

INFORMATION MARKETING INITIATIVES IN AGRICULTURE RELATED SPECIAL LIBRARIES IN GHANA

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to explore the extent to which marketing principles are adopted in the provision of library services in agriculture related special libraries in Ghana. For this study, a questionnaire was used to collect data from librarians in charge of libraries. The study areas examined were level of training of library personnel, resources available to them for product design and marketing, and implementation of marketing principles. The study found out that libraries undertake limited marketing activities. Their activities are mostly promotional. These are newsletters, talks and exhibitions among others. The librarians have had some training in marketing through workshops and courses in the Department of Information Studies, University of Ghana, Legon. In spite of the above activities, none of the libraries had a marketing plan. They lacked adequate budget to support their activities. The library collections do not adequately meet the needs of the users due to its limitation in numbers, subject coverage and currency. The study concludes with recommendations that would enhance the marketing skills of the agriculture related special libraries.

KEYWORDS: MARKETING STRATEGIES, AGRICULTURAL INFORMATION,
INFORMATION SERVICES, MARKETING RESEARCH.

Introduction

Information in general and agricultural information in recent years is regarded as a resource because of its contributions to economic growth of countries. Researchers

need this information to improve upon research already done and other operators also need current information to improve services and products.

One institution which plays a vital role in the collection, processing, storage and dissemination of such information is the library. Libraries have been in the forefront in providing information to the public for generations. Libraries are engaged in the provision of services such as documentation, reference, referral and information retrieval.

Agricultural information results from scientific and technological research and documentation efforts made by mankind. Given the huge volumes of information, it is necessary that attention be paid to identification, collection, storage, and dissemination of such information. In view of this, many information centres and libraries have been established to perform these tasks to facilitate the use of agricultural information.

Governments in developing countries have come to realize the importance of agricultural information. Library and appropriate information systems were therefore established immediately after their attainment of independence. However, it is on record that these libraries and information systems in developing countries face many challenges such as inadequate funding, lack of government support, lack of cooperation and co-ordination among libraries etc. and Ghana is no exception.

The Marketing Concept

Marketing as a concept has been defined in various ways. Some of the definitions reflect profit centeredness whilst some see it as a social exchange process. The Institute of Marketing (UK) defines it as a “management function which organizes and directs all those business activities involved in assessing and converting customer purchasing power into effective demand for a specific product or service and moving the product or the service to the final consumer so as to achieve the profit target or other objectives set by the company”.

On the other hand, the American Marketing Association defines marketing as “the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion and distribution of ideas, goods and services to create exchanges that satisfy individual and organizational goals”.

Kotler and Andreasen (1991) define marketing in terms of what it is not. They contend that it is not intimidation and coercion. It is not hard selling and deceptive advertising, but rather a sound effective technology for creating exchanges and influencing behaviour that when properly applied must be socially beneficial. Kinnell and MacDoughall (1994) indicate that “marketing is a whole range of functions that bring an organization closer to

meeting the needs of its customers, and ensuring the necessary resources to achieving its goals”.

Tanui and Kitoi (1993) explained that in library management, marketing is about the way in which an organization matches its own human, financial and physical resources to the wants of its consumers. Nawe (1993) also explained that the term is basically an attitude towards consumer satisfaction. It aims to arouse the interest and attention of consumers and to sustain it through providing the clients with what attracts them in terms of its utility and speed of delivery and in the manner most convenient.

In each of the definitions, the idea of identification of users, creating services/products and meeting the needs of the users are evident. In the library system, these activities are pursued to satisfy the needs of the users of the library. It also indicates that marketing is not purely a commercial or profit making activity that can be employed solely in a competitive environment but also in a non-profit making organisation such as the library. In short, marketing involves being aware of the public’s needs, tailoring the organization and its products to satisfy those needs; communicating with the public and monitoring customer satisfaction and making appropriate adjustments.

Objective of the Study

The purpose of this study is to explore the extent to which marketing principles are adopted in the provision of library services in agriculture related special libraries in Ghana.

Methodology

The field survey method was used. A questionnaire was used to collect data. Questions were asked in respect of areas such as:

- Level of training;
- Marketing knowledge;
- Attitude to marketing;
- Marketing plans;
- Resources available for product design and marketing; and
- Implementation of marketing principles.

