

The Role of Information Communication Technology in Quality Services Delivery at Babcock University Library, Ilishan-Remo, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: The aim of this paper was to discuss the key role of information communication technology in quality services delivery at Babcock University Library. Libraries have always been regarded as service oriented centers which, if they integrate the use of ICTs, could provide timely, relevant, reliable and current information. The effective use of the ICT will make librarians more competent and this will, in turn, make their libraries more competitive in their strategic marketing plan. The paper, among other things, highlighted the user based components of ICT application and services that, when adequately put in place and effectively used, could afford Babcock University library a competitive advantage over other libraries. Finally, it concluded by making some recommendations to Babcock University library administrators on what could be done to create and maintain services that the customers will perceive as being more superior to those of their competitors.

KEYWORDS: Library, Information Communication Technology, Quality Services, Competitive Intelligence, Competitive Advantage.

INTRODUCTION

The library has always been regarded as a service oriented center. Its role is to support the mother institution by meeting the information needs of the users. The importance of the library, Onohwakpor (2006) emphasizes, is that it is a store of knowledge, indispensable to the success of any functional education. Afolabi and Abidoye (n.d) assert that the essential role of the library is to provide information services to support educational, recreational, cultural, economic, and technological endeavors. Further, the International Federation of Library Association and Institutions (IFLA) (2003) adds that the library and information services contribute effectively to the development and maintenance of intellectual freedom in that they provide unhindered access to essential resources for economic and cultural advancement. Consequently, education without the services of library is poor.

Quality services have to do with meeting the users' needs with current, adequate and quality product and services, Heat and Cook (2003). The evaluation of service quality is defined by customers for they are, to a large extent, the ones that judge what could be termed as quality. So, library resources and services should be adequate in quality, depth, diversity and currency to ensure that it supports the institution's curriculum effectively. Users of libraries all over the globe want information, irrespective of their format, to satisfy their curiosity or other aspects of needs. According to Bello (2010), users wish for an opportunity to have total and unlimited sources of information whether it is from internal and external environment or information without any kind of restriction. Therefore, meeting their expectations determines their intention to request for more services and, as well, in making regular use of the library information resources. This will, in turn, result in the library gaining competitive edge over their competitors. But if the library fails to offer quality services, users will look for an alternative means to meet up with their information need, which could lead to the loss of library customers. Based on this, Onohwakpor (2006) cautions that since information is scattered in many areas, libraries should keep track of them by

utilizing the recent developments in information technology (ICT) for effective library services. The outcome of this could bring about better offering of quality services as well as meeting the information needs of the users.

According to Elisha (2006), there is no single way to define ICT. It has to do with uses of digital technology that already exist to help individuals use information. The ICT also covers products such as radios, television, cell phones that enable people to store, retrieve, manipulate, transmit or receive information electronically in a digital form. For Hamelink (cited in Islam and Islam, 2006), ICT has to do with the use of computers, telecommunications and microelectronics in the acquisition, storage, retrieval, transfer and dissemination of information, as well as to enhance literature search. From the above explanations, the application of ICT can facilitate work in the library. Therefore, the library, through the integration of ICTs, could provide timely, relevant, reliable and current information, and this is the core competence that confers competitive advantage.

Miller (2003) claims that competitive intelligence is a systematic and ethical program for gathering, analyzing, and managing information that can affect a company's plans, decisions, and operations. It could be regarded as the process of monitoring a competitive environment. This enables an organization to develop appropriate plans to compete successfully, (McGonagle and Vella, 2002). An important aspect of competitive intelligence, according to Liu and Oppenheim (2006), is the competitive intelligence environment. This is the external ingredient of the market competitiveness as a whole. This encompasses politics, economics, culture, science and technology, law, the structure of the market, and competitors. They further identify benchmarking, which is the process through which an enterprise compares its own conditions and procedures with those of similar enterprises in the same field, as part of competitive intelligence factors. Based on benchmarking, the enterprise makes its analysis accordingly. Libraries, therefore, are to embrace this approach to provide adequate, quality and satisfactory services to their users.

