

Marketing and health libraries

Maurice Wakeham

Academic Liaison Librarian : Health and Social Care

University Library

APU

Bishop Hall Lane

Chelmsford

Essex

CM1 1SQ

Marketing and health libraries

Abstract

Aim: To present an overview of the concepts of marketing and to examine ways in which they can be applied to health libraries.

Method: A review was carried out of literature relating to health libraries using LISA, CINAHL, BNI and Google.

Results: Marketing is seen as a strategic management activity aimed at developing customer relationships. Concepts such as the “4 Ps”, marketing plans, the marketing mix, segmentation, promotion and evaluation are identified and discussed in relation to health libraries.

Conclusion: In increasingly complex health service and information environments the marketing and promotion of library services is becoming more important if those services are to justify the resources given to them. Marketing techniques are equally applicable to physical and digital library services.

Key points on Policy

- Marketing is a long-term strategy.
- Health libraries need marketing plans, which derive from the missions and marketing strategies of the organisations to which they belong.

Implications for Practice

- The customer / user / reader is central to all marketing and promotional activity.
- Every library transaction ‘markets’ the library.
- Marketing is as much to do with building long-term relationships as individual transactions.
- Marketing is the public representation of other management activities, such as development and training, performance management, benchmarking and accreditation.
- Marketing and promotional activities can be carried out locally or shared across library services.

Marketing and health libraries

Introduction

The status of health libraries within the health sector in Britain , specifically in the National Health Service (NHS) has been enhanced in recent years. Levels of library provision(often inadequate) came to be noticed when health service professions sought graduate status and basic and post registration professional education moved into further and higher education. Heightened impetus came from the demands of continuing professional and inter-professional education and lifelong learning, of research-, or evidence-based practice and problem- or enquiry-based education.. In response, libraries have become increasingly multi-disciplinary, collaborative and networked. The advent of the Internet has made information more immediately available to health professionals and the public. In the face of this competition, library managers need to market their services to actual and potential users.

Marketing is one of the strategic tools of management. Marketing a library service has the objective of engaging people in a relationship, which will encourage them to use the service and to continue doing so in the long term. It entails knowing or anticipating what users want,

communicating to them what is available and being able to provide it to a level that is satisfactory to them.

Decisions have to be made about which services to provide and whether they can be delivered effectively and efficiently within the resources available. The range of services on offer represents the library's "marketing mix". It is a balance of the 4 Ps – product, price, place and promotion. Some authors like to add additional 'Ps', such as people or process. The balance of these factors for each client group may be slightly different so the library may have to target its efforts towards different parts of its customer base at different times. Marketing a library is about the relationship between it and its actual and potential users. The latter have to know the library is there and be made aware of what is has to offer. They must use the service, support the financing of it and be willing to continue to do so over time.

Every organisation and every library within it should have a marketing plan which derives from their respective missions. The library's purpose will derive from the aims and objectives of its parent organisation and how the library staff interpret them

Product

The library provides a collection of services, which are its product.

“Goods are used but service is experienced” ¹. While information provision is the central service, other requirements may include somewhere to work, to meet, to study, to read, to browse, to photocopy, perchance to dream. The ‘mix’ will change over time. Any new services provide an opportunity for marketing and promotion ². New books arrive, new journal subscriptions are opened. Loan periods change: students may demand short loan periods one week, longer loans the next. Formats change: printed indexes give way to CD-ROMs that in turn give way to web-based services. The service evolves as technology changes. The library responds by providing training in the use of the new equipment and the new services it facilitates. Would the users want this or would they rather call upon the library staff to do their information searching for them? Should the library make more effort to go into the workplace? ³

If new services, such as that of a clinical librarian or a canteen-based book-drop commence, these need to be promoted as part of the library’s role and in addition to general library marketing. A clinical librarian could not only be an object of marketing but also a prime agent spreading the word about library services ⁴. More to the point, all library staff

‘market’ the library by the way they present what it offers and how they deal with visitors. Too many people still see the library as bureaucratic and concerned with apparently petty rule enforcement ⁵. When library users are impressed with the service, they talk to their colleagues. Word of mouth (referred to in its Internet form as viral marketing) may be one of the most effective tools at the library’s disposal ^{6,7}. Google, for example, “went from newbie to industry leader” in a very short time on the basis of it ⁸. Non-users may have an image of the library gained from hearing other people talk about it, which could turn them into users.