The population for this study was the agricultural related special libraries in Ghana listed in the “Directory, Special Libraries and Information Centres in Ghana” compiled by Alemna and Acquah (1995) and “Libraries in Ghana” (1998) compiled by the Ghana Library Association. Initially fourteen libraries were identified. However, two were dropped because one no longer exists and the other was temporarily closed down because there was no one to manage it. Librarians in charge of these libraries were engaged in the study.

Of the 12 libraries left, one librarian had passed away in the course of data collection. This explains why only 11 librarians participated in the study. The libraries that participated were: Animal Research Institute (ARI); Cocoa Research Institute of Ghana (CRIG); Crop Research Institute (CRI); Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO); Forestry Research Institute of Ghana (FORIG); Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA); Oil Palm Research Institute (OPRI); Plant Genetic Resources Centre (PGRC); Savanna Agricultural Research Institute (SARI); Soil Research Institute (SRI); and Water Research Institute (WRI). The study was undertaken between 2000 and 2001.

Presentation of Results

Ten out of eleven copies of the questionnaire sent out to librarians and individuals in charge of the agricultural libraries identified for this research were retrieved. This represented a response rate 90.92%. Eight of the responding libraries were located in research institutions, notably in Council for Scientific and Industrial Research (CSIR). One library was located in the Ministry of Food and Agriculture (MOFA) and another library in an international organization.

Marketing Strategies

Respondents were asked whether they undertook any marketing activities in their libraries. Eighty percent of the respondents indicated that they undertook marketing activities in their libraries whilst two (20%) of them did not. When it came to the issue of how long they had been marketing their services, some interesting revelations were made. Five (62.5%) out of eight respondents who marketed their services, indicated between one and three years. Two (25%) indicated they had been doing this for between ten and thirty-two years. One of them, however, could not say for how long the library had been doing this. A cross reference on the responses showed that the time period of the two respondents stating between ten and thirty-two years was equal to the number of years they have been in employment. Two librarians did not answer this question.

Knowledge of Marketing

The researchers wanted to know if the respondents had any kind of formal training in marketing. Nine (90%) out of the ten respondents answered in the affirmative and one (10%) in the negative. The level of training for the librarians varied. Some respondents indicated more than one level, that is, the person might have taken the training as a course in library school and might have attended some seminars/workshops on marketing. This finding was higher than that of Do Amaral (1992), where only 36% indicated they had attended a course or courses in marketing whilst 60% did not. The responses are highlighted in Table 1.

Table 1: Level of Formal Training for Librarians in Marketing

Level of Training	No. of Librarians	Percentage
Certificate	3	30
A course at Library School	3	30
B.A.	1	10
Seminar/Workshop	9	90

SOURCE: Field survey, 2001/2002

As illustrated in Table 1, for those who had some formal training in marketing, 10% had a first degree in marketing. Thirty percent indicated they obtained formal training in marketing at the certificate level and another 30% indicated having taken the course at the Department of Information Studies of the University of Ghana, Legon. The rest (90%) of the respondents attended workshops/seminars in marketing.

It is interesting to note that some librarians had certificates and degrees in marketing. This is because marketing as a course in the Department of Information Studies (DIS), University of Ghana, Legon, was introduced in 1998/99 academic year. Moreover, there was no special award for it since it was only a course among other subjects. The only explanation that could be given to those holding certificates and degrees in marketing is that, they might have obtained these qualifications outside the DIS.

A high percentage of librarians acquired marketing knowledge through seminars/workshops. These methods may be insufficient to give an in-depth treatment of marketing courses. Regular training in marketing and other courses such as strategic planning, budgeting etc should constitute a continuing education programme for the librarians and other library staff.

Perception of Librarians about Marketing

The perceptions of the librarians on the value of marketing on their libraries' services were ascertained. Eight persons responded to the question and two declined. Out of the eight, seven agreed that marketing of library services was essential and one said it was very important.

On whether training in marketing has had any influence on their attitudes towards marketing of library services, all eight who had had some sort of training, agreed it did

influence their attitudes. To assess the extent to which training had influenced their attitudes, six statements were presented for the librarians to agree or to disagree on.

