

PUBLIC RELATIONS AND MARKETING OF NIGERIAN SCHOOL LIBRARY MEDIA CENTRE (SLMC) PRODUCTS AND SERVICES

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Abstract

This wisdom paper focused on public relations and marketing of Nigerian School Library Media Centre (SLMC) products and services. The paper explains public relations in School library Media Centre (SLMC), need for public relations in a SLMC, some clarifications about marketing as a concept, marketing SLMC products and services, and channels of public relations and marketing in SLMC. Some of the channels of the public relations and marketing of information resources and services of SLMC that were discussed in the paper include: press release, letter writing, house organ, booklets, bulletin and notice boards, and electronic / text messages, social media. The study concludes that information should be priced. Hence, librarians' ability to determine the prevailing group of users in their environment would determine the price range. Therefore, SLMC specialists need a very good knowledge of the marketing mix to achieve huge results.

Keywords: *Public Relations, Library Marketing, School Library Media Centre, Media Products, Media services*

Introduction

School library media center is the heart of school academic and extra curricula activities in primary and secondary school system. Todd, Kuhlthau and Oelma (2004) states that school librarians and school library media programs helped students and teachers to succeed in all academic and extracurricular activities in school. A school library otherwise known as school library media center is a library within a school where students, staff, and parents in a public or private school have access to a variety of information resources. The goal of the school library media center is to ensure that all members of the school community have equitable access to books and reading, to information, and to information technology. A school library media center uses all types of media... is automated, and utilises the Internet as well as online information resources (e.g. e-books) for information gathering (Morris, 2004).

The successful implementation of the school's curriculum, teaching, and extra curricula activities depend on materials that are housed in the centre and the ability to use the materials effectively. The walls of the school library media center hold a wealth of information about subject areas, recreational interests and "real world"

topics. Materials in the SLMC otherwise known as information products include: books, films, recorded sound, periodicals, realia, and digital media (e-resources). In addition, school libraries' collections contain books, films, recorded sound, periodicals, realia, and digital media. These items are not only for the education, enjoyment, and entertainment of the all members of the school community, but also to enhance and expand the school's curriculum (Lonsdale, 2003; Morris, 2004).

These materials are not only used for the education and entertainment of students and teachers, but also to enhance and expand the school's curriculum. SLMC provide a range of learning opportunities such as classroom visits with collaborating teachers; learning space for students to do independent work, use computers, equipment and research materials; and host special events such as author visits and book clubs (Morris, 2004). However in this information age, school librarians are worried that there is a great decline in the use of school library media resources by primary and secondary school students. The underlining assumption relating to this issue could mean that awareness of school library media and information resources was not properly made to attract the public, students and teachers' attention to the rich benefits offer by SLMC. One of the ways by which awareness of the rich programmes and information/ media resources can be made known to the school community members is through public relations and library marketing. This paper therefore explained the issue of public relations and marketing of Nigerian School Library Media Centre (SLMC) resources and services.

Public Relations in School library Media Centre (SLMC)

Public relations can be regarded as communication by a person or an organization with the purpose of creating a favourable public image. It has to do with managing the sharing of information about public interest between two or more individual persons, an organisation like school, library, government agencies, and non-profit making organisations, among others (Grunig and Hunt, 1984). Seitel (2007) defined public relations to include an organisation or individual gaining exposure to their audiences using topics of public interest and news items that do not require direct payment.

The aim of public relations in school library media centre (SLMC) is to inform the public (school community), potential and prospective users (students, teachers, and non-teaching staff), proprietors/government, partners such as non-governmental organisations (NGOs), employees and other educational stakeholders and ultimately persuade them to maintain a certain view about the school library, its leadership, products and services (Seitel, 2007). If librarians remain silent in today's information age, it is the students who suffer. Librarians engage in school library public relation activities for the rights of young people to free and equal access to information resources, new media technology, and learning because school libraries are critical to educational success (Habley, 2015).

School libraries today are confronted with presenting public relations efforts to

promote different types of information resources and services that fit in to the modern education system than in the past. Public relations efforts can include publishing a library service brochure, a booklist, a program announcement, a web page, a special event/project or organising library campaign programmes. It is therefore helpful that librarians understand the types of school library media resources and services that need to be promoted. Therefore, public relations in school library involve the utilisation of publicity and other paid and non-paid forms of communication designed to present the library and its products positively.

Need for Public Relations in a SLMC

It is important we talk about SLMC product and services to make them known and for patronage. Many prospective beneficiaries of SLMC products and services are ignorant of what SLMC is all about. Some others have misconceptions about SLMC and some have not formed any particular opinion. What all these categories need is information, which coincidentally is our stock-in-trade (library collection). These erroneous believe can only be corrected when experts in the field of school library media/resource continuously and deliberately talk about their relevance. This could be in terms of advocacy and/or advertisement. Wherever we find ourselves as SLMC personnel we must not stop talking about school library media centre. When we do so, we are only marketing the SLMC.

The focal point of every public relation exercise is either to attract the interest of new subscribers or to sustain existing ones. Subscribers who are students, teachers and non-teaching staff (even researchers in school library media as the library policy may allow) are our customers. Customers are kings and should be treated as such. They are different in nature and divers in needs, desires and requirements. Understanding of their nature and needs would assist SLMC personnel present value-adding products and services as well as use appropriate strategies to meet their requirements and ensure their satisfaction. Existence of different types of users/patrons/clientele has effects on almost all the SLMCs do, if it is a user-friendly one.