Services develop but so does the marketplace. Hospital based libraries may find themselves responsible for providing services to Primary Care Trusts and General Practitioners some distance away from the library stock ^{9,10}. Establishment of a new clinical unit may prompt a specialist collection. The library faces the issue of how to market to these groups. Distant users need to know about services available to them within the library but perhaps more emphasis should be placed on electronic services available through local computer networks. The library may want to actively attract new groups of users. This may mean diversifying services, such as providing group study spaces or video viewing facilities or perhaps refreshment facilities. It may mean physically taking stock to prospective users ¹¹.

People

It has already been argued that the people who work in the library are part of the product that is offered. All library staff promote the service every time they interact with a user or prospective user. Staff create relationships with their users based upon the quality of service they provide. This is as true for the part-time assistant at the counter as it is for the senior professional representing the library on various committees. Another central group of people are the library users, the customers. It has been proposed by Andreason and Kotler that the customer should be at the centre of all marketing analysis and planning . Effective marketing “is the right offerings in the right place at the right time and at the right price” ¹².

The library may have many client groups, which will require a range of information, to be provided in a variety of ways. In health libraries successful marketing involves identifying these groups and promoting services to them. A hospital library may support technicians, doctors, nurses and consultants, all working in a wide range of specialities,

operating department practitioners, researchers, students, managers and, in some cases, patients ¹³. Marketing jargon describes these groups as 'segments'. The segment has to be easy to both identify and differentiate. The segment needs to be easily accessible and it needs to be sufficiently numerous to make it cost effective to target. Common groupings for health libraries might be geographic, occupational, employer, or status (e.g. qualified or student). Another segment might be identified by virtue of the benefit they hope to obtain or the information need they hope to fulfil - better examination grades, sources of research funding, access to specific databases. Segmentation of the library market s should be kept under review.

It is the role of the librarian to customise and package the service for the groups that use the library. Thus one of the first things to do will be to identify who the potential customers are, the extent to which they use the library, what they use it for and whether it provides not only what they need but also what they want. This can be established by doing surveys, attending meetings (inviting oneself if necessary), setting up feedback systems(paper and electronic), talking to people who visit the library, talking to people who don't, organising focus groups, and offering to become involved with projects being run by other parts of the organisation. Library staff carrying out these activities will become

known within the organisation for listening and talking, for being the information specialist, a primary information source and, hopefully, for providing what is wanted from the service ¹⁴. Such activity is one of the ways of marketing the library.

Groups can be categorised but they are all made up of individuals who will have different attitudes to libraries and their need for them.

Becoming aware that a library exists is the first step. Marketing the library entails making known to users and potential users (within and perhaps outside the organisation) the answers to the questions about who does what, when, where and how in relation to information provision.

The individual must be sufficiently confident, motivated or interested to make the effort to visit the library or its website. The library has to facilitate a satisfactory experience. The visitor may want to study quietly alone or work with a group of colleagues. A first visit may occur at a promotional event but not all resulting visits would take place at that time. Is the library as welcoming when it is not running a special event and are all promoted aspects always available?

What the user takes away from the library may include something material, such as a book, journal article or a piece of information. He or she also goes away with the experience of the service, whether it was

provided quickly, enthusiastically, completely or partially, efficiently or otherwise, and in pleasant surroundings. Did the experience live up to the expectations that the user had when they made the decision to use the library? The development of a level of expectation will be part of the task of the marketer and it is the job of the service provider, who may or may not be the same person, to ensure that expectations are met, if not surpassed. Rea ¹⁵ has highlighted that “[T]he service offered must be as good as the promotion claims it to be”.

Place and virtual place

Expectations are formed as soon as the library is encountered ¹⁶. If the library is a *Resources Centre* or a *Knowledge Bank* or the librarian is a *Knowledge Manager* or *Information Specialist*, an image is being conveyed. As a place it should be welcoming, tidy, modern, well designed, centrally located and preferably purpose built. Any new or even remodelled building is a tool for promotion ¹⁷. The library should be easy to use with clear, professional signs, maps and notices in keeping with institutional design guidelines. The physical environment is itself a tool through which the library can market itself.