In all, eight persons responded to at least one of the statements. Out of the eight respondents who responded to the statements, five (62.5%) of them responded to all the six statements. One (12.5%) responded to five statements out of the six, another one responded to three statements and the last person responded to only one statement. All the eight respondents agreed that training in marketing influenced their attitude towards marketing of library services by way of enabling them create and maintain awareness of library and information services in their organizations.

Planning for Marketing Activities

Marketing forces demand that managers continually think about the future and plan for it, a plan that will help them implement marketing strategies to accomplish the goals that have been set. With the competitive environment, managers cannot rely on luck to succeed. Planning or plans can help lessen the chance of surprised environmental changes, reduce the chances of making costly mistakes and help marketers prioritize how to spend scarce money and time.

The researchers enquired whether there were marketing plans for the libraries. All respondents stated they had no plans, but five indicated that they intended to prepare one for their libraries. This finding is at variance with that of Kelso (1995). She found out that 60% of her respondents had formal annual and long-range plans, including marketing plans for specific products and target markets. As to how they implemented their marketing activities in the absence of plans, only one out of the five respondents who indicated his/her library had no plans stated his/her activities were based on intuition.

In the case of those who stated that they were yet to prepare a marketing plan, two of them indicated they employed different methods to suit the occasion. It was only one among those who employed different methods reviewed his/her style of operation annually. The implication is that they undertook some form of marketing but it was not planned.

Marketing Research

Marketing research involves gathering, analyzing and evaluating information about situations and the environment. Such information is important to inform decision-making, planning, execution and control.

In response to the question on which issues the librarians often collect information, the respondents had the following to say. Fifty percent of the respondents indicated that they collected information on user dissatisfaction; similarly, fifty percent of the respondents indicated that they kept records on additional stock every year. Four (40%) collected information on active lending stock and three (30%) on library use and on enquiries received. It is important that librarians keep track of what goes on in their libraries. Based on this information, librarians can take informed decisions to improve on their services. The responses to the question are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Activities on which information was collected

Activities	No. of Libraries	Percentage
User Satisfaction	5	50
Similar services by other Libraries	1	10
Active user population	3	30
Enquiries received	3	30
Loans	4	40
Library use / head count	3	30
Additional stock per annum	5	50
Reservation	2	20
E-mail requests	1	10
Telephone calls	1	10
CD-ROM services	1	10

SOURCE: Field survey, 2001/2002

Priced Services

An attempt was made to identify the services the libraries charge for. It was revealed that fees were charged for some specific services. Out of 10 respondents, three indicated that they did not charge for any of the services provided. Seven (70%) of the respondents, however, indicated they charged for some of the services. The types of fee-based information services provided by the libraries are shown in Table 3.

Table 3: Types of Fee-based Services Provided

Service	No. of Libraries	Percentage
Online bibliographic Search	1	14.3
Photocopying	6	85.7
E-mail	2	28.6
CD-ROM Searches	2	28.6
Training	1	14.3

SOURCE: Field survey, 2001/2002

The results illustrated in the table above confirmed a well-known phenomenon that fees are charged for photocopying services in libraries. Out of the seven respondents, 85.7% charged for photocopying. This finding is similar to the findings of Edoke (1991); Ekoja (1996); and Bani (1998). Edoke, for example, found that 100% of the libraries he surveyed charged for photocopying.

As to who sets the prices of the services being charged for, seven (70%) respondents answered this question. Out of the seven respondents, two (28.6%) stated that it was the sole prerogative of the librarian to fix prices for services. Another two (28.6%) indicated it was the head of division and the librarians who agree upon fees to be charged whilst one respondent stated that it is the director of the organization and the librarian. It was observed that, even where the librarian was not solely responsible for fixing prices, he/she was always among those who were responsible. This re-emphasized the fact that, librarians must be knowledgeable in various types of pricing principles to be able to influence or suggest appropriate strategies that would be beneficial to both the users and the library. It also revealed that the organizations where the libraries were located played a part in the marketing activities of the libraries by being part of the pricing system.

The reasons why they charged for some of the services are highlighted in Table 4.

