

4

THE MARKETING MIX

The marketing mix is the planned package of elements that makes up the product or service offered to the market. It is aimed at supporting the library and information service to reach target markets and specified objectives.

The key issues to consider are user convenience, user cost and user communication; taking core services and packaging them according to the needs of specific user groups is a priority.

The objectives of this chapter are:

- to define marketing mix for librarians and information professionals
 - to outline the nature of the elements of the marketing mix
 - to discuss the traditional 4Ps of the marketing mix: product, place, price and promotion
 - to introduce 4Cs as more appropriate for libraries and information services: user considerations, user cost, user convenience and user communication.
-

The marketing mix is a key concept in marketing, but it needs to be understood thoroughly before strategic decisions are made on its applications.

Is it the magic formula that will put all to rights, whatever the organization, whatever its problems? No, like all marketing concepts and techniques the marketing mix is an integral part of marketing planning that depends on environmental scanning, market research, understanding users, readers and

clients, and offering quality products and services. But it is a substantial part of effective marketing strategy, designed to cover all the aspects of the product or service that are important to the customer, or user: how does it answer user needs? Is it attractive? Easy to access? Is it marketed at the right price?

The marketing mix helps to position the library or information service very firmly in the perceptions of their communities served: the wider community for the public library, academic community for the academic library or the clients and customers for the business or specialist information service. Marketing mix needs more properly to be termed marketing mixes, to encourage librarians and information managers to perceive the value of different marketing mixes for specific market segments or groups of users.

Marketing mix elements each have a number of controllable facets or variables tuned to specific markets and the markets for libraries and information services vary enormously. This is why the various elements of the marketing mix are considered at greater length later in this chapter and promotion and public relations discussed in the following chapter.

It is vital to remember that a marketing mix will change over time in accordance with shifts in the macro- and microenvironments, with changes in market segment characteristics (market segmentation is discussed in Chapter 6) and as and when the library or information centre's own vision changes.

The four Ps

The consideration of the interaction of Product, Price, Place and Promotion provides a valuable structure in working towards a set of strategies. When this is coupled with substantial market information and used against a background of careful analysis of the micro- and macro-environment then marketing objectives are more likely to be achieved:

- *Product* – all the product or service characteristics aimed at the target market
- *Price* – the real cost to the customer or user, including other costs than solely money

- *Place* – everywhere and every way the product or service is made available
- *Promotion* – all the methods of communication used to reach the target markets.

McCarthy's (1978) classic model of the four Ps – how the product or service is best presented, in attributes, price, availability and promotion, to the desired market segment – is a development of a theory put forward initially by Neil Borden (1965). Borden's mix is now more precisely found in market research and market strategy.

Librarians and information professionals will need to know that extra 'P's have been added to marketing mix considerations for service marketing:

- *People* – the people who play a part in service delivery
- *Physical evidence* – the environment for service delivery and any tangible representation such as brochures or delivery vehicles
- *Process* – the activities by which the service is delivered.

For those new to marketing, these aspects are already implicit in every facet of the existing four Ps. It is not particularly helpful to seek to pigeon-hole all marketing mix elements in this way but they are useful reminders of what might be considered.

The four Cs

The strategic change and approaches implied by Kotler's four Cs will be a more readily acceptable mix to many librarians and information professionals, who should nevertheless examine both marketing mix formulas closely.

Philip Kotler, the 'experts' expert of marketing', says that marketing must focus more sharply on the customer. He convincingly argued that the seller's paradigm of the four Ps – product, price, place and promotion – should become the four Cs of a buyer's or customer's mix as propounded by Robert Lauterborn (1990) in an interview with Mazur (1991–2). Kotler's name is truly synonymous with marketing. The fact that just about every student and

practitioner of marketing has studied and benefited from his work is a testament to his contribution to marketing thinking and practice.

In a customer-oriented marketing mix, product becomes value to the client or user, i.e. customer value; price becomes cost to the customer and includes time and energy cost; place for the customer is convenience and promotion becomes communication. Librarians and information professionals will, therefore, be looking to a marketing mix addressing:

- customer (user) value
- user convenience
- user cost
- user communication.

Some might argue that this is a mere play on words, but it does portray a massive shift in marketing management thinking, philosophy and strategy. The issue is not what words are used but what is the best way to offer value to the user. The marketing mix elements that the library or information service controls 'can be used to satisfy or communicate with customers' (Zeithaml and Bitner, 2000, 18). Interestingly, the customer charters that are now proliferating are also examples of a paradigm shift toward customer satisfaction as a priority.