However, the librarian cannot assume, to paraphrase the voice that speaks to Ray Kinsella in the 1989 film *Field of Dreams*, that “If you build it they will come”. The digital age forces librarians to think about new ways in which they respond and market to their users. The library website is an alternative entry to the services offered. It should be professionally designed and constructed. It is both a product that may itself need promoting and a marketing tool for the wider library. It is ironic that to “promote an electronic resource, printed matter is often more effective than electronic means”¹⁸. Ways of promoting the website might include providing examples of ‘real’ people who have used the site for specific purposes, identifying champions who can be seen to be using the system, and organising events around information available on the site.

One author¹⁹ has indicated that “users will only return if the site offers what they want: instant gratification, helpful links, good navigation features and currency”. Online information should be localised or, better, personalised, while not entirely divorced from some form of face-to-face support.^{20, 21} Users may be identified by name when they log in. E-mail can serve to welcome new users to the service, alert them that their books are due for renewal, their reservation has arrived, that new books are in stock, of the contents of journals they have pre-selected and so on.

Importantly the user can also respond directly to messages or through

dedicated feedback lines or discussion groups. If the library invites interaction it must be prepared to respond to it. The relationship between user and virtual library can be both distant and, paradoxically, more personal at the same time.

Direct digital access enables searchers to go straight to Yahoo or Google without attempting to access the kinds of subscription-based information available through libraries. The effective marketing and promotion of training sessions covering electronic information has been seen as crucial²² :“marketing a training session these days as “learn how to use library databases” won’t work. Instead, title the presentation “Google Searching and Beyond”. Now, that should lift attention”. If users can find sufficient acceptable information by these means it becomes even more important that libraries are able to market effectively to them, both in terms preservation of the library service but also in terms of knowledge about reliability and validity of information used in evidence based practice^{21, 23}.

Price

Health libraries do not often promote themselves in terms of price, though monetary factors can affect users, fear of fines or cost of photocopying

for example. The other side of price is cost and not only in cash. Users may trade off costs with perceived benefits. Inter-library loans may be free but how easy are they to obtain, how long will the forms take to fill in? Will the user have to run the gauntlet of being quizzed by a librarian about why they want it? It may save time to use one library rather than another and not only in terms of geographical proximity. If it does (or not) word of mouth will pass on the fact. Electronic access may represent a cost or a cost saving to the user.

The library must also be concerned about its own costs ²⁴. Library staff must be used cost effectively but is the fact that library staff are willing to help with basic queries, which may not seem basic to the enquirer, one of the factors that attracts people to the library? To a library manager a small site library may be an expense; to a nervous user it is a positive benefit. It is possible for libraries to charge for specific services or particular user groups. An NHS library may charge employees of a private hospital to use the service, either individually or corporately. A charity library may offer its specialised knowledge on a subscription basis. Though bearing a price, these are still services which could be promoted, to the right group.

Promotion

A key element of the marketing mix is promotion, sometimes referred to as marketing communication. Promotion must be an integral part of the overall marketing strategy, but it is only a part. It must be clear what is being promoted, why and to whom, and what the effect is. According to Rea “[a]nything which imparts positive information about a library may be regarded as promotion”¹⁵. A number of techniques can be used to promote the library. Table 1 indicates some of the promotional tools. They are not all of equal value and some will work with some users and not others. Most important to remember is that promotion is not synonymous with marketing. It operates as a tool of the overall strategy. A promotional campaign can be thought of as a way of communicating with a specific group of users (or non-users) about a specific service (or set of services)²⁵. For the sake of clarity each campaign should have a specific purpose or ‘unique selling proposition’. Health libraries are unlikely to be paying to advertise their services on television, radio or in the press. Most libraries will produce publications, which they can distribute to users or within their organisation. These might take the form of guides to the collection, to services, opening hours and contact information. They may be in the paper form of fliers, notices or the electronic form of email or web pages.