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

According to Islam and Islam (2006), the use of information communication technology (ICT) in the libraries began in the 1960s. This enabled libraries to improve their efficiency in relation to internal operation and in providing access to resources outside the library. The use of ICTs in the library also helped in the interoperability of information systems as well as in the provision of access to local library resources. Accordingly, Omoniwa (2001) claims that the globalization of information and the adoption of information technology will be the hallmark of great libraries in this twenty-first century. The ICT user based services that could be found in some libraries include computers, the Internet, the Web, Intranet, Extranet, E-mail, On-line retrieval networking, and multimedia.

In the library, computers are facilitating the consolidation of huge amount of information in an organized way; enabling easy retrieval. The libraries and information centers can hardly function without the use of computers and ICTs. The Internet, as one of the user based services found in the library, according to Akintunde (cited in Okiy 2010), is perceived as one of the greatest technological advancements being experienced in this 21st century. Internet is a powerful and dynamic tool for communication and is seen to be the largest single source of information channel, Meheswarappa and Emmanuel (in Parameshwar and Patil, 2009). It has influenced the methods of information gathering and storage and is regarded as a reliable tool for information retrieval as well as dissemination, irrespective of one's geographical location. The Internet has made activities which were viewed as impossible, possible, Odunewu and Olosore (cited in Ikonne, Madukoma, and Onuoha, (2013); Anyira, (2011); Luambano and Nawe, (2004); and Dike, 2000).

Lund (1998) explains that with the use of the Internet, academic researchers and students can obtain information which previously would have required a trip to a specialist library. Libraries which have been experiencing difficulties in meeting the rise in the cost of printed journals have found their burdens eased "by cheaper access to a vast range of electronic journals accessible on the Internet." In addition, he notes that since the Internet was introduced; the growth of online courses have been steadily giving rise to the advent of "virtual University," and this has transformed the whole concept of distance education. Nwankwo (2006) opines that ICTs application to library works and services could be seen as the best way that could be used to assist researchers to adequately solve their literature need for effective research activities.

The issue of competitive intelligence is considered to be important in the library. Competitive intelligence is the ability of an organization to know what competitors have and their competitive strategy. The knowledge gained from this information is then used to enhance the organization's own competitiveness. Regarding competitive intelligence or advantage in library services, Helm (2011) expounds that in a competitive marketplace, up-to-date information can make the difference between "keeping pace, getting ahead, or being left behind." Hence, the essential element of a competitive advantage is the ability of the library, through the integration of information communication technologies (ICTs), to provide timely and adequate

services for the users of the library and to ensure that customers are provided with the level of service they require. Dominic, Goh, Wong and Chen (2010) posit that in this age of customer quality service delivery, an essential strategy to be taken into consideration in order to survive and succeed in today's competitive environment is competitive intelligence. So, for competitive advantage in libraries, information product and services need to be presented in a marketable format suitable for consumption.

Despite the importance of ICT in competitive library service, scholars like Adekunmisi, Osinulu and Ogunbote (2008) point out that some libraries have short sighted view about the services and products they offer. They remark that some libraries feel that their services are so relevant that people will always use them regardless of any input from them. These scholars believe that this is an erroneous assumption because the needs of the users must be met. Users want to be satisfied. Therefore, for a library to remain competitive or even more fundamentally remain relevant, Das and Karn (2008) assert that it has to change its image by shedding and stripping itself off the image of being a highly fortified storehouse of knowledge and of a place where the customer is perceived to be a probable thief. They further state that the new-age library should be a veritable service organization, having professionals who could identify speedily the kind of information their customers need and also helping the users in accessing information with least time and effort. Therefore, the new-age library should be a true service organization, thereby making services more responsive to user needs and wants, and this will improve users' satisfaction. They conclude that this is the purpose of marketing information services and product, (Das and Karn, 2008).

Libraries that neglect to match service capabilities to customer needs risk becoming marginalized and being perceived as irrelevant. The reason is that customers will always seek alternative and competitive offerings so as to meet their needs. Hence, the rapid processing and dissemination of information, the supply of relevant and timely information for improved decision-making, and the innovative use of information in the creation of new opportunities are some of the ways by which the libraries could achieve competitive advantage, (de Vries, 1994). Ultimately, the success of an organization, Gronroos (2000) concurs, depends on its ability to create and retain a customer base.