Creating the marketing mix

The marketing mix is not, as some writers misleadingly state, akin to a recipe, for say a cake, implying that the ingredients work in stated amounts in proportion to each other to produce a predictable outcome. The essential elements of the marketing mix must all be present, but in relation to the specific library or information service, to individual products and services, to the organization and its services at different times, the emphases in parts of the mix will differ accordingly.

Influence of the parent organization on marketing mixes

The markets for libraries and information services are profoundly affected by how elements of the marketing mix – price, place and promotion – are handled for the organization as a whole. To use an analogy, the soft drink manufacturer offers a range of products and services, just as the library or information service does. The markets will be diverse and often complex for each product or service, but the response to those products and services will be affected according to different market segments' perception of the overall organization. When a new soft drink is launched, diet style or vitamin enriched, in new bottles or Tetrapak, via supermarkets or expensive fitness clubs, it is brought to the market in the light, or shade, of its parent company's image and reputation.

Marketing something entirely new is very much easier than attempting to change a target market's indifference to an existing service or to erase a poor image and replace it with a more attractive, exciting service. Take the public library and its education services for instance: how education services are used will depend on how the library is perceived by different market segments. Is it a quality organization, high-technology, budget-conscious, high-performance – or old-fashioned? The public library is expected to offer education materials and services to a massive range of market segments: the under-fives, via their parents; schoolchildren; college and university students, rising numbers of mature students; part-time and evening-class students who are learning for pleasure; distance-learning students to whom the library building becomes their proxy educational institution; the unemployed who wish to retrain; women returning to work; the third age, living longer and making new demands on community services in enhancing their quality of life; local businesses operating in-house training courses. A marketing mix for each group served will have to be designed, but each of the target groups will already have a perception of the public library or the local authority. The marketing mix must take this into account and all the target markets need investigation with this in mind.

What proportion of potential users is being attracted? How satisfied are they with services? Who are the non-users and what are their reasons for non-

use? What changes might be made to provide more effective services? And how might products be augmented? Appropriate levels of materials; changes to loan periods; more comfortable study areas; staff attuned to a different way of treating requests for help; and a system to allow staff to offer a greater quality service in terms of time and depth: all these would be possibilities in the marketing mix. The target markets' attitudes to the parent organization can either make for a receptive audience or a hostile one, and it is in this context that research should be conducted, results considered and a marketing mix designed.

Car manufacturing may provide interesting scenarios for librarians or information professionals to consider. The car manufacturer is not divorced from the specific model in customer's mental maps when choosing a car. It is vital that the company maintains a high profile and quality reputation. The customer perception of the reputation of the car manufacturer will have a huge bearing on choice. The company will be known for its levels of quality, reliability, durability, budget pricing, design flair, high technology or environmental concern. The specific model will be judged against that background and selected or rejected initially because of that perception. Some car manufacturers have had to fight hard to live down past reputations for old-fashioned design, rust corrosion or lack of spare parts; they have, however, managed to revive interest in their vastly improved products.

How might this help the librarian and information professional? The library or information service must also be seen as a quality organization offering a range of appropriate and effective products and services. Renault, Ford and Toyota work as hard on their corporate image – networks of dealerships, staff training, promotion work, after-sales service and the like – as they do on the technical and aesthetic qualities of their individual car models. How many, even of our specialist information services, contact users to discuss whether they have problems that need addressing or merely to check that they are satisfied with current levels of service?

Corporate image management is a vital foundation, and librarians and information professionals will often find they need to win this battle first.

Product and service/Customer value

Kotler (1984, 463) offered the following definition of product: 'A product is anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use, or consumption that might satisfy a want or need. It includes physical objects, services, persons, places, organizations, and ideas.' In 2000 (394), he added *information*:

A **product** is anything that can be offered to a market to satisfy a want or need. Products that are marketed include *physical goods, services, experiences, events, persons, places, properties, organizations, information, and ideas*.

What can be marketed and many of the products and services offered by libraries and information services are discussed in Chapter 1. The message is: *product or service is anything that the library or information service is offering, or could offer, that would be of benefit to users and potential users*.

Services and products offered must present value to the user, over and above actual cost. The design and quality of services are manifest in tangible factors such as timely, up-to-date, appropriate formats, and implicit in intangibles such as staff motivation and training, effective use of resources, and knowledge of user and client needs. The product line can be offered differently from different market segments. Hotel chains offer different types of hotel and service levels for a range of market segments; car models or pens are offered from basic function to super de-luxe model. If this seems far removed from libraries and information services, there are school library services in the UK and USA offering gold-, silver- and bronze-level services according to subscription paid.