Evaluation

The final element of the marketing plan is evaluation. Evaluation tells us how successful we have been and whether we are spending our time wisely on particular activities. It identifies whether aims and objectives have been achieved, the needs of the various segments of the library market correctly identified and met, and whether the promotional activities aimed at them been successful. It tells us whether more people are coming through the door or using the website or if users associate the library with excellent service. Smigielski and Wulff say that “Having planned performance objectives keeps the marketing efforts focused and on schedule, all the while demonstrating to the administration that things are happening, and that they are getting a return on their investment. . It has been pointed out²⁶ that evaluation does not close the cycle, it creates a spiral of activity so that what has been achieved can be built upon in future years:”Consistent, meaningful evaluation backs up feelings and impressions with cold hard facts, all the more leverage for that cold hard cash”

Discussion

Health libraries do have some problems with promoting themselves. They provide a professional but intangible service to many users. Various groups' demands and perceptions of what the library should provide may be in conflict. Though health libraries in the UK should be multidisciplinary, anecdotally one still hears that some doctors see the library as 'theirs' rather than something to be shared with other health professionals. It may take a lot of 'promotion' to overcome an unfriendly 'atmosphere'. That said, some specialist libraries might legitimately wish to restrict access to their resources.

It has already been stated in this review that health libraries do not generally compete on price. However, services have to be paid for. Funding for the marketing strategy may come from staffing, publications / stationary, training and development, even estates budgets. These budgets may be held in the library, another part of the institution, or in the case of the NHS, another part of the organisation. To successfully market different aspects of library work may mean actively bidding for funds from a variety of sources²⁷. The budgetary process itself could be used for promotional purposes²⁸: . Marketing may take up considerable time of library staff, who may need training in marketing techniques²⁹. Although some larger libraries or regional units may have staff specifically responsible for marketing, rarely will this be the case for

health libraries, at least in the UK^{30, 31}. As with all priorities, while you are marketing, what are you not doing?

One way of overcoming this problem is for libraries to work together across a city or region. They can join together to promote services. For example, the Eastern Confederations Library and Knowledge Services Alliance (ECLAKSA), a group of NHS librarians in the east of England, has organised a conference, sent speakers to other events, organised a document exchange network for inter library loans, set up special interest groups, created a website detailing its activities and established links with other national and regional organisations. A difficulty here might be that not all libraries within a group would be able to perform to the same high level and users may experience different levels of performance.

Libraries could also link up with national promotional schemes such as those organised by CILIP or the NeLH^{18, 32, 33}. Plans for a nationally branded and marketed library for health are currently under consideration³⁴.

Conclusion

Marketing is a way of thinking which has to pervade the whole approach of all library staff. It is to do with predicting and providing the services that people need. It is to do with providing those services to the best quality. Libraries are experienced by their users so environments should be accessible, pleasant and welcoming and staff have to be knowledgeable and well trained. In a world of evidence-based-practice clinicians need to know what is available to them. If libraries are to survive as information providers they must be seen to be relevant to the health care setting³⁵. The very first issue of *Health Libraries Review* included John van Loo's article on marketing the library service³⁶. If anything marketing is more important today than it was then because both information needs and the competition to meet them are greater.

Librarians should find marketing and promotion a core element of their professional role. Ranganathan's five laws of library science revolve around the customer, providing what they want, and saving their time in the context of an evolving service³⁷; "the right offerings in the right place at the right time and at the right price"¹². The modern library is more than a physical place. The 'product' and the 'place' increasingly becomes the web page, its content, ease of use, navigability and so on. The 'price' to the user takes in the cost of computer and telephonic access, or the additional cost of *not* being able to access information or text

electronically. The library's virtual arm, like its outreach worker, the clinical librarian, is both a tool and an object of marketing planning. According to Elliott de Saez "[m]arketing processes in the digital world are no different initially: exploring and identifying trends, understanding market needs, presenting appropriate marketing mixes and evaluating throughout. The same marketing concepts are fundamental, whatever, wherever and whenever the scenario"¹⁹.

The marketing plan identifies and targets segments of the customer population. The library wants to 'sell' its services to its users. How far is the library selling an ideal? The ability and knowledge to make a correct diagnosis, to identify an effective treatment, to pass an exam, to set a patient's mind at rest, to comfort a grieving relative, and to be able to do these things efficiently or sensitively, this is what is on offer. Library users have images and expectations of libraries. These derive from the individual experiences they have of their library. A marketing framework seeks to ensure positive experiences within a long term relationship. The library holds the evidence to solve problems and provide answers but it can also supply possibilities, connections and ideas. It is this potential for empowerment and vision that libraries should be marketing.

