



The Role of Serials for Effective Utilization by Information Users in Academic Library

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Abstract

Serials are the backbone of every academic library because of their peculiar nature of being carriers of current information in all fields of human endeavors. Serials are usually expensive both in terms of acquisition and management. As such, academic libraries commit substantial percentages of their annual budgets to serial acquisition. They have a unique value and play a very important role in the operations of academic libraries more especially in marketing the products and services of the library. Because, library is a holistic compendium of knowledge where information resources in form of books and non-book materials are philosophically collected and systematically arranged for dissemination to cater for the ever changing user' information needs, the potential users need to be aware of the available resources in the library before they can come into the library to utilize the resources which is done through promotion which is aided by serial resources. Thus, marketing is an integral part of the library services, because it has to do with basic principles of librarianship, that is, to develop good collection and user-oriented service as recently, library and other non-profit organizations have become aware of the need to market their products and services. Thus, library and information products and services are now being recognized as commodities that can be sold, exchanged, lent and transmitted, hence, there is a need for attraction, invitation, retention and satisfaction of users' need in order to will their loyalty; and this is easily done by serials.

Keywords: Serials, Information Products, Effective Utilization, Information Users and Academic Library

1. Introduction

Academic libraries contribute to the realization of institutional objective thereby supporting the total programme of the institution by acquiring and making available the information materials and services, which are needed by all categories of its users. Among library information resource materials is serial, which are always a publication in print, non-print or electronic format issued in successive parts and intended to be continued indefinitely. Serials are of various kinds and include journals, magazines, newspapers, newsletters, accessions, reports, proceedings and transactions of societies and other periodicals like abstracts and indexes. Serials are of great importance because they carry latest, current, up-to-date and useful information. It constitute a major part of all university libraries'



collections. The goal of library services is generating, collecting, synthesizing and disseminating up-to-date, accurate, unbiased and relevant information available in serials, books and non-book formats which can be stored and retrieved whenever needed. Therefore, it is the duty of the university libraries and librarians to provide serials and services for lecturers, students and other users for research activities. Universities are involved in teaching, research and publication. One of the preoccupations of any university academic staff is research, which the outcome is usually published. The worth of a academic staff is usually determined by the quantity and quality of his or her publication. Publication output of every lecturer to a great extent, determines his or her promotion based on the policy of “publish or perish”. And to be able to carry out a meaningful research, the researcher must be able to have access to and use relevant, current and adequate serials in the university library.

The terms serials and periodicals are synonymous. The terms are used interchangeably to refer to publications in any medium (print and non-print) that are published serially or periodically. Similarly, Rogers (2011) cited Osborn (1980) to describe serials as publications in any medium issued in successive parts at regular or irregular intervals, usually having numerical or chronological designation and intended to continue indefinitely. Serials include both periodicals and non-periodicals. A periodical is a serial with a distinctive title, issued more frequently; that is daily, weekly, fortnightly, monthly, yearly, and so on; usually at regular intervals with each issue containing articles by several contributors, examples are journals, newspaper and magazines (Nwalo, 2003). In contrast, non-periodicals are serials issued at irregular interval such as yearbook, annuals, proceedings of societies, and monographic series. Parts of serial publications may be published at different intervals such as daily, weekly, monthly, bi-monthly, quarterly, annually, bi-annually and so on by an academic society, a research institution, a learned society, a reputable publishing organization, or a professional body. On the other hand, some serials are published on subject basis while some are published on general topic. It is frequency that distinguishes serial publications from books and monographs and it is the periodicity that dictates their format and price.

Marketing covers those activities that connect the organization to those parts of its outside world that use, buy, sell or influence the output it produces, the benefits and services it offers (Vij, 2012). Marketing of information in the library is creating awareness of the available resources in the library. Kotler and Armstrong (2012) give a broad definition of marketing as “the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationships in order to capture value from customers in return”. Marketing of library resources and services is creating the right products inform of books and non-books material and letting the right people (the patrons) know you have them and creating conducive environments for utilizing the resources. Jestin and Parameswari (2005) describe marketing as being able to study the needs of a particular group of people and in turn designing the right products and services that will best serve their needs. The librarians need to market their goods which are books and non-book materials. In the library setting,



Sharma and Bhardwaj (2009) refer to marketing as instruments through which both raw and processed information is transmitted to its members. Rowley (2003) describes marketing of information as “the marketing of information-based products and services”. These products include books, journals, CDs, databases, electronic journals, newspapers and etcetera. The products and services can be marketed in order to satisfy the needs of library users.