Table 4: Reasons for Fee-based Services

Reasons	No. of Libraries	Percentage
To make up for the shortfall in government subvention	1	14.30
To improve the quality of services	3	42.90
To recover costs of services	5	71.43

SOURCE: Field survey, 2001/2002

Another well-known phenomenon has been confirmed in this study. In all, the most frequent reason cited for charging was to recover cost of services, as cited by five (71.4%) librarians out of seven. Three (42.9%) respondents stated that they charged so that they could improve the quality of the fee-based services. One person indicated the reason was to make up for cuts in government subvention. It must be pointed out that, the intention for charging might not be to make “profit” but rather to replenish the stock of consumables such as printer cartridge, toner and paper for photocopying among others.

Promotional Channels

To know the types of channels the libraries adopted in informing their clients about their services, respondents were provided with a number of alternative channels to choose from as it applied to them. They were also to provide other channels not stated that they employed. It became apparent that displaying information about the library’s additional materials and services on notice boards was the most used channel (70%) in creating awareness about library services available. Another 70% of the respondents indicated that they used talks, another 40% made use of posters, 30% indicated leaflets and newsletters. As regards flyers and exhibition, two librarians indicated using these as a means of promoting their services and one respondent indicated he made use of the institutional homepage, annual reports, logo and sign post. The range and number of channels used by the libraries were varied. They employed different kinds of means in communicating their services to users. Some employed as many as four channels whilst the others employed as few as one channel.

Constraints to Marketing

The study attempted to ascertain the marketing challenges faced by the libraries. Eighty percent of the librarians responded to the question.

Table 5: Constraints to Marketing Library Services

Constraints	No. of Libraries	Percentages
Lack of training in marketing	2	25.0
No. of Specific plan	5	62.5
No. of specific marketing budget	6	75.0
No. of specific person for marketing	4	50.0
Lack of funding	1	12.5

SOURCE: Field survey, 2001/2002

As illustrated in Table 5, six (75%) out of the eight respondents cited the problem of having no specific budget for marketing their activities. Marketing activities need to be financed properly. Promotional activities such as advertisements, organizing talks and exhibitions or impact assessment studies, for example, have to be budgeted for. Libraries, thus, need separate budgets or increased budgets for marketing activities. Related to this was the problem of inadequate funding as stated by one respondent.

Another problem cited by the respondents was, not having a plan for the marketing activities as indicated by five (62.5%) of them. Lack of a plan can really hinder the take off of any project. The value of a planning document is that, it clarifies the objectives of the library, sets targets, communicates to others what is happening and puts everything on course. Lack of this important document could lead to haphazard implementation of activities.

Four (50%) cited no specific person responsible for marketing as their problem. Normally, libraries are an integral part of the organizations in which they are established. Lack of training in marketing was another problem cited by two (25%) respondents. This problem cannot be overlooked. For any effective marketing to take place, the librarians must have marketing skills. Training in marketing therefore would equip them with the required skill to undertake the marketing activities.

In response to a question on how the libraries get funds for their marketing activities, seven (70%) librarians responded. Four (57%) out of the seven indicated they depended on the organisation's core budget since no budget line was reserved for the library. As such, they prepared a memorandum to the head of the establishment when the need arose. One respondent indicated he/she had sponsorship from a donor whilst another respondent depended on the library's budget. This implies specific budget allocations are made for some of the libraries but not solely for marketing activities.

Plans for the Future

The respondents were asked to state the services they planned to introduce in the near future which they were not providing. A wide range of new services were listed by the librarians as presented in Table 6.

Table 6: Future Planned Services

Service	No. of Libraries	Percentage
CD-ROM	2	22.2
Internet	4	44.4
Compilation of bibliographies	1	11.1
Abstracting/indexing	1	11.1
Photocopying	2	22.2
E-mail	3	33.3
Current awareness service	2	22.2
Website	1	11.1

SOURCE: Field survey, 2001/2002

Nine respondents cited at least one new service to be introduced by their libraries in the near future. The introduction of the Internet service was what many of the libraries wanted to introduce, this was cited by 44.4% of the librarians. This response was not surprising because Internet was among the new communication technologies which was very beneficial to information dissemination. In Ghana, for example, funds for buying library materials are limited. With the Internet, users can access information, particularly current ones which may not be available in the libraries.

