

THE MARKETING STRATEGY FOR EFFECTIVE PUBLIC LIBRARY SERVICES IN THE ACCRA METROPOLIS

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Abstract

The paper looks at the potentials and strategic importance of the Accra Central Library to the provision of effective and efficient library and information services to the public and institutions in Accra, and its inability to contribute effectively to the development and growth in education, industry, commerce, culture, tourism, socio-economic and political activities in Accra and nation-wide. The writers have analysed the acute problems and issues that have stalled the continuous process of effective service delivery and also proposed a new marketing strategy that seeks a holistic approach to address the nagging issues and the way forward for a better library and information service provision in the Accra Metropolis. To revamp library and information services, and attract financial and material support from the public, profit-making institutions and non-governmental institutions, the writers have called for a closer collaboration of Management of the Library and identifiable institutions, politicians and other stakeholders.

Introduction

For sometime now all types of libraries are taking a new look at their operational schemes and programmes, aims and objectives to

ensure innovation and maximum use of their human and material resources. They are also breaking new grounds to promote purposeful and effective service and to "preserve or enhance the consumers and societies well being."¹ The new realisation is that other institutions and organisations are engaged in or performing services that are usually within the exclusive domain of libraries.

In the event of this process, some libraries have to re-chart their marketing strategies in order to make an impact on their clientele, to attract their support and due recognition as an institution versatile enough to provide their information needs and also contribute to the public wealth eventually through its diverse operations.

Background

It has been recognised that libraries are service organisations beset with changing client attitudes and societal needs, increasing public and private competition, and diminishing financial resources.² The Accra Central Library like other public libraries, has a challenging role to play to actualise its aims and objectives,

briefly stated, "to acquire, organise and make available books, non-book material, and information for use by the public, and provide facilities necessary for reading, reference and research at the library's premises and for home use". In addition to this, the library organises activities that would encourage and enhance education, culture, recreation and national development.

The efforts made to bring these aims and objectives into fruition have been hampered seriously by lack of suitable resources, equipment, facilities and inadequate funding from the central government coupled with a high staff turnover. Besides, lack of adequate public support also undermines the struggle to contain the challenges ahead.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Marketing public library services in the Accra metropolis is a big task. Despite its achievements and the glorious past, the present situation in the provision of adequate books, effective and efficient services and a conducive environment for study and research have become problematic to the effect that the library is hardly satisfying the information needs of the general public. Even the current users of the library's resources and facility can not be said to be satisfied on the average, due to constraints in equipping and stocking the library with current literature, reference books, information and communication technology. To overcome the difficulties and move forward it would be plausible to

consider some thoughts shared by some writers.

Gareth Smith and Jim Saker³ assert that "for marketing activity to become established and effective it is essential that the service being offered is defined so that an appropriate marketing message can be developed." They further opine that "the concept of marketing is founded on the fact that marketing decisions should be based on customer needs and wants" ⁴ Booth⁵, on the other hand remarks that "the best way for an organization to ensure survival in ... strained economic circumstances is to make its presence felt and impress upon those holding the purse strings." He also believes that marketing can help achieve this aim and that "marketing will in itself raise the library's profile which will hopefully lead in turn to increased use of services.... and thus provide managers with ammunition to silence critics and justify the continued existence of the library."

While Baldock⁶ was reflecting on marketing libraries, she cited Janet Schmidt as saying that marketing is "a continuous process which enables an organisation to meet the current needs of the clients and to assess and create new services to meet their future needs." She further stressed that "the general goals of any organization will be furthered by identifying, attracting and serving specific users and gaining their support"⁷ in addition "libraries can be indispensable to community groups and organizations if they are

streamlined to avoid overlapping. Predominantly they should be able to satisfy unfulfilled needs. Libraries are however a public service that requires public investment and unless the public and politicians can be persuaded that resources should be spent on library services high quality provision will not be possible because nobody insists in anything that does not guarantee profit of some kind.”⁸

According to Churchill and Peter⁹, successful marketing is customer driven: it addresses customer needs and desires. Needs are the things customers require to survive as individuals and organizations while desires or wants are the things that customers would like to have or make their lives more pleasant or their activities easier to carry out.

Developments in library services

Since its humble beginning in the 1950's students, school children, adults and some institutions, clubs, societies etc. have been the main clients of the Accra Central Library. Students, school children and some individuals who used the library before 1975, at least can express some satisfaction about services offered by the Accra Central Library. During the period 1950-1975, the library operated a mobile library service from Accra to render service to the Eastern, Volta, and Greater Accra Regions. The Ashanti and Brong Ahafo regions were accorded the same services when they were raised to the status of regional libraries.

