Library impact, value and marketing: how do they fit together?

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Abstract
This article explores where marketing fits with the process of identifying and capturing the impact of libraries and demonstrating library value. It considers whether having a clear concept of marketing is useful in practice. Drawing on Value and Impact work in healthcare libraries it concludes that adopting marketing as a strategic management process may help make work capturing impact and demonstrating value become mainstream.

Key words: libraries; librarians; marketing.

Introduction

The purpose of this article is to explore where marketing fits in the process of identifying and capturing the impact of libraries, and demonstrating their value. Does having a specific concept of marketing make a difference to what we do?

As has been well documented the terms impact, value and marketing are used in different ways and depend on a context and a situation for meaning (1-3)

Marketing: strategic management process not just publicity

I still tend to use the word marketing as a synonym for advertising "we must market our library using impact statements that demonstrate the value of what we do", which is not uncommon (2). As Garoufallou (1) identifies however, the consensus is "that marketing is a customer-oriented strategic management process, which combines both a theoretical framework as well as a practical set of method and techniques". Marketing can be the term used to describe a complete management process that ensures the clients (users and non-users) are at the centre of service development and the procurement of resources. Marketing requires library managers to be clear about the purpose of their service, and to know who their clients, and client groups are. From this they can profile information needs, wants and likely future demands. Developing and maintaining a relationship with clients means the service can respond to expressed needs, and also create demand.

Viewing marketing as a client-focussed strategic management process makes the link with value and impact work obvious. Knowing what services make a difference (have an impact) makes it possible to tailor services to needs. Money is not wasted publicising services to those who are never likely to need them.

Value and Impact

The recent ISO definition of impact is "difference or change in an individual or group resulting from the contact with library services" (4) If the library service captures the difference made or change then value can perhaps be demonstrated.

Some research seeks to measure objective changes (5, 6). To prove that contact with a library (separate from any other factors) caused a change is clearly very difficult. The impacts therefore are often self-perceived, as used in the NHS Impacts toolkit (7). Individuals' value different information and different impacts, and what is valued may change over time, or depend on the role they are in (8). We need to recognise what our clients' value (for advertising, service and resource development) and also what our funding bodies, shareholders and wider

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organisations value (to demonstrate our contribution to achieving what is valued). Recent work on public value identifies that "public organisations that have no mandate (or authorizing environment) cannot survive, however noble their mission, and however capable their operational abilities" (9). Basically if the public doesn't value what is being done, then why would they continue supporting it? Back to the marketing process - it takes an on-going two-way relationship to build a shared concept of library value. Christine Urquhart identifies value creation and value co-creation, noting "there are ideas for reflection from marketing science, but no easy answers" (10).

Value context for NHS libraries

My context for value and impact is healthcare libraries in NHS England. We have a clear, over-arching social value: good health. This value is generally shared by NHS librarians, public, patients, funders and managers. It is translated into a mission statement for NHS England ("Health and high quality care for all, now and future generations") (11) and countless objectives at individual, group and organisational level. NHS library impacts need to resonate with that value structure. Capturing and publicising the impacts means we can demonstrate our contribution because the impacts relate to what is valued.

Although the over-arching value is a social one, local organisational values may be in the economic tradition, where value is measured in pounds. Research in healthcare libraries (5, 6) shows the impact of using the library can be linked to the objective measure of money (e.g. £Xs saved by reducing the length of time in hospital using information from a library literature search).

Research (12, 13, 8) has identified a range of self-perceived impacts that are relevant to healthcare ("I believe that information from the library influenced my decision and reduced patient risk/saved money/improved an essay"). Impacts are identified through the focus on an information incident (information supplied, or a training session delivered), often using the critical incident technique (13, 14).

Knowledge for Healthcare is the framework for the development of NHS Libraries in England (14, 15). The work programme to deliver the vision includes a workstream for Quality and Impact, which, among other things, aims to enhance the existing Impact toolkit. Embedding the process of capturing and demonstrating impact into day-to-day practice is likely to be a challenge. What is the motivation for libraries? Is it to ward off cuts; publicise what we have in terms that will appeal to our clients; because we have to tick the box in a monitoring scheme; to inform service development and resource purchase; all of these things and others?

Conclusion

Most library managers agree that marketing is important, and it is worth emphasising that collecting evidence of value and impact is part of that process. Knowledge about what matters to the client and client group helps managers to plan more effectively for the future. Publicising evidence of impact at local and national level helps create a shared public value. Adopting marketing as a strategic management process would make impact and value work mainstream library activities, as they clearly sit within that strategic approach.

Yes, seems to be the answer to the question posed at the beginning. Our concept of marketing can change the way we work, and focus energy and time on the client interaction.

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