Farley, Broady-Perston and Hayward (1998) affirm that libraries must use marketing strategy to create and sustain competitive advantage if they are to transform the intrinsic threats of change into opportunities. For Low and Tan (1995), marketing deals with organizing a company's strength, experience, and resources so as to achieve acceptable level of profits and user satisfaction. This is concerned with aligning an organization's business objectives with those of the clients. Having recognized this, the library should then deliver the desired satisfaction of their customers more effectively than its competitors. One of the ways this could be accomplished is through environmental scanning and SWOT analysis. Library professionals do environmental scanning to determine the needs of the consumers. They also analyze these needs to know the organizations strength, weaknesses, opportunity and their threat. When these processes are done, the opportunities will be used to overcome the threats. So, making use of marketing strategy to create and sustain competitive advantage is an asset which the library could use in other to transform the intrinsic threats of change into opportunities.

USING THE ICT AS A COMPETITIVE APPROACH IN LIBRARY SERVICES

According to Seddom (in Alemna, 2001), information has become a very profitable commodity. Many profit-marketing organizations are now involved in the provision of information services and products similar to the services of the libraries. This situation has slightly increased the number of competitors in the information market place. Based on these challenges, Adekunmisi, Osinulu and Ogunbote (2009) assert that libraries should visibly show that they are extremely useful to the continued survival and sustenance of their organizations. To achieve this is by actively marketing their product and services. One way this can be accomplished is through the use of ICTs and its applications in the libraries.

According to Porter (1980), positioning is fundamental to the creation of a competitive strategy. An organization positions self by exploring those aspects of a service that distinguish it from its competitors and competitively pursue them to gain advantage. In this regard, the use of the ICT and its facilities in the library will position it to be more competitive in providing quality services to its patrons. The umbrella justifications of the ICT and its applications is that they provide access to learning resources, information and knowledge previously inaccessible by reason of distance, resources and the availability of relevant technology, (Afolabi and Abidoye, n.d.).

In view of the competitive advantage that ICT usage affords the library, as evident in the foregoing literature review, it is plausible that some user-based components of ICT application and services, when adequately put in place and effectively used, could confer on Babcock University library a competitive advantage over other libraries. Some of the key user-based components of ICT applications and services are described in the paragraphs that follow.

Computer: Computers have been referred to as the nucleus of ICT application. It is difficult to talk of ICT without mentioning computers. The availability of adequate number of and appropriate quality computers in the library is a crucial strategy. Idowu (2011), Afolabi and Abidoye (n.d.), and Islam and Islam (2006) enumerate some of the key roles that computers play in the libraries, namely:

- Ordering and acquisition
- Circulation
- Library data base
- Inter library loan by two or many libraries that are connected
- Documentation and administration
- Serials Management
- Desktop publishing
- Cataloguing and classification
- Audio visual management
- IT services
- E-library services
- Reprographic Service
- Selective dissemination of information (SDI)
- Computerized interactive search

These library services complement with the ICT and its applications. A library that is heavily fortified with functional working, quality computers will attract users to it. It will also assist in quality work performance and productivity.

Computer Networks (Network technology): Computer network is a system of interconnected computers for sharing information and resources. Islam and Islam (2006) explain that the key function of the computer network is to interconnect computers and other devices so that data can be transferred from one direction to another instantly. This, they posit, could involve two or more computers in a single office or several computers in different units across an organization or across the country. The networks, Olusanya and Oloyede (2003) add, include the local area network (LAN) and wide area network (WAN). Islam and Islam (2006) explain that the LAN is a communication network that covers a limited area such as the campus or a building while the WAN a wide geographic area such as a country or state. With computer network, libraries can access and share information in different locations and also download for users needs. On the contrary, without the computer network, libraries cannot speedily access and share information. It is not sufficient to be highly equipped with computers but the networks must effectively function, permitting users to get connected from their immediate environment to the outside world when searching for information sources and services. This is competitive intelligence strategy. Therefore, computer networks are crucial at BU library for effective transfer of data from one end to another.