Marketing as a concept: Some clarifications

There are several definitions of marketing. The one provided by United Kingdom Chartered Institute of Marketing (2016), the largest marketing body in Europe is hereby adopted, which emphasised that marketing is the management process which is responsible for identifying, anticipating and satisfying customers' requirements efficiently and effectively at a profit. It may be important to consider in details the key words in this definition. They are

- Managerial process
- Identifying, anticipating and satisfying
- Customers' requirements
- Efficiently and effectively
- At a profit

Management process – Process is a series of actions or operations conducted or

performed in order to do, make or achieve an objective. One activity follows the other. Some activities of the management here include: Planning, Organising, Staffing, Directing and Controlling.

Identifying – SLMC personnel need to identify customers' requirements as at now. This they accomplish by conducting investigation within customers. This investigation is called market research.

Anticipating – To anticipate is to project into the future and predict what is going to happen or what needs to be done and act accordingly. SLMC personnel use their information telescope to gaze into the future and guesstimate what information users will like to have in the future.

Satisfying – Having discovered the needs and wants of clientele as at now and anticipated what may be required in future, SLMC professional now develops the products and services that will satisfy those needs and wants on continuous basis.

Patron requirements – These are the needs and wants of patrons. The patron here refers to both known (existing) and unknown (possible) subscribers to the SLMC products and services.

Efficiently and effectively – To be efficient means to do things right. Efficiently depicts a consideration of the relationship between output and input. It is a measure of how well resources at our disposal are being deployed to obtain some output. On the other hand, effectiveness suggests doing the right thing. It has to do with achievement of set goals, aims and objectives. It is a measure of the extent to which pre-set goals have been achieved.

Profit – Profit is the difference between sales and cost. It is the reward of entrepreneurship.

As perfect as this definition seems, one of the shortcomings is that it assumes that all marketing efforts are geared towards profit making. This is because SLMC and many other organisations undertake marketing activities as well but may be for patronage, as in the case of SLMC.

Marketing SLMC Products and Services

There are about ten types of entities that can be marketed. They are: goods; services; places; properties; experiences; events; organisations; persons; information and ideas. We all know the category SLMC products and services belong (services, events, information and ideas). SLMC products and services must offer satisfaction to the users/patrons, be of interest to the clientele, need for it must be willingly expressed by the recipients, both the tangible and intangible aspects of the offering and provide benefits to the user or clientele.

Channels of Public Relations and Marketing in SLMC

To create goodwill for a product or service, employ one or more of these channels of public relations:



Figure - Promotion of reading culture

- Press Release: Presenting information about the product or services in positive light in the news media.
- Letter Writing: This involves writing the news editors about the product and/or service; it may be to react to publication that is offensive to the image of the SLMC or its products and services.
- Advertisement: It is the planning of advertisement in the newspaper or other media to showcase the importance of the SLMC or its products and services. In order to ensure that everyone is aware of the event or activities in the SLMC, library media specialist can develop a press release, insert a note in the school newsletter, and create flyers. Use desktop publishing software such as Microsoft Word or Publisher to develop professional-quality promotional materials for the advertisement (see figure 1 & 2). Use online clipart or materials from CD clipart collections to add a professional look.

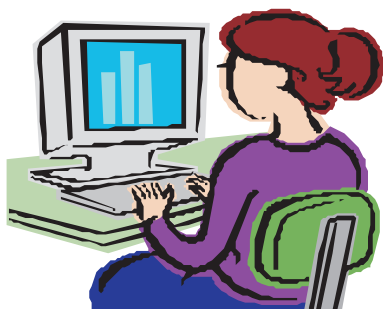


Figure - Computer use in SLMC

- Booklets: These are publications that showcase the details about the SLMC to members of its publics.
- Bulletin and Notice Boards can also be used to advertise new products and services.
- Electronic / Text messages: In this era of technology when computer technology is the order of the day, one can easily make use of e-mail and text messages through computers that are internet compliant and phones of different grades and sophistication.
- Use of Social Media: Social media platform such as WhatsApp, Facebook, LinkedIn, Twitter, Instagram, Google plus, WeChart, etc. are various ways of marketing school library and media resource centres to potential and existing users.

No matter the method of marketing adopted, products and services of any SLMC should be the type that would meet needs and satisfy users. This is the best form of advertisement. Note that there are about four to five groups of people you can sell to:

- i High income /high demand group
- ii Low income /Low demand group

- iii High income /low demand group
- iv Low income /high demand group

Conclusion and Recommendations

As experts in the field of SLMC, librarians have resolved that information should be priced, hence our ability to determine the prevailing group of users in our environment would determine our price range. This would predict the success rate or otherwise of the SLMC. Finally, we like to recommend that a very good knowledge of the marketing mix will assist players in the field achieve results.

One must know the people. The product must meet needs and be value-adding. The procedure for distribution must be well-established and fantastic. The price must also be affordable. This marketing mix is popularly referred to as 4Ps'. Above all, make your SLMC users important and target their interests and pay attention to their individual needs. By so doing, they are flattered when you recognise and share in their interests, hobbies and passions. When you capitalise on your common ground you can then build a personal relationship.

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