The author would like to thank Joan Lomas, Trust librarian at Queen Elizabeth Hospital, Welwyn for information about marketing and promotion in the Eastern region; and Roy Newson, Director of Marketing at Anglia Polytechnic University for comments on the first draft of this paper. Any errors remain the responsibility of the author.

Table 1

Ways of promoting the library

(after van Loo³⁶)

Advertising: Posters, fliers, notices, mouse mats, lapel pins, balloons; displays; up to date web sites, e-mail messages, e-mail and phone contact details, weblogs³⁸, discussion lists – local and national, intranet bulletin boards; payslips; service evaluation surveys.

Publicity: Articles in institutional publications, library newsletters, bibliographies; public meetings, special events – open days, conferences, talks, public lectures – attend them and give them; exhibitions – housing them and participating in them; piggy backing on national promotions (NeLH, World AIDS Day, Mental Health Day); External awards (Investors in People, Charter marks, accreditation); staff activities and achievements, famous users or visitors, competitions, sponsorships; reviews of new books, research activity by the library, research activity by other staff.

Personal contact: Meeting departmental heads, presentations to Executive Boards; other meetings (research, ethics, clinical governance); over the counter, discussions in the corridor, visits to wards and units, named librarians, business cards, induction tours, education and training

in using services, stands in cafeterias or clinics; participation in professional organisations.

Incentives: Freebies, i.e. notepads, pens, pencils, mouse-mats, bookmarks, fridge magnets, badges, post cards; fines amnesty, free searches, competitions with prizes, refreshments

Atmospherics: Design of building and library space within it, guiding, colour scheme, “footprints on the carpet”³⁹, goldfish⁴⁰; signposts, ‘atmosphere’

Public relations: Corporate letter headings, business cards, memo pads, coherent and consistent design, library logos, newsletters, press releases, guides, current awareness lists, bibliographies, annual reports – being mentioned in them, producing them; advertising for staff; database of users and contacts

References

- 1 Gupta, D. K. What is marketing in libraries? Concepts, orientations, and practices *Information outlook*. 2002, Available at http://www.findarticles.com/cf_dls/m0FWE/11_6/94406195/p1/article.jhtml [accessed 11/06/2003]
- 2 Lord, S. Promoting remote use of e-journals by RCN members across the UK and abroad *Serials* 2003, **16**, 77-81
- 3 Kassel, A. Practical tips to help you prove your value *Marketing Library Services* **16**,. 2002, Available at <http://www.infoday.com/mls/may02/kassel.htm> [accessed on 3/11/03]
- 4 Watson, J. A. and Weist, A. The Forest Healthcare clinical support librarian: 6 months on *Health Libraries Review* 2000, **17**, 219-221
- 5 Shamel, C. Y. Building a brand : Got Librarian? *Searcher* 2002, **10**, Available at <http://www.infoday.com/searcher/jul02/shamel.htm> [accessed 3/11/2003]
- 6 Wilson, R. F. The six principles of viral marketing *Web Marketing Today* 2000, **70**. Available at Sheila Webber's Marketing site. <http://dis.shef.ac.uk/sheila/marketing/wilson.htm> [accessed 16/12/2003]

- 7 Furlong, K. and Crawford, A. B. Marketing your service through your students *Computers in Libraries* 1999, **19**, 22-4, 26
- 8 Plosker, G. R. The information industry revolution : implications for librarians *Online* , 276. Available at <http://www.infoday.com/online/nov03/plosker.shtml> [accessed on 21/12/2003]
- 9 Pearson, D and Rossall, H Developing a general practice library: a collaborative project between a GP and librarian *Health Information and Libraries Journal* 2001, **18**, 192-202
- 10 IDP Information Discovery Programme. 2003, Available at <http://www.sghms.ac.uk/depts/is/discovery/index.htm>
- 11 Speak, M. Promoting library resources in Age Concern day centres *Health Libraries Review* 1991, **81**, 21-28
- 12 Andreasen, A. R. and Kotler, P Strategic marketing for nonprofit organizations, 6th ed. New Jersey : Pearson, 2003
- 13 Shisler, C. M. Positive image and high profile gets results in a hospital library *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 2000, **88**, 251-253
- 14 Cooper, E. R. Marketing the hospital library to physicians: one approach *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 1991, **79**, 86-87