Information services in industry and commerce are today managing information resources and focusing on users, on the information requirements of their individual clients. Their product is knowledge and their services knowledge management and knowledge sharing. Their product is truly competitive intelligence, a hugely valuable resource and driver in any company.

The same process can be seen happening in university libraries, which now

often treat their undergraduate population differently from post-graduate students in lending services, interlibrary loans and access facilities.

Look again at car manufacturers. They produce a range of models to suit the needs of different market segments from small economical models to top-of-the-range performance cars. Within each model there will be specifications and features to attract buyers. A basic, small, economical model will offer bright colours with lots of trims and a zippy image for the younger market. The same model may suit mothers, who will look for safety, reliability, washability, sturdiness, interior covers and childproof locks. The retired buyer may be looking for a car to reduce running and maintenance costs and will consider the same model. Moving through the product range there will be cars for the family, for the business executive, the speed-seeker and the luxury lover.

Each group will be looking for a different set of characteristics or benefits from what is basically the same form of transport. The manufacturer must offer the most effective package – the additional benefits or services that augment the product – to meet those needs. Features offered, whether as standard or optional, will help the manufacturer to differentiate the company's products from those of the competition. This is especially desirable in a market where it is difficult to produce something really original and where the concept of *unique selling proposition* (features unique to the particular product or service) is not likely to apply very often.

The analogy of car manufacture can also help when it comes to thinking of ways to make the product more attractive overall. The customer will be looking for benefits, tangible benefits yes, but also, and perhaps unconsciously, intangibles. Colour, a tangible feature, is a safety factor: according to motor accident research, some colours make a car disappear in poor light or bad weather. But colour is also tremendously effective in psychological terms and while the range of car colours is staggering, the manufacturers are trying to appeal to the complexity of psychological and physiological responses that colour arouses. While colour research is expanding, few customers could articulate the rationale behind choosing racing green or fiery red rather than lime green or Nevada beige. Entrances to libraries and information services are immensely important and discussed elsewhere in the text, but

consider colour in this context and cover any Nevada beige as quickly as possible.

Innovation and creative approaches can enhance existing services or develop new ‘offerings’ or products to answer the needs of the various groups of the library’s users or the information centre’s clients. Academic libraries can offer very different propositions to academic staff, research students and undergraduates in their first year, in terms of access, loan opportunities, and password-protected intranet sources and activities, plus seminars for specific purposes in terms of information skilling, support for research fund seeking or faculty tuition on sources specific to the subject area. Public libraries can offer subject searching or alerting services to local businesses, specialist sessions akin to the ‘clinics’ of medical practices at appropriate times of the week for mothers with children, retired groups, the young unemployed, to add to the homework clubs now found in most libraries. Specialist libraries and information services will have their own subsets to cater for and packaging may be quite literal in the provision of information and materials, whether in terms of hard copy or web versions. Think of Parker: they make pens, but they are really in the gift business and successfully provide the same functional implement, in appropriate packaging, to markets ranging from schoolchildren to presidents.

Place/User convenience

Place is usually translated into ‘Distribution’ in a commercial marketing mix, but suits admirably for libraries and information services, since it refers to where and how a service is made available to the users and clients. That availability may be via a telecommunications network as well as or instead of a geographical location, since point of access covers a huge variety of possibilities and potential, as well as current practice, in the information world. The key word is convenience, make a service convenient to the user and service use will grow measurably. Thus a marketing mix for an educational institution, often with a main campus library plus department libraries and collections, would make a priority of a campus computer network to facilitate access to all sources.

Opening hours

Place includes accessibility, it covers 'when', as well as 'where'. The variety of opening hours and service type and availability is wide ranging. Many university libraries, for example, rely on student or auxiliary help to maintain at least an access service during the late evening or weekends. This means that even though professional user services or loan facilities are not available at all times, pressure on limited stocks and seating, and accordingly on student stress, is reduced. Loan services curtailed during such hours can have a positive effect in encouraging the user towards a more effective use of expensive, essential, but often underused periodical provision, but only if self-help user tutorials are made available or the marketing mix has included teaching sessions on the availability of various sources and the manner of their use.