E-mail services were cited by three (33.3%) respondents as services to be introduced in the libraries. Two (22.2%) respondents indicated current awareness, photocopying, and CD-ROM services and one (11.1%) respondent mentioned abstracting, website creation and compilation of bibliographies as services to be introduced. One respondent stated that, he/she intended to create additional access points for the use of the Internet so that many users could access the Internet at the same time. One observation made was that, the respondents were eager to make use of the information technology to enhance their operations.

To efficiently manage the resources required to enhance service delivery, training of the library staff is vital. As such, enquiry was made into the training of the library staff. It was found out that all the ten respondents indicated they had no plans for future training of the library staff in marketing. It was not enough when the librarians alone are trained in this field. All the library staff must be trained because they all serve users and libraries need to provide customer-led services.

The respondents were asked to express general views about the future. Seven out of the ten respondents expressed views on the future of their marketing activities. There

were optimistic comments from two respondents that, marketing library and information services have a bright future. They stated the bright future could only be achieved if the library staff could be trained to re-orient their attitudes towards marketing trends. One respondent indicated that the future was bright because the libraries were placed under the business development unit of their organization. This could mean that being placed under such a unit the authorities have realized that the libraries also needed to be run as businesses and not just be there to be used when one needs it. This was a good sign for the future of the libraries and the organizations as a whole.

On the other hand two respondents expressed pessimistic views. One stated that the future was bleak because there were many competitors in the country. This, the researchers assume refers to the many communication and business centres in the country particularly in the cities. This was a defeatist attitude. The librarians should be proactive and aggressive in their business and strategize to cope with competition.

Another respondent indicated that the future was bleak in view of the acquisition of materials which was rather on the low side. This respondent's fear may be genuine. One cannot market something that one does not have. The services provided in the libraries are based on materials acquired which are the products. When one does not have quality products marketing becomes difficult. One of the qualities of information is its currency. If the libraries would continue to base their services on aged documents, the future is bleak indeed.

The irony of the overall responses was that, all the respondents stressed training as a starting point but none of them mentioned specifically training of the library staff as one of their future plans.

Out of the future services planned to be introduced, some of the librarians intended to charge for the following for which they had not been charging for. They included Internet searches, E-mail, CD-ROM searches, photocopying and bibliographic search. These are shown in Table 7.

Table 7: Planned Fee-based Services

Service	No. of Libraries	Percentage
Internet Searches	4	44.4
E-mail messages	4	44.4
CD-ROM Searches	6	55.5
Photocopying	3	33.3
Bibliographic Searches	1	11.1

SOURCE: Field survey, 2001/2002

As can be seen from the table, most of the services for which fees would be charged were mostly in the area of information technology. Five (55.5%) respondents indicated that fees would be charged for CD-ROM search, four (44.4%) cited Internet search and e-mail, three (33.3%) for photocopying and one for bibliographic search. One respondent indicated that he/she intended increasing the service points for Internet service so that more users could have access at the same time.

Conclusion

The study revealed among other things that the special libraries undertook some form of marketing activities. These marketing activities were mostly promotional, that is, through display of information about the library, by posters, newsletters, talks and exhibitions. In spite of all these activities, most of the libraries did not have adequate budgets to support their promotional activities. In addition, many of the libraries did not undertake any research to find out which promotional activities make the most impact. Finally, the study also revealed that there is an urgent need for marketing plans and training to update librarians' skills and knowledge in marketing and marketing research.

Recommendations

The following recommendations are being made based on the findings of this research. These are to serve as a guide to all libraries in general and especially agriculture related special libraries in Ghana which intend to market their library resources. The recommendations are for both librarians and policy makers.

Resources

1. Staff

Although almost all the librarians in charge had some form of training in marketing, this was viewed as insufficient. It is therefore recommended that regular seminars and workshops in marketing should be organized for the librarians to enrich their knowledge and performance.

2. Equipment

The increasing availability of electronic facilities dictates that the libraries should be supplied with adequate and relevant ICT equipment so that they can receive information and compile their own databases. As a policy, management should ensure regular update of the ICT equipment available to keep pace with rapid changes in the industry.

