities, rules and regulations, procedures) becomes customer focused. As the table below demonstrates, each of these laws has important implications in regard to basic marketing strategies.\[17\]

T. D. Wilson finds that although user studies started around 1948 they did not become a hot topic in LIS until the 1960s (Wilson considers that the “starting point of user studies to be the individual information user who, in response to some perceived ‘need’ engages in information-seeking behaviour.”).\[18\] Although linked to marketing because of the interest in a better customer knowledge, in many cases user studies merely describe information habits and do not explain the decision-making process behind information strategies. In order to evaluate service vis-à-vis outcome performance, new measurement techniques began to be developed in the 1950s. The bibliography by Atkin\[19\] and the survey by Nobel and Layzellward\[20\] cover much of the literature published on performance measurement during 1950–1970. However the concept of customer satisfaction broadened and changed by the 1970s.\[21\] (Nahl mentions that library managers started acquiring an understanding of how the user-centeredness can be embedded in the culture of services via strategic and operational management and summarizes eleven user-centered principles). Prior to this time, it would be fair to say that service provision was professionally determined and system centered rather than customer driven. As a result, the measurement of performance has shifted from input to output: books borrowed, articles photocopied, items consulted, demands met, market penetration, and more subjectively perceived satisfaction.

In conclusion, between the 1920s until the early 1970s, aside from special libraries most libraries, archives, and information services did not see much, if any, need to market their products and services. Most marketing-related documentation in the field of librarianship had been presented under such labels, as user needs, user training, performance measurement, and economics of information, and efforts toward promotion, public relations, selling, and related concepts.

**Library Marketing: The Formal Beginning**

At the end of the 1960s, the world famous marketing author Philip Kotler and his colleague, Sidney Levy, published a landmark paper entitled: “Broadening the Concept of Marketing”\[22\]. In this 1969 paper Kotler and Levy suggested new avenues for marketing in nonprofit organizations. This marked a change among the marketing specialists who had previously considered marketing mainly as the field of commercial organizations. In the 1970s, marketing in nonprofit organizations and the associated areas of public sector and social marketing received a lot of attention. At the same time, LIS managers witnessed a kind of formalization process concerning the marketing of LIS. Indeed a number of important trends occurred in marketing of LIS during the last three decades.

First, the concept of “marketing mix” emerged and became the most popular concept in LIS marketing. The marketing mix is commonly referred to the four Ps of marketing—product, price, place, and promotion. This is a simple, yet effective means of considering the key elements necessary and the emphasis to be placed on each, in order to effectively implement any marketing strategy. The mix still provides a useful framework for thinking about ways in which an organization’s marketing strategy is implemented. Writings related to pricing or charging fees for library services also started to appear, thus the pricing aspect of marketing started getting attention in library and information centers.

Within the last 5 years the library community demonstrated a growing interest in marketing information products and services. Nevertheless, the approach to marketing in the LIS field continues to be characterized by a high degree of fragmentation. Surveys of information needs, wants, use, and satisfaction are important kinds of knowledge for a library and represent an element of marketing. However, the LIS approach has often been limited to disseminating information about library services and programs; this represents only a single aspect of marketing, and ignores product, pricing, and distribution activities. The majority of marketing-related work done in libraries has concentrated on one (or at best a couple), of these elements of marketing, and need to be melded into a coherent marketing program that is integrated into the organizational structure of the library. In 1977, the Library Association of the United Kingdom published the first simplified text which was entitled *Marketing the Library*.\[23\] In this work, by A. Yorke, he affirms that libraries and marketing are compatible and explains similarities which do exist between a library and most other organizations irrespective of the field of activity in which they are operating; Yorke also attempts to show how the library should try to organize itself and its activities from a marketing point of view and looks into future.

In 1981, Blaise Cronin\[24\] compiled a famous set of marketing papers for the Association of Special Libraries and Information Bureaus (ASLIB). This book covered topics such as marketing myopia; broadening the concept of marketing; marketing for nonprofit organizations; and strategies for introducing marketing into nonprofit organizations. It also reprinted quality papers published over library marketing during last two decades. It was only in the 1980s that marketing of services started to attract the attention of information professionals. The difference between products and services were repeatedly highlighted and finally the features of the service category (intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability) were established. The new three Ps—people, process, and physical evidence—became equally important; writers who discuss these new three mix consider a range of
aspects concerning marketing of services and also reflect on how they interact with each other. However, there is a continual debate whether the marketing mix is relevant in the present. Sueli Ferreira in her paper “4Ps Concept in LIS Literature”[25] addressed the extension of the marketing mix in library literature during 1975–1995: she concluded that although “the four Ps can be an important tool to help librarians to understand information agencies as a ‘business’, librarians need to overcome the concept and go out of the four walls of the information agencies to guarantee the future of these organizations.”