Activities organised for school child-

ren included story hour programmes, radio programmes, reading and essay competition, “spelling bee” film shows, quiz, exhibitions and school library service. On the other hand businessmen and commercial concerns have of late not benefited much from the services of the public library. There used to be a Commercial Library, which provided commercial, industrial, manufacturing and business information to the public in the 1970's but this folded up in the mid 80's.

The current situation

The library's administration needs a huge financial outlay to bring up the whole organisation to an appreciable standard or status. Furthermore, books, periodicals and other resources such as vehicles for official duties, mobile vans for school library and book box services, and information technology support service, are urgently required. As of now, the posture of the administration does not portray its utmost capabilities and potentials.

Provision of library and information services at the Accra Central Library, to say the least, is an aberration despite the serious commitment and effort being made by the Board to overcome some of the constraints. The situation on the ground is near chaos, as the analysis below would show.

Statistics of book stock/Membership and Pattern of book borrowing

There is an unimpressive library stock, membership, and pattern of book borrowing from the library in 2001 as

shown below.

Book Stock

	Accra Central Library	Total Stock
i.	Children' library	10,017
ii.	Extensions Department	9,861
iii.	Lending library	10,253
iv.	Reference library	8,147

- programmes;
- ii. Inadequate popular/text books;
- iii. Lots of popular and suitable books are long overdue; and
- iv. Lack of attractive titles and recent publications

Staff at Post (Line staff only)(Fig. 2)

Pattern of Book Borrowing (Fig. 1)

An observation of the stocks indicates that a sizable number of them are very old and not attractive. Very few titles have recent editions. The stock is not balanced to cater for varied user tastes. Weeding or revising the stock cannot be done properly because the staff are inexperienced and lack the professional acumen to do so.

Membership

Accra Central Library Registered Users

i.	Children's library	968
ii.	Extensions Department	97
iii.	Lending library	240

The following are some of the perceivable underlying factors of low patronage:

- i. Lack of adequate books generally to support outreach

The staffing situation is very appalling. In the organisational set up as at December 2001, the line staff at the Central Library was 23 with only 2 professional librarians at post, instead of at least 6 professionals. Secondly, most of the staff are very new to the job (see table 2b). Fourteen (14) of them have not had the opportunity to attend the In-service training programme organised by the Board because the programme had been suspended since the year 2000. The suspension of the programme is seriously affecting staff development from the base line. It is also unfortunate that a library with such a reputable and enviable track record should be denied the financial and material support to its In-service training programme for the newly employed staff. This development would initially affect the career

TABLE I

Issues-January - December 2001

	0	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	TotalFiction	Grand Total	
Lending	38	52	75	455	133	468	890	98	190	23	2422	1207	3629
Children's	6	-	465	1106	199	382	14	16	215	54	2457	6591	9048
Extension	57	39	32	872	1572	72	437	159	176	20	3436	5960	9396
Total	101	91	527	2433	1904	922	1341	273	581	97	8315	13,758	22,073

Source: Ghana Library Board.

TABLE 2a
Accra Central Library

	Staff at post	Establishment	Remarks
Children's library.	6	6	No professional librarian attached to the department
Extensions department	3	3	No professional librarian attached to the department
Lending department	6	10	Only one professional Librarian attached; need for one other professional librarian
Reference library	8	9	One professional librarián attached to the department.

Source: Ghana Library Board.

development of the staff and is bound to have grave consequences on efficient and effective library and information service delivery.

Length of Service

Most of the staff have worked for less than 5 years. Four (4) of them have benefited from the In-service training programme whereas only 2 have acquired the Diploma in Librarianship from the University. Against this

background, it is now clear that the staff generally, have an up-hill task i.e. to offer an effective and efficient service to a literary sophisticated community. Something concrete ought to be done before the service collapses completely.

Staff training in librarianship

Training, which is necessary for institutional survival, development and progress has become an excruciation

TABLE 2b
No. of years at post

	1-5yrs	6-10 yrs	11-15 yrs	16-20 yrs	21 yrs +	Total
Lending	4	1	-	-	1	6*
Reference	5**	1	-	2	-	8
Children's	5	-	-	-	1	6***
Extension	-	-	1	-	2****	3
Total	14	2	1	2	4	23

Source: Ghana Library Board

* Four staff members have worked for less than two years, one for more that two years but less than five years.

** Three members of staff have worked for less than one year and two for one year.

*** Two members of staff were engaged less than a year ago, three have served for less than two years and one has worked for 32 years.