Web and intranet services open up accessibility potential to a phenomenal degree, but the same caveat applies, too many resources on the web are underused or badly used. It has always been the case that user education should be paramount for the enablement of library and information service users. The problem of provision is exacerbated today by the fact that, from toddlers to silver surfers, everyone thinks that they know how to use touch-of-a-button sources and, worse, they too often accept what they see without questioning accuracy or source credibility. There is real potential here for librarians to market information skills on using the intranet, side by side with the basic courses on IT offered by the plethora of training agencies, by schools, colleges and universities. Information professionals can call it consultancy instead of training and *creating competitive intelligence at the cutting edge* instead of information skills and their clients will be delighted. Offering e-mail enquiry services needs to be matched with realistic promotion on when such services are staffed, since 24/7 access to the internet and intranet is the norm for users, and when responses can be expected.

The public library experience of branch networks should be invaluable in identifying how, when and where services may more effectively serve users. Particularly in times of reduced budgets, evaluating availability in conjunction with user need can often highlight much-needed change in terms of redistribution of services, opening hours and other methods of providing for

particular publics, all the varied interested parties. Too often, branch libraries reduce opening hours in an attempt to cut costs and what results is a mish-mash of availability, so users give up. Sadly, a large UK public library authority is currently not buying fiction at all. Why? Its budgets have been reduced because of declining use. In the same authority one of its largest branches opens as follows: Monday 9–5, Tuesday 1–7, Wednesday 9–1 (except on the third Wednesday of the month when the local Member of Parliament holds his surgery for constituents), Thursday 9–7 (but this is the day of the week for late-night shopping in the town centre and the library is 20 minutes from the centre), Friday 9–5, Saturday 9–12 and 1.30–4, Sunday closed. Declining use? Or, declining to use because readers have no idea when they will find the service operating? Closing completely on Thursday and opening all day Wednesday and Saturday would go some way to restoring readers' sanity and the MP's surgeries should be monitored for attendance. These sessions could also be used as a marketing opportunity to promote information sources, since the constituents voicing concerns are also likely to be active and heard in their communities. When they are in the nursery school, doctor's surgery, pub or park, they can spread the word about the quality of the library's services.

The information centre that is providing services for an organization in, say, the industrial, medical, government or voluntary sector, needs to look at where and how it is making services available. Too often a physical base is seen to be of prime importance when, in fact, most potential users will be constrained by their situation or working practices from personal visits. Limiting service hours to those when professional information personnel are available will again hamper user potential when, as is often the case, the organization is operating on a 24-hour basis. 'We never close' may not be practicable in terms of availability of professional staff, but the situation needs to be assessed to see how online, electronic mail, auxiliary staff or user education, in say CD-ROM use, may effectively compensate. The dissemination of needed information to identified units within the organization on a regular basis is imperative and is also good public relations.

A voluntary sector unit may be able to offer only a restricted range of serv-

ices, due perhaps to low funding or availability of helpers. It is essential that the limited service is managed to allow for maximum effectiveness. The type of help on offer, and where and when it is available, needs to be fully explained to potential users. A consistent pattern of service availability, even though restricted, is better than attempting to operate a service on an 'as often as possible' basis. Telephone-answering machines, even decent-sized and prominent letter-boxes, will reduce users' frustrations, especially if it is made absolutely clear when the service will be in full operation. A frequently asked questions facility, available by website or answering machine can also aid in user satisfaction.

It is tempting to make all available staff time user-access time, but it is much more effective to ensure that professional staff have dedicated time for preparation, training and in-depth enquiry work. It is usual now to see notices in large retail stores and also in some public libraries, advising that training is carried out at certain times, usually early weekday mornings, and that service starts later on that day. Small information centres that are an integral part of a larger organization might find it physically difficult to close off user access, but a determination to provide such time will pay off. Telephone calls can be diverted and even in open-plan environments screens can be used effectively. It is vital that messages or requests left during such times are answered rapidly when full service resumes, providing a good-quality service that will aid the continuing campaign for more support and resources.

Mobile services

Rural areas and the housebound are well used to mobile services. There have been some exciting ventures too in promotional activities in the use of specially converted buses, as well as the more usual library van. It is worth considering experimenting with regular mobile services to situations within the community where there are large groups of people who are disadvantaged by not having easy access to library services. Better again if such services could include the extra added value of reference services via computer links and a rapid delivery service of materials or information not carried. Poetry collec-

tions are delivered and enjoyed alongside the postal deliveries in the Highlands of Scotland. Collections could be tailored to the needs of many special groups. A new housing estate will have a preponderance of young mothers needing materials for their offspring, certainly, but their personal needs will be much wider. A sheltered housing complex will often be in a well-developed community and yet the residents will welcome a regular doorstep service since they are not fit enough to visit local amenities easily. The public relations value of these services is inestimable, whether for the elderly, infirm, isolated villages or busy urban hinterland, especially when very often this is the segment of the community who are articulate, who have the time and who have the vote.