2. Role of Serials in Marketing of Academic Libraries

Serials serve various functions in marketing and promotion of academic library resources and services. These marketing roles include:

Increases Users' Patronage

Essentially, marketing is the means of informing your users what you do and what you can do. The success and survival of libraries is dependent on getting the users to use the library resources and services. A library without users is useless, to succeed there is need to make the users aware of the existence of the library and its services and this can be achieved through marketing. The librarian may wonder why no one is coming into the library to use the resources. Information materials such as serial collections, if a library does not have them, how would the users come come? Lawal and Amusa (2005) opined that Librarians must see themselves as salesmen who must dispose of their goods and services to those who need to be told and convinced of the need of such goods and services. Academic libraries are meant to support teaching, learning, research and community services; therefore, they need to provide serials because their importance in any academia is holistic.

Librarians need to market their information products and services; because proactive information dissemination needs to be carried out by Librarians. Proactive information dissemination involves making available specific information contained in books, to users that need or that may need them. It is also emphasized that there are certain potent approaches to effective information dissemination and marketing of library information products and services that Librarians can employ in their dealing with the public. These approaches most notably include provision of current and relevant serial publications. Therefore, serials as library materials increase the users patronage of the libraries.

Enables the Libraries to Survive in this Era of Information Explosion and Digital Age

For libraries to survive in the present world of information explosion and internet age, they need to market their goods and services. Jose and Bhat, (2007) pointed out that we live in an era of competition and library's competitors include internet, television, FM radios, exhibitions and fairs, leisure services, holiday services, computer games, family retreats etc. Adekunmisi, (2013) also enumerated information explosion, technology revolution, escalating library costs and increasing competition by information providers and web based commercial services provider as factors responsible for encouraging the library professionals to develop a marketing strategy to its operations and services. The library according to Okon and Umoh (2014) is generally regarded as an information market to its users or clientele, the buyer or consumers. However, the library's monopoly of the



information market has been broken and it has to compete to survive and stay in circulation (Martey, 2000).

Therefore, to stay in circulation the librarian needs to market its resources and services in order to remain relevant in the world of information explosion where libraries have various other information stakeholders to compete with. In the midst of this serious challenge, libraries can claim to be the providers of the most important resources that any academic library is expected to be providing in the name of serial information materials including both the periodicals and non-periodicals. .

Increases the Value of the Library which Justifies the Funding

The library is not a profit-making organization and so its worth and survival cannot be determined by profit. Continued financial supports for the operation of the library depend on the demonstrated use of the services it provides. A service that is not used does not need financial support. Libraries therefore have the responsibility of encouraging the use of the services they provide which they do so by ensuring that the required serials are provided. For libraries and information services to stay viable in the current climate, it is important they provide serials to help meet organizational mission, goals and objectives. Effective marketing provides the means by which users are made aware of the services of the library and their value. Academics cannot do without serial resources due to their massive importance as heavy patronage determines the worth of the library and justified the value of the funding of the library. Effective marketing is only one of the factors that determine library use because libraries depend on the supports of people they serve for their survival. A library should therefore provide its customers with the information resources capable of quenching their thirsts to justify the funds expended on the library.

3. Summary and Conclusion

In summary, the success of every library's programme, could easily be measured in terms of its efforts in acquiring and managing relevant, current and adequate serials, as they are effective tool in modern information and research. Serials are used for diverse purposes including leisure reading, scholarly research, teaching, professional reasons and hobbies. Lecturers and researchers in universities are regarded as the library and serials users with advanced degrees in their subjects of specialization. Many scholars including Rowley (20013) and Adekunmisi (2013) confirm the fundamental concept that a fraction of the periodical collection accounts for the majority of usage.

In conclusion, the elements of serials management (which is the pivot on which the marketing of library and information resources and products by serials revolves around) are serials acquisition which involves selection, deselection and subscription; organization which involves processing and display on racks for users; and maintenance which involves updating, filling the gap, preservation, and binding of back issues and repair of damaged ones. Others are provision of facilities like finding aids, reading areas equipped with tables, chairs and air-conditioners as well as provision of services such as current awareness services, photocopier, exhibition, translation from foreign language like Germany, French and Arabic to the language understood by the users.



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