**** These two members of staff have worked with the Board for 32 and 33 years respectively

burden on the management of the Board because of the high staff turnover and under-funding. The table below shows the precarious posture of staff training among those at post as at December 2001.

To overcome these problems and forge ahead, the Accra Central

support educational programmes in general; and compliment the efforts of the Non-formal Education Programme, and the National Commission for Civic Education (NCCE).

TABLE 2c

Analysis of beneficiaries of training programmes

	<i>No. of staff</i>	<i>No. training at all</i>	<i>In.service training</i>	<i>Certificate/Diploma holders</i>	<i>Degree/Post graduate degree holders</i>
Lending	6	5	Nil	Nil	1
Reference	8	5	1	1	1
Children's	6	4	1	1	Nil
Extension	3	-	2	1	Nil
Total	23	14	4	3	2

Source: Ghana Library Board.

Library should re-examine its marketing orientation for a positive change in service delivery and customer satisfaction. It has to look at the kinds of services it ought to offer or promote to satisfy the taste and interest of the public. It also has to adopt appropriate methods for delivering satisfactory service. Therefore, it has to determine the needs, wants, and interests of target markets.

The need for strategic planning for the future

The time is ripe for the Accra Central Library to evolve a new development planning strategy that would support the city and Ghana's economic, political and socio-cultural programmes. Secondly, to provide information and organise activities to

To guarantee financial and material support from profit making organisations, individuals and potential users, the solution is to put in place the following strategies that would entice and sustain their interest:

- i. Marketing focus strategy;
- ii. Service innovation strategy; and
- iii. Value added strategy.

It could be safely said that the Accra Central Library service is a shadow of itself because these three strategies are obviously absent in its operations, at least as at present.

The New Dispensation

The restructuring of the Local Government Administration (PNDC Law 207) has prescribed active involvement of District Assemblies in providing libraries in each of the one

hundred and ten (110) district capitals.

Administratively, the Accra Central Library is supposed to be the district headquarters under the new dispensation with branches in the sub-metro and towns at the periphery. The arrangement is a recommendation by a committee set up by the Ghana Library Board to draw up guidelines for the establishment of libraries in the newly created districts.

The district library as envisaged should be established in the district capital and a network of branches developed in other towns and suburbs. Apart from providing the traditional library services, the new dispensation prescribes that the district library should re-introduce the development of databank or databases for its administrative area in addition to the Reader's Advisory Services, extension activities and collection of government publications and those of institutions, organisations and other bodies. So, it behoves on the District Library Administration to research into the needs of the stakeholders in education, business, health, commerce and industry, tourism, transport, agriculture etc. and collect information or data that would be relevant or beneficial to the people and institutions for the economic and socio-cultural development of that particular geographical area.

The magnitude of this job calls for urgent establishment of functional libraries and information centres to

offer services to meet the growing needs of the general public and specific interest groups, hence the need to adopt viable marketing strategies to ensure the long-term profitability of the service.

The marketing strategy perspectives

Before 1970, the Accra Central Library service had a lot of expatriate patrons, literary clubs and societies and educational institutions that depended heavily on the library for their information, recreational and educational needs. The dependence of these patrons on the library diminished drastically when the expatriates returned to their country of origin. The social clubs also folded up. The establishment of libraries, information and documentation centres in institutions, firms and organisations became the order of the day. The local collection, which was supervised by the Readers' Advisor, was well patronised by all and sundry. However, this lovely service could not be sustained for a much longer time due to low patronage, lack of publicity and a sustainable development strategy.

The focus of user needs and services has changed because the needs, tastes, etc. of the patrons during the time of the expatriates and the pre-1975, are not the same today. The change had been caused, apparently, by the diminishing interest in British novels, the rise in the demand for African Writers Series, and books written by Ghanaians and other African authors in economics, English language, history and geography. This change

in taste is evident in the type of books in stock now.

The Management Committee of the library should re-examine the needs of current users and design outreach programmes that would also enable the administration to identify the information needs of the 'new' business community, industry and the marginalized urban youth. This exercise or project could be effected by administering questionnaires to the institutions, organisations, business houses, schools, industries and so on, to seek their views, needs and programmes for a comprehensive or a holistic information provision strategy to be developed for the Accra metropolis.