The traditional industrial estates and the new high-technology parks are also obvious targets for mobile services. These are concentrated populations, often served by banks, post offices and sandwich shops, but rarely considered by libraries. The nature of such industrial estates and parks is that they are on the outer fringes of urban development and thus working hours tend to be extended for employees because of travelling difficulties. Equally, as lunch breaks tend to be short since there is nowhere to go, the unfortunate employee has little opportunity to visit branch libraries in normal opening hours. The lack of competitive facilities on such estates means that any library, public or academic, making its services available would be highly successful. Co-operation with individual companies would quickly allow for effective timetables and specific visits. This kind of activity could also generate sponsorship potential, as well as providing a platform for launching or enhancing information services for local industry and businesses. The corporate universities and learning organization culture of many organizations are crying out for potential partnerships of this kind.

Location

It is unpalatable but necessary to recognize that the user may be at risk in attempting personal visits to a service point. A public library branch in a shopping precinct that is deserted in the evening, or the university precinct, so

well populated in daylight hours, can become lonely areas at night. The business information service in a tower block is surrounded by echoing corridors outside core hours of activity and the industrial information unit can be a nightmare to approach if it is within the manufacturing area of the company's business. All these represent a potential deterrent to users. Indeed, these situations are of concern to service personnel also and investigation needs to be made into methods of alleviating actual and perceived risk among staff and users alike.

Co-operation with the library or information centre authority, institution or organization will often result in better lighting or security equipment and personnel, which come out of central budgets as an added bonus. It is often the case that over time the physical environment or social or working practices will have changed gradually and it is not obvious that such factors are the cause of decreased usage. Such an example was a public library service, committed to its community, which offered a drop-in, cup-of-tea afternoon to pensioners (or third-agers as they are now) at one of its branches where use was declining alarmingly. There was no take-up of the generous offer: senior managers were not aware that the branch was virtually marooned in the midst of a network of new roads and heavy traffic flow.

Appearance and atmosphere

The physical location where a service is proffered may be, in terms of actual location, apparently unchangeable. Carnegie buildings abound across the UK. They are enormous, grand, imposing buildings and they can appear awesome. They must be changed: paintwork can do it, taking down old-fashioned partitions and opening up inner entrance doors can do it, illustrations on the windows can do it, flower displays seen from the street can help and, most of all, what will succeed is seeing people going in and out (school groups, mothers and toddlers, could you persuade the local football or cricket team to plan their tactics there?).

There are numerous, and excellent, examples of imaginative use of existing structures, as well as purpose-built public libraries and education libraries

from school to university level. Private subscription libraries, often in listed buildings and expensively sited areas, have utilized marketing expertise to ensure future funding through expanded subscription lists, sponsorships and grants and the actual physical surroundings have been a hugely important element in readers' perception, and then support, of the library. Plans to change the British Library Reading Room raised an outcry across the world.

The physical attributes of place are, then, important to users, and potentially instrumental in attracting new users; they need to form a substantial part of the marketing plan.

External signposting is a good place to start and this will often be financed by the parent organization. EC funding has resulted in many city and town centres being tastefully adorned with destination signposting; co-operation with the planning department will ensure that the libraries are on appropriate signs. Equally, within an education campus or industrial complex, representations to the appropriate site maintenance departments will be all that is needed. If the information centre is in a large building, survey all possible entrances and routes to note where indications would be valid. The temptation to produce in-house computer-generated graphics should be resisted, even by the smallest of libraries or information services. Good signs, commercially designed and produced, are surprisingly inexpensive and present a quality image. Many large organizations will have a central department responsible for such activity and need only to be told what is needed.

An examination of inside physical structure should also be made with an objective eye to judge what early impressions are being made. Too many libraries do not even announce what they are, yet pride in the service will be reflected by a strong statement of identity. That identity should be clear from the initial approach: materials, typefaces and colours used will say a great deal about the services within. Discreet gold plates or foot-high red letters indicate much about the kind of service to expect. The general fabric of the building will reflect on the service offered too: well maintained, it will build confidence in the service it houses, in the same way that flaking paintwork and dingy surroundings will certainly affect perceptions adversely.