3. Stock

Managers of agricultural libraries need to rethink the range of sources of information that they can tap. The following sources are recommended:

i. CD-ROM Databases

CD-ROM's huge storage and retrieval capability is the biggest boost to library and information services in developing countries in recent years. This enables libraries to provide reasonable service as well as to achieve an acceptable uplift of image.

ii. Internet Resources

Internet conquers geographical and territorial restrictions. With the Internet service, the collection development normally planned toward 'just-in-case' orientation will become "just in time" orientation. A movement between these two orientations, however, must be balanced for an excellent stock. An example is Food and Agriculture Organisation (FAO), World Agricultural Information Centre (WAICENT) which can be accessed through the Internet. The Centre is a global resource for authoritative information on agriculture, forestry, fisheries, and rural development.

iii. Inter-Library Loan and Document Delivery (ILL/DD)

It is a fact that no single library can satisfy all the needs of its clientele with its own collections. Thus, another way the libraries can source information to satisfy the users' needs is through inter-library loan.

iv. Grey Literature

In Ghana, a lot of literature exists in grey form. Most of them can be found in the universities in the form of students' dissertations/theses and research reports undertaken by research fellows, lecturers and students. Some grey materials are also in government ministries and research institutions such as policy documents and technical reports.

To encourage the use of grey literature, librarians need to make an effort in tracking unpublished reports. When there is the need, librarians should be trained in the techniques of tracking these documents.

Planning Marketing Activities

In fact, of all the tactics for marketing, probably the most crucial to the marketing strategy is the marketing plan. Such plans determine the marketing activities of the future and will reflect the target for the future. As a policy recommendation, a marketing plan must be developed by each librarian as an important basis for evaluating the overall result of the marketing activities.

Marketing Research

The study revealed that, librarians collected information on various services that they provided. However, this was more of keeping statistics on their activities than for research and decision-making purposes. There is an urgent need for market research – user needs survey, evaluation of resources, etc., and on regular basis to get information to guide them in decision-making, planning, implementation and control. As practiced in other countries, reviews of user/customer satisfaction must occur at least every two years if it cannot be done every year.

Fee Based Services

Based on the findings of the study, the following three means of collection of fees are recommended. Any one or combination of two or all the three of the following can be adopted as it fits the system of operation or more convenient to the parent organization:

- i. Charging back is a mechanism by which services are charged to departments' projects, and to jobs. That is, departments are charged with direct costs incurred for services provided by the library. In this case the accounting department takes care of the process and no one actually handles the money;
- ii. Charging out, also called billing out is when a fee for a service is added to the fees already being charged to a customer for a primary service of the parent organization. For example, when project proposals are being written, cost of information should be included in the budget. In this case the library is not functioning directly as a fee-based service but yet fees for information service are passed on to project financiers; and
- iii. Selling information services directly to customers is a third type of fee collection. In this case fees charged are collected directly by the service provider.

In special agricultural libraries, the librarians together with the Directors and some representatives of the researchers should form a library committee to draw up a pricing and fee collection policy for the library services.

Promotion

Many channels of communicating to potential users of these services exist. However, the most frequently used channel of communication on available services in the libraries as revealed in this study were displays and talks.

It is therefore recommended that agricultural librarians must go beyond the 'normal' means of promotion – providing newsletters, displays, notices, and talks among others. They must undertake special initiatives in promoting their services such as conference and training courses. Librarians must take the opportunities created by conferences held in their institutions to share information about their libraries. Information leaflets can be placed in the delegates' packs to inform them about information available. A reply slip can also be included to facilitate quick response.

Closely related to the conference strategy is training course or workshop strategies. Agricultural librarians should find out about training courses in the field of agriculture and a record kept on all forthcoming relevant courses. As the course date approaches, course organizers should be contacted with information packages for the participants on databases the library has developed. This could be just an information sheet for each participant.

From the analysis, only one librarian indicated she uses her library's website to promote the library and only one librarian plans to create a library website in the future. Websites provide general information about the library and also provides access to other Internet resources for users. The librarians should seize any means available to them including websites, to present short articles to inform their readers about what is available.

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