Another significant trend noted during 1980s is the combining of strategic planning and marketing. In 1983, Wood wrote an article “Strategic Planning and the Marketing Process: Library Applications,”[26] in which she stressed providing programs which support the library’s mission. She considered that libraries must consider adopting business concepts, such as marketing and strategic planning, if they were to survive the challenges of the 1980s. In the following years Wood expanded her article into a full-length book Strategic Marketing for Libraries: A Handbook.[27] In her introduction, she noted that the combination of marketing and strategic planning “promotes not only strength in the short run, but also the kind of long-term viability needed to work towards each organization’s vision of the future.”

Darlene Weingand also published a monograph entitled Marketing/Planning Library and Information Services,[28] in which she integrated the ideas of planning and marketing. She emphasized that marketing and planning must be integrated if either is to be effective. Marketing and planning should be integral functions within a library and marketing and planning must be combined in to a “unified whole.” Throughout the book, Weingand stressed that “to be effective, the marketer must understand his environment, must design the products and services the environment needs, must monitor and evaluate their use, and then must build on this process for future planning.” According to her, marketing is a managerial process that must be carefully formulated and thought out. There are many other works which deal with marketing–planning combination in libraries.

In the 1990s the question of quality services in libraries became an important issue in library literature, a problem intimately linked to marketing. SERVQUAL,[29] a tool to measure quality based on survey methods, became the model for the profit sector but the instrument was not fully applicable in the nonprofit sectors such as LIS. Starting from this model, the American Association of Research Libraries (ARL) developed an adapted instrument called LibQUAL+, and later WebQUAL. The tool was used widely in North American libraries as well as in other contexts, and it has become a useful marketing tool for library managers.

Later librarians began to consider relationship marketing, that is, integrating marketing with customer services and quality into one stream. Relationship marketing is based on a motion of establishing trust and cooperation with known customers. As a library operates routinely with a known set of customers, this concept is seen as very important for the marketing of LIS. A library also operates on trust. Essentially, it is based on the idea that when a client walks into the library, he trusts that the service provider will find the material or information that he needs. The library in turn, trusts that the client will return the items he borrows within the specified borrowing period.

Table 2 gives a cluster of marketing and related themes that have been covered in literature in the last three-and-half decades. The table is not a complete list of terminologies that were first used during a given decade, but is indicative of trends that have occurred and can thus help to understand the scope of marketing and the way it has changed over the years.

With the impact of technologies and other environmental changes, the role and concept of library services is changing very fast. The range of services that take place outside the physical library is expanding due to the new technology, and it is likely to expand further. Additionally, the scope of some services has become nearly unlimited. Some forms of service can be offered almost as easily around the globe as around the town. Libraries serve and will serve far beyond their walls. All business activities may be seen through marketing lenses. Marketing in case of libraries is necessary to offer benefits to users want, reduce barriers to use and access, persuade and inform the users, and carefully plan to satisfy users’ needs effectively. “Marketing is so basic that it cannot be considered a separate function within the library. Marketing is a central dimension of the entire library. It is the entirety of the library’s operations and services seen from a point of view of its final result, that is, from the customer’s point of view.”[30]

**ROLE OF ASSOCIATIONS**

Library associations, both at national and international level have played a vital role in popularizing, promoting role of libraries, their present and potential services, resources, and facilities for the benefit of the community at large. And also in developing their member’s marketing skills, and providing them with support.[31] Reference [31] is an extensive review sponsored by IFLA covering areas such as conceptual framework, LIS marketing practices around the world, role of library associations, education, research and training for library marketing, excellence in marketing, literature review, databases, etc., 47 contributors from more than 40 countries have contributed for the volume.) Rigorous efforts have been made by international, national, and regional associations for popularizing marketing through establishing separate sections, e.g., Management and Marketing Section at IFLA, Advertising and Marketing Section at SLA, Public Relations and
Marketing Section at ALA, Publicity and Public Relations Section at Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (CILIP). These associations organize various programs and activities, they issue publications, and they recognize the best practices through awards, etc.

In its programs and activities, the Special Library Association (http://www.sla.org) has been giving increased attention to marketing. The SLA Management Division gives training and publishes bibliographies on marketing from time to time, and the SLA Advertising and Marketing Division has a discussion list on the subject (slad@lists.sla.org). Similarly, at the IFLA 2001 Annual Congress in Boston, the ALA launched “@your library”—a new advocacy Campaign for the World’s Libraries. Through this bold initiative IFLA and over 25 national library associations who have embraced the campaign are able to make ALA’s collective and individual accomplishments better known across the world. ALA has also published many useful texts on marketing area.

In Britain, CILIP’s Publicity and Public Relations Group, which was established in 1983, works to make library and information professionals aware of the value of marketing and PR and also offers a platform for sharing ideas and experiences. CILIP has produced various publications and organizes an annual conference with training workshops and other events; it also produces publicity and promotional material, and rewards excellence in libraries through “Public Relations and Publicity Award” (recently renamed as the “PPRG Marketing Excellence Awards”).