Again, co-operation with relevant departments will ensure that the main-

tenance programme cycle incorporates the changes that are desirable when the time comes. If the parent organization insists that a house style must be adhered to, librarians and information professionals need to ensure that their voices are heard during the planning stages if they are to escape the equivalent of bland magnolia or mock Tudor.

Given a free hand, and all buildings eventually have to be painted, and furniture replaced, it is important that careful consideration is given to what Philip Kotler calls 'atmospherics', the feeling that the organization would like to engender in users, or the image to be portrayed. It is aided or hindered by design.

A welcoming atmosphere can be created by staff well trained in customer care, the use of warm colours, comfortable seating and good use of space, plus wording of signs and notices. 'Welcome to the library' *will* welcome, whereas, 'Watch your possessions, there are thieves about' is not what you wish to see first as a reader.

Can libraries copy banks in the way that they have changed their image and public perceptions successfully? From awe-inspiring, gloomy, miserable halls of unapproachable tellers imprisoned by high barriers and grills, banks have become bright, friendly, customer-comfortable places, where tellers are at open desks, their names and smiles openly displayed. While it could be argued that some banks have gone too far with piped music forming part of the atmospherics, there is no doubt that the overall strategy of looking to the customer and providing a more comfortable atmosphere has paid dividends. Librarians can learn from other services; not every service or individual can afford to be at conferences, national or international, but simply travelling to a neighbouring authority or another university in the same region can often produce fruitful ideas.

An efficient, smoothly running organization inspires confidence in the user and this efficiency should be reflected in the way he or she is received initially by the system. Discussed further in the section on public relations in Chapter 5, initial reception must be considered here too. A library user may be fully confident in particular zones of the library's activities, but will be akin to a new user at the point of approaching a service not used before. A depart-

ment store will welcome the customer with a breathing space area, unused space inside the entrance, an opportunity to decide on direction, a list of departments and guide to appropriate floors if necessary with a clear pathway to encourage the customer in. Entering most libraries or information centres the user is faced with security screens, then hives of activity, some behind desks or further screens. Quite often there are queues and no obvious pattern to proceed further; the user faces a real challenge – hardly the conducive atmospherics to communicate confidence.

Welcome your users must be the message. Wal-Mart, the American supermarket leader, employs ‘greeters’. The library does not have to employ retired librarians as greeters, but it does have to examine the welcome signals to users. Do all overt and implicit signals ‘say’ welcome? How does a user feel walking through security screening devices, facing prohibitive notices, a myriad of blank computer screens? Users may be sophisticated in a whole variety of ways but a warm welcome will always colour their perception of the service offered.

The same rules apply to websites: welcome the user, make it easy to progress and use accessible language.

‘Place’, then, covers physical and virtual environment, ambience, staff and activities, as well as being the point of service offering.

Price/User cost

Price is the element of the marketing mix which for many in the library profession will be the most difficult to consider. Even where information centres are operating in a highly competitive business environment, the information professionals involved often feel uneasy with this aspect of the marketing mix. Price is, therefore, rarely used as a political or promotional tool by librarians and information professionals.

Price does not necessarily imply cash value: marketing is an exchange process and the price paid could be in terms of time, energy or other opportunity or activity forgone. Security cameras are installed, it might be said, at

the expense of limiting personal freedoms. The true cost of ineffective user education leading to poor information-seeking skills could be inestimable when medical research is not identified in time, orders are lost in a competitive field because of poor intelligence gathering or young people make life-planning decisions on inadequate information. The price to be paid by a community might be a decision to resource other leisure activities rather than better library facilities.

The standard economic equation and calculations to achieve returns on investments, as used by other organizations, are only part of the strategic decision-making process for library and information professionals. Libraries have operated for centuries on a co-operative basis and the debates on public library charging issues will continue well into this century. In the meantime, income generation is a fact of life.

In some sectors, a new, highly coveted service might command a premium charge, as would very personalized information services for individual or specific purposes. Immediately problems arise, of where, and to whom, such services would be offered; who might be disadvantaged by not having the services available to them? As the demand for a service continues and perhaps increases, do prices stay at the same level, reduce or increase? Should public libraries charge business users on the basis of time taken over reference enquiries? Would a delivery service of information or materials produce viable revenue? When considering pricing there are a number of marketing practices that are on the face of it more relevant to commercial sectors, but that may well be applied elsewhere in concept.

Costs could differ according to *demand levels*, for example a university undergraduate who needs a tutor's or faculty librarian's signature on an interlibrary loan request will seriously consider the need for that request when weighed against the bother involved.