The responses to the questionnaires and interviews should be valuable enough to be used to formulate a formidable marketing strategy, a revision of the library's acquisition policy and re-design outreach programmes. Lessons from this exercise would definitely compel the Management Committee to re-examine its human resources development programme; because it is believed that the newly envisaged direction of service would require a special calibre of personnel, staff imbued with identifiable qualities and skills or recruit people who may have the capability to become an asset to the city library service after they have gone through the necessary training programmes. Furthermore, it would also enable the Management Committee to determine the extent to which the library should be able to

meet the information needs and requests of the target segments. It is believed that this exercise would definitely reveal the current strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats of the Accra Central Library. The library's influence and relative impact on individuals and the identifiable groups would also be established.

Invariably, research into user needs could reveal or suggest how to share responsibilities among stakeholders to satisfy the information needs of actual and potential users and what action plan to be employed.

Data collection and maintenance

The Management Committee should develop a databank and infrastructure that would enable the marketing strategies to function smoothly and successfully. Management should endeavour to locate institutions, resource centres, agencies, organisations, libraries and other offices whose services could assist the development of a network for the implementation of outreach programmes. The product of this phase of the development programme should equip the Accra Central Library with a clear indication of places, institutions and organisations to be consulted for information not readily available at the Central Library.

The databank/database should provide useful information about business and commercial activities such as types of business, agents, products and services, volume of internal and external trade,

information on researches or projects in progress, location of raw materials, suppliers and sales representatives and so on. Introduction of indexing services of documents and information about social organisations, associations, clubs, schools and colleges, vocational institutes, and their contact addresses, aims, objectives, projects, programmes, field of speciality, membership rules and regulations be considered seriously. Important statistical data should be collected, and preserved for reference and research. Information on internal and external communication facilities, recreational centres and facilities should be documented. The library could also compile profile of prominent personalities who have excelled in identifiable fields or professions.

The Management Committee of the library would have to work out qualitative and practical strategies for the maintenance of the records, stocks and the databank/databases. The maintenance programme could be done in collaboration with stakeholders.

Human resource development

The magnitude of work involved in revamping the services of the library requires high calibre personnel of good professional standing and intelligent support staff because of the magnitude of the problems prevailing within the establishment. So the management team of the Central Library must retrain some of the para-professional staff to acquire skills in relevant fields and employ more

professionals, one to be responsible for data collection, storage, retrieval and maintenance; the other to be responsible for extension activities, which should include, organising fairs, exhibitions, symposia, seminars, lectures, and forum for schools, industries, business, commercial firms, social organisations, literary clubs and other interest groups. The supporting staff should be re-shuffled and their job description well defined and made easily available and also to ensure that the right person is assigned a job that would suit him or her against the background of his or her skills, intellectual capabilities and potentials.

Proposals for enhancing library and information service

The Accra Central Library needs a facelift among other development activities to boost its marketing prospects. The following activities must be considered:

1. The Environment

- i. Facelift for the vicinity
 - a. To develop the area into a tourist centre;
 - b. Provide street lights;
 - c. Improve the drainage system;
 - d. Relocate the stationery/booksellers operating around the library premises;
 - e. Repair the access road to the library complex; and
 - f. Prevent the compound from being used as a thoroughfare by hawkers, truck pushers, porters, pedestrians and motorbike riders.

The Ghana Library Board cannot execute this phase of the project because it does not fall within its scheme of operation. The responsibility lies with the Accra Metropolitan Assembly (AMA), the Local Government Authority responsible for the development of and maintenance of the city.

2. Expansion Programme

- i. The user population is far greater than could be accommodated in the library. The authorities should be thinking of establishing reading rooms at vantage places within the city, with information and communication technology support;
- ii. Establish standard branch libraries with stocks for both children and adults;
- iii. Network all the public libraries in the six sub-metropolitan districts and the central library with internet facility;
- iv. Develop information clearing centre for quick reference service on-line at the central library.

3. Information Technology support

A new IT centre for Internet café, business and communication centre to be built on the plot of land located at Kaneshie adjacent to the Police Station.

4. Service Points

- i. Refurbish the Lending, Reference and Children's libraries as well as the Extension Services Department and the Stack Room. It is being proposed

that all these departments be air-conditioned.

- ii. Renovate the Exhibition Hall; provide air-conditioners and conference facilities so that the hall could be used for other social engagements to raise income for library operations.
- iii. Introduce interior decorations in the public services areas.
- iv. Revise the stock

5. Fund Raising activities

Lobby the District Assembly and Sub-Metros, Parliament and Non-Governmental Organisations (NGO's) for financial and material assistance.

6. Special Services Unit

This unit is to serve as information brokerage, consultancy and reprographic services centre.