Launched in 1997, the IFLA Marketing and Management Section (http://www.ifla.org/vii/s34/somm) is made up of library professionals who either work actively in marketing and management in their libraries or teach these techniques to future librarians. Members of this section, who come from countries throughout the world, are working to develop a conceptual basis for marketing in libraries; they also formulate guidelines to teach management and marketing, and they aid LIS professionals throughout the world in their efforts to promote the broader acceptance of marketing. The section also organizes annual conferences and training programs, and it issues publications, including a newsletter. In order to recognize best practices in marketing of library and information sector worldwide, the section created the IFLA International Award in 2001. The work of IFLA’s Marketing and Management Section illustrates the internationalization of the concept of marketing LIS.

**EDUCATION FOR LIS MARKETING**

A large part of being an effective librarian involves being an effective marketer. Many successful librarians concede
Marketing has been identified as one of the areas of competency that is important for professionals in library and information science in the United States and Canada. However, marketing is not a major area of focus in graduate LIS education. It is certainly the case that library and information science programs must fulfill the role of graduate programs in general, with regard to presenting the theoretical and practical in a range of content areas. In Canada, marketing/advocacy/public relations courses are offered in all seven information science schools. The content of these five LIS marketing courses is comparable to a great extent. However, in regard to objectives, readings, and assignments, there are some distinctive priorities. One course includes an advocacy component affirming the idea that, "advocacy is essentially the marketing of an issue." Finally, an assessment of the state of development of a "public relations and advocacy" course in the seventh LIS school is underway.

In the United Kingdom, management is still strongly represented in the curriculum, with marketing sometimes mentioned as one of the topics covered in a management module. A few specific marketing modules exist. There have been some changes during recent years within the marketing curriculum, reflecting developments in the field. For example, customer relationship management, relationship marketing, and aspects of Internet marketing are now more likely to be taught. CILIP conducts short-term training programs on different aspects of library marketing.

In India, the need for education in marketing LIS was felt in early 1980s. Although marketing was widely discussed in literature, conferences, and many training programs started during 1980s, the inclusion of marketing in the curricula was slow as the University Grants Commission (UGC) Model Curriculum did not lay much emphasis on marketing. Nonetheless some universities and institutions have recognized the need for inclusion of the topic in their syllabi. For example, the University of Bangalore has a full paper on Marketing LIS whereas University of Delhi has half paper on marketing LIS and in the National Institute of Science Communication and Information Resources (NISCAIR), the topic of marketing of information products and services is covered under the paper on Information Products and Services. However, the role of Indian Institute of Management (IIM), Lucknow in training for LIS is significant. It offers short-term courses for top- and middle-level librarians of all kind of libraries.

In Pakistan, only a few large public, special, and university libraries make use of certain public relations tactics. A course on marketing was first introduced in 1995 by the Course revision Committee of the UGC, but prior to 2002 books on LIS marketing were not included in the list of recommended books. In the year 1999, Islamia University implemented the curriculum recommendations. The University of Punjab introduced the elective course in Marketing of LIS and was made a core course in 2002. In 2001, Sindh University of Hyderabad also started Marketing of LIS course as core course in 2001. Another university, Bahauddin Zikriya University in Multan, has adopted the curriculum of University of Pakistan in 2004.

In France, although marketing is present as a topic in the syllabi of most of the universities, little time is devoted to the study of marketing, and lectures are often given by faculty in fields other than library science. However the topic of marketing is not often offered in continuing education programs given to library or documentation professionals. However, at the national school of library and information science in Lyon (ENSSIB: École nationale supérieure des sciences de l’information et des bibliothèques), there is an online course on marketing strategy available for heads of libraries and documentation services.

In Estonia, among the institutions that prepare information professionals, library marketing is currently being taught both in the curricula of Department of Information Science in Tallinn Pedagogical University and the curriculum of Department of Librarianship and Information Studies in Viljandi Culture Academy. In Norway, marketing component in library syllabi is different from university to university. There is very less part of “marketing” or “public relations” or “communication” in curriculum.

These examples from several countries demonstrate that education for marketing among library and information professionals is more and more part of the curricula. However, most of the time it remains an option and is not a core, required topic.

**CONCLUSION**

Although the idea of marketing LIS is not new, and some progress has been made in the past, more efforts have to be made if we want to see better marketing of a wide range of LIS. In recent years there has been a kind of overconfidence in information technologies, and many LIS professionals believe that these new technologies will provide a way to make LIS more visible. It is true those technologies are important and librarians, archivists, and other information professionals need to make effective use of technology in order to improve the services to users. Library and information managers need to realize that these technologies are broadening the market and therefore provide
immense opportunities to them to offer services and products at the global level. To effectively reach this broadened group of potential users, it becomes imperative that positive attitudes toward marketing be part of the organizational culture of libraries. LIS managers must be aware of and sensitive to marketing in every aspect of acquisition, digitization, sharing of resources, access and delivery, and services to the users. Without a marketing orientation, a high-tech library or information service would not necessarily be successful.

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