Market skimming aims a new product or service at a relatively small proportion of a market and charges a high price. A new database or highly selective, specialized information provision in terms of subject content or speed of provision might be introduced. If this strategy is chosen, it is particularly important that the product or service must be of excellent quality and be very

different from what is otherwise available. Market skimming is not a long-term strategy: a good product or service will soon be copied by other information suppliers. The original library or information provider can benefit further by introducing cheaper or modified versions to a larger market and ahead of competition.

Market penetration in pricing terms is the opposite of skimming: a new product or service will aim at building a large user base quickly by offering the product at a low price. Economies of scale operate and, in addition, market penetration builds customer habit so that competition has difficulty in becoming established. Photocopying, video rental and even refreshment services can produce such benefits in most libraries. Offering internet access cheaply, or free, is a successful ploy in the public library sector as are information bulletins with reliable sector information in commercial information services.

Price discrimination strategies are practised widely. Special groups such as children, students, old-age pensioners and the unemployed are often offered reduced prices, and libraries could reduce standard charges for them; the increase in the use of these services would more than make up any shortfall caused by the reduction. Services or products are often reduced according to the time of day, or year, in which they are used or bought: rail travel off-peak, pizza and pub happy hours, central heating installed in summer, Monday night theatre seats are just a few examples. Extra loans could be allowed during lower-use days and it could perhaps be made conditional that they must be returned in a corresponding period.

Family subscriptions to a private library at an advantageous rate will happily mean a likelihood that the children will continue membership as they reach adulthood.

Pricing always needs to be examined carefully. Charging by volume of use is a minefield. A university library may well charge a higher subscription rate to a professional society or body with a large membership list, and a very much smaller rate to a relatively smaller body; yet it could well be that the volume and type of use made by the membership of the smaller society is very much more demanding.

A business might be prepared to pay an external provider for information that adds substantially to competitive intelligence, but might be unhappy about putting a price on its own in-house provision of services especially as the use of extranets grows. Discussing these problems at senior management level will highlight the value of the company's information service whatever the eventual decision.

And finally, yet another factor before deciding on pricing strategy: price often implies value in the mind of the user and is taken to be an index of quality. Parents will often buy materials to support their children's development or education, when the library could provide much better resources freely. The marketing mix needs to stress other benefits of the service to overcome this type of market behaviour.

Promotion/User communication

Librarians and information professionals are confident here, because they have had more practice in this area of marketing than any other. Marketing communication is a better description than is 'promotion' of the activities involved – and the one, incidentally, preferred by Kotler. Librarians and information professionals will confidently claim that their communication skills are good; marketing expertise will channel and focus those skills to even greater effect.

It is helpful to consider the aspects of a marketing communications mix or promotions mix as a subset of the marketing mix and as a highly integrated part of that mix. Where libraries and information services have not been happy with the results of, often heavily resourced, promotional efforts, it has usually been where the promotional programme has been planned in isolation. It is important to remember, too, that even comparatively simple promotion activity has a real cost in staff energy and time, to which must be added either the loss of the work with which staff would otherwise have been involved or the cost of other staff doing that work. The mantra for all librarians and information professionals hardly needs repeating – *communication is a two-way process*.

Promotion, publicity and public relations methods are discussed in greater detail in Chapter 5.

Planning the communications mix

A return to the mission of the library and information service and firmly fixing the need for an internal as well as an external policy are vital prerequisites for drawing up objectives for the communications mix. A clear picture is needed, through recent market research where possible, of the segments to be reached, in order to decide on the most effective ways of reaching these segments. Evaluation methods must be built in at the planning stage too. Another factor for serious consideration is time, not just the appropriate timing of activities, but the need for sufficient preparation time for those involved in publicizing the activities.

Project management and critical path analysis are useful management tools to use in working with the communication mix.

Users will, of course, be continually receiving a variety of communications about the library or information service, some of which were dealt with when discussing place and price. It is vital that this is taken into account, that it forms part of the planning process and that information on user perceptions is also sought consistently.

Classic models of communication form a basis for considering fundamental factors in the planning stages: who says what, in what channel, to whom, with what effect.

A planned communications mix for a library or information service will include some or all of the following elements:

- public relations
- paid-for advertising
- publications
- salespeople.

Public relations

Public relations is defined by the UK's Institute of Public Relations as: 'the deliberate, planned and sustained effort to establish and maintain mutual understanding between an organisation and its publics'.