Support services and co-operation

The management team of the library should solicit assistance and co-operation from organisations, corporations, offices and institutions for uninterrupted implementation and the success of the new deal. In this direction, it should invite representatives of the under-mentioned organisations for a dialogue:

- i. Ghana Broadcasting Corporation;
- ii. Ghana Chamber of Commerce;
- iii. Accra Metropolitan Assembly;
- iv. Postal Services;
- v. Ghana Telecom Company;
- vi. Department of Mobilisation and Social Welfare;
- vii. Ga Traditional Council;

- viii. Ministry of Education, Ministry of Youth and Sports, and Ministry of Local Government and Rural Development;
- ix. The Press;
- x. Ghana Library Association; and
- xi. Other identifiable organisations.

And to discuss the entire programme in addition to the following:

- i. Revamping library services to meet the needs of basic and secondary schools, institutions and organisations and individuals in the entire district;
- ii. How the library service could help in the overall development process of the local government administrative area;
- iii. Information provision for the business community, the commercial houses, industries, organisations and others;
- iv. Justification for their financial and material support; and
- v. The role they could play to ensure that the strategies actually work and sustainable if they put their full weight behind the new deal.

Resource management

The ultimate success of the new marketing strategy will require sound management practice, effective and efficient information delivery systems, and provision of adequate human resources, good service conditions and remuneration. Management should put in place inventory of stock, equipment, and facilities and utility services. These activities should guarantee a systematic and efficient

operation and implementation of the library's marketing strategy.

Outreach programmes/publicity

The Central Library Management Board should endeavour to have access to the electronic and print media to present educational programmes such as:

1. Book discussion;
2. Discussion of potentials of library and its services;
3. Discussion of library activities, future plans, activities and programmes;
4. Discussion of work with children; and
5. Discussion of programmes on social relations, business matters, economic and industrial developments, the arts and recreation.

The services of the mass media should be sought by management to publicise, publish and advertise its activities and programmes. It should be practicable for the library to work in close collaboration with other agencies, corporations and institutions to facilitate viable joint programmes and ventures.

Reflections of the past

It must be emphasised that in the past the Accra Central Library undertook a lot of activities to promote library services in accordance with its mandate. Laudable as these services were, the problem of continuity and sustainability rocked the boat. Some of the remarkable achievements that have become extinct are:

- i. Index of biographies, which were compiled from the newspapers and journals and a collection of annual reports of institutions and companies in addition to Ghanaian languages collections.
- ii. Management Committees, which were formed to help the Administration in some specified areas of its work, such as book selection. The Committees did not function effectively as was expected because more often than not their meetings did not have a quorum, thus frustrating the work of the Board they were supposed to assist.
- iii. The Board sponsored some para-professional staff to do a course in marketing, public relations, and advertising at the Ghana Institute of Journalism, to enable them perform and render better services during exhibitions, fairs and displays.
- iv. The Board also had plans to develop the Kaneshie and Osu Children's Library into standard branch libraries with all the facilities that go with it.
- v. The rural library service, service to the hospitals, prisons, and teachers through the Postal Service, clubs, societies and communities were abandoned due to lack of resources both financial, material and logistics. Programmes held on the Radio that are no longer active included, question and answer service, book discussion, story telling, children's play etc.

- vi. The human resource development and management is another important factor that has considerable impact on the downward trend to library services in the Accra Metropolis. The staff turnover has been extremely high.

Conclusion

If the Accra Central Library is determined to come out of the woods, it should honestly re-examine its role in the development of Accra Metropolitan Assembly area of jurisdiction in all respects: education, culture, and provision of information and services to satisfy the numerous needs of its actual and potential users and the community at large.

Besides, it should initiate development programmes that would create avenues for the industries, non-governmental organisations, business and commercial firms to consult Accra Central Library for client-centred services and information to promote or enhance their businesses.

Furthermore, it should develop a reliable, efficient databank and information system, which will satisfy the information needs of all sectors of the economy, social groups, and institutions. Creation of a local history section to promote the cultural heritage etc. of the Ga people is highly recommended.

Any effective human resource development programme is an asset to the library. Therefore, the calibre of staff to implement the marketing programme should be examined

critically. Strategies designed to market the programmes and services should be supported with adequate supply of equipment, provision of facilities, logistics, funds, books and non-book resources, and of course good remuneration and conditions of service for the library staff. Lack of adequate salaries and conditions of service has been the bane of public library development in Ghana in recent times, therefore the issue must be resolved once and for all else no amount of logistics, facilities etc. will turn the tables in favour of quality and efficient service delivery.

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