- 15 Rea, G “Promoting the library service” IN Pinder, C. and Melling, M. eds Providing customer oriented services in academic libraries. London : LA / SCONUL, 1996
- 16 Olsen, C. A Test your library’s marketing IQ *Medical References Quarterly* 1993, **12**, 75-83
- 17 Walker, M. E. A new hospital library: a marketing opportunity *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 1995, **83**, 330-332
- 18 Turner, A. and Rosen, N. Promoting NeLH to the health community *Health information on the internet* 2002, **29**, 5
- 19 Elliott de Saez, E. Marketing concepts for libraries and information services, 2nd edition. London : Facet, 2002
- 20 Bell, L. Guerilla tactics in information dissemination: developing a web based resource for NHS managers *Aslib proceedings* 2002, **54**, 158-165
- 21 Crawford, G. Marketing library services: a model for success at the Warwick Business School Library *Relay* 2004, **56**, 11-14
- 22 Price, G What google teaches us that has nothing to do with searching *Searcher* 2003, **11**, Available at <http://www.infoday.com/searcher/nov03/price.shtml> [accessed 18/12/2003]
- 23 Davies, S. and Wales, A. Integrating electronic information resources for NHS Glasgow staff at the point of need: a model of interlibrary

- collaboration and resource sharing *Health Information and Libraries Journal* 2001, **18**, 229-237
- 24 Wakeley, P. J., Poole, C. and Foster, E. C. The marketing audit: a new perspective on library services and products *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 1988, **76**, 323-327
- 25 Bunyan, L. E. and Lutz, E. M. Marketing the hospital library to nurses *Bulletin of the Medical Library Association* 1991, **79**, 223-225
- 26 Smigielski, E. M. and Wulff, J. L. Health maintenance : the cycle of marketing at a health sciences library *Bibliotheca Medica Canadiana* 2002, **24**, 17-20
- 27 Swaffield, L. Competition wasn't healthy *Library Association Record* 1999, **101**, 290-291
- 28 Roddham, M. Toolkit for a healthy image *Library Association Record* 1997, **99**, 434-435
- 29 Forsyth, E. Putting the skills into practice *Library Association Record* 1997, **99**, 317
- 30 Bedwell, K. Marketing library services at LSE *Relay* 2002, **54**, 15-16
- 31 Rees, A. Project Connect: information for health care networked across North Thames *Health Libraries Review* 1998, **15**, 59-63
- 32 NeLH DLnet education pack. 2003, Available at http://www.nelh.nhs.uk/dlnet/education_pack.pdf [accessed 3/11/2003]

- 33 Cree, J. S. and Pepper, M. National Libraries Week – report from the Department of Health *Assignment* 1998, **15**, 44-46
- 34 Herman, C. and Ward, S. The NHS library policy review – developing the strategic road map. London : TFPL, 2004
- 35 Hernando, S. Promoting library services to qualified nurses: towards a market-led approach *Health Libraries Review* 1997,**14**: 103-119
- 36 van Loo, J. Marketing the library service: lessons from the commercial sector *Health Libraries Review* 1984, **1**, 36-47
- 37 Ranganathan, S.R. The five laws of library science. Bombay : Asia Publishing House 1963
- 38 Fichter, D. Why and how to use blogs to promote your library's services *Marketing Library Services* 2003, **17**, Available at <http://www.infotoday.com/MLS/nov03/fichter.shtml> [accessed 18/12/2003]
- 39 Forrest, M. and Mackay, D. A healthy relationship with your user *Library Association Record* 1999, **101**, 476
- 40 MLA Chapter sharing roundtables – May, 2003. Marketing and public relations. 2003, Available at <http://www.chaptercouncil.mlanet.org/roundtables2003/marketing.htm> 1 [accessed 18/12/2003]