Internet Facility: Internet is described as a worldwide network of computer and people. According to Brown (cited in Ossia-Ugbah, 2010), the internet is a global network of computers linked together over large distances. The internet makes it possible for thousands of dissimilar physical networks that are not connected to one another and that use diverse hardware technologies to connect and operate as a single communication system. It is an important tool for global on line services. For this reason, Islam and Islam (2006) conclude that the Internet could be referred to as a “virtual library where the world’s information is gathered for the clientele.” The use of the Internet, Luambano and Nawe (2004) observe, makes it possible for scholars and academic institutions to disseminate information to a wider audience around the globe. Ossia-Ugbah (2010) maintains that the provision of internet access to students through automated library service creates a large research pool for maintenance and sustenance of the academic culture of excellence. Rosenberg (2005) states that an adequate ICT infrastructure with a sufficient number of networked and Internet-connected workstations is essential if a library is to offer access to e-resources and develop e-services. Without the Internet, users might not be able to access these online resources. One of the boosts to effective Internet use is seen in the provision of the number of computers connected. The more computers provided to the users, the more the attraction to the library. Another crucial factor in relation to the Internet is the connectivity. Research has revealed that slow network speed and reliability are real barriers to using e-resources. This barrier must be rectified, by providing high-speed Internet connection, if the library wishes to retain its users. Rosenberg concludes that the “ideal situation for a digital library is to be connected to a campus backbone so that library resources can be accessed not only from within the library but from anywhere on the campus.” Therefore, connectivity with the whole university (either with fixed point or wireless), enabling users to access the library from any point is an excellent market strategy for the library.

Electronic Mail (E-mail): This is a system of exchanging message in electronic format and it is the most used tool on the Internet. E-mail is a fast, easy and inexpensive way to communicate with others. Email has brought about revolutionary changes in communication because any type of information can be sent and received from anywhere in the world, even in the remote areas in a fraction of time, (Islam and Islam, 2006). Email is used to obtain important new resources for learning and teaching in schools. Elisha 2006 cites Oniyide (2005) who points out that it is possible to send out orders to publishers and producers of learning and teaching materials and equipment through the Internet. Based on this, Marklein (cited in Parameshwar and Patil, 2009) concluded that using the Internet for email services by the US college students was so common for some of them that, "It is like picking up a phone." So the provision of constant and quality internet services affords the users the opportunity to access and communicate with the outside world: and this is competitive advantage. When users' information needs are met, they will be satisfied and will keep on patronizing the library.

Video Conferencing and Skyping: Another ICT strategy that can bring users to the library is video conferencing. Offorma (2000) in Afolabi and Abidoye (n.d) describes video conferencing as a "means of linking up two or more remote computers, all of which have a small camera attached which enables the participants to see each other, to speak to each other and in some systems, to be able to start, [and] send documents through the linked computer." Some libraries use this medium to source for information that are not available in their own libraries. He further says that it is used to bring awareness to users who are ignorant of the available information resources in the library.

Expert System: This is a computer program that applies artificial-intelligence methods to problem-solving (Microsoft® Encarta® 2009). Without an expert system, the application of the ICTs will not be possible. Burton (cited in Afolabi and Abidoye, n.d) explain, that expert systems encapsulate the knowledge and experience of the human expert and make them available to a wider audience. A lot of information may be gathered, synthesized and manipulated before conclusion and decisions are made on some complex areas of human knowledge. Within information work, Afolabi and Abidoye (n.d) cites McDonald and Wickert (1991) confirm that expert systems have been applied in the area of cataloguing, classification and information retrieval.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The success of any library is largely dependent on attracting users to the library by making them aware of available services. This goal is achieved through strategic marketing. It is imperative that strategic marketing planning becomes a necessity for libraries. The aim of such activity is to match organizational services with customer needs through the creation of an effective marketing strategy. Libraries should carry out competitive analysis to investigate their competitors in order to obtain an insight into those organizations that serve the same market segments, and their associated competitive offerings. This kind of investigation, in conjunction with an analysis of its strengths and weaknesses, Broady-Parston and Bayne (n.d.) argues, will make it feasible for the library to conceive of a strategy that will lead it to position its services so that the customers will perceive it as being more superior to those of the other competitors. The function of a library is dynamic and customer oriented. Librarians should provide services that will attract and satisfy their customer needs. Thus, gaining competitive advantage in libraries, information product and services need to be presented in a marketable format suitable for consumption. By marketing the library services through various ICT applications, the library stands the chance of gaining advantage over its competitors such as having larger and frequent library users within and without the University community, providing fast, current and up-to-date library information.

In the light of literature evidence, it is recommended that Babcock University library administrators should ensure adequate supply of computers and computer network systems, access to high-speed Internet facilities and constant connectivity, e-mail facilities, video-conferencing and Skype, and system experts in order to create and maintain services that the customers will perceive as being more superior to those of the other competitors.

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