Who are the 'publics' of libraries and information services? Kotler (2000, 605) defines a public as: 'any group that has an actual or potential interest in or impact on a company's ability to achieve its objectives'. The library or information centre's main 'publics' with whom they need to build good relations are those listed by Wilson and Gilligan with Howsden (1995, 369): the community at large; employees; customers – past, present and future; suppliers of materials and services; the money market – the funders, shareholders, potential investors or sponsors; distributors; potential employees and opinion leaders – all those whose opinions may help or harm the organization. Local, regional and national government agencies, professional bodies and pressure groups are publics. Within the organization there are publics too, other departments or divisions, or other companies under the auspices of a parent company. An audit of communications with publics inside and outside the organization is recommended as essential. Particular attention should be paid to:

- the influence, actual and potential, of the various publics on the well-being of the library or information service
- the type, frequency and extent of communications with specific publics
- the methods of evaluating the effectiveness of communications.

It is an inescapable fact that it is impossible for the library or information service not to communicate. The elements discussed under 'Place', for example, substantially affect public relations since they are communicating a number of messages: efficient service, welcome, we care. The ways in which a telephone is answered or responses to correspondence, electronic included, are handled, affects public relations continually. Managers need to check for themselves, regularly, what kinds of message are being conveyed.

Paid-for advertising

Advertising channels of communication range from a small classified advertisement in the local press, through billboards and posters, radio and cinema advertisements, website plugs to prime-time television commercials. Unlikely though it may seem, even the Church of England has used television commercials, but the cost of a professional production, plus air-time, will be way beyond the budgets of many libraries and information services.

Press advertisements are not so costly, but nevertheless are a substantial call on the communications budget, and it is worth employing an advertising agency if a major campaign is planned. Advertising agencies are important in the creative processes and for making decisions on the best channels to use for reaching target markets. They can also negotiate reduced fees and test for the effectiveness of communications.

A variety of research techniques – DAGMAR (Defining Advertising Goals for Measuring Advertising Results) from Colley (1961) is one of the well known – exist to test for effectiveness, but proving that there is a relationship between advertising and any future action by the user is notoriously difficult. Lord Leverhulme is usually quoted in this context: ‘half of all advertising is wasted, but the problem lies in knowing which half’.

It is important to assess where advertisements might appear most fruitfully, in terms of which media to use, and when. Auctions were once held for television commercial space in the middle of popular soap programmes and the highest bidder often came in at the very last second to upstage a rival competitor. Libraries, even large national libraries, are not going to be involved in that kind of race. However, the rapid multiplication of television channels, analogue terrestrial, satellite, cable and now digital, means that the choice of audience can be very specific according to channel and time of day, narrowcasting rather than broadcasting. This means that it may well be worth considering such advertising since the target can be very precise and the response rate probably high. Academic libraries advertising in the local community will aim at businesses as well as prospective students.

Television health programmes abound and the primary care professionals would be interested in medical collections and services. Where special

collections are the subject of the advertisement, specific trade media can also be used to target professionals. Programmes for parents at mid-morning are prime advertising spots for the target audience, but not so expensive if public libraries wanted to promote new collections for parents.

Where the library or information centre pays for an advertisement (classified advertising usually), whatever the media, the actual content of the advertisement, format, place and time of appearance is under the control of the librarian or information manager. As the paying customer he or she will stipulate exactly what is required, and will pay very heavily for this benefit, depending on where in the newspaper or television schedules the advertisement is to appear. Front page, bottom right-hand corner of the newspaper is most expensive and the right-hand page on a double spread, again bottom right, is also expensive, because this is where the human eye alights first. Customers tempted by cheap rates in the gutter margin are wasting their money. It is firmly recommended that libraries use a press release rather than advertising for events and public announcements. (How to put together an effective press release is discussed in Chapter 5.)

Publications

Publications are discussed elsewhere as products; for example from the business information centre come business reports, specialist monographs, training manuals, statistical surveys; from the public library there are collections of photographs or calendars from local history collections, anthologies of creative writing, book reviews or poetry; from the academic sector there are subject bibliographies and texts on how to cite and reference, and abstracting and indexing services abound. The majority of such publications will be in paper and electronic format. It is not always the best policy to insist on a house style for all publications, but what is essential is to ensure that the library or information service is clearly portrayed as the originator, creator or publisher of the publication. The role of publications manager, or more likely set of responsibilities in a smaller information centre, might be one that is conducive to the talents and skills of a specific member of staff. The existence

of such a post, or responsible colleague, would encourage staff who are specialists in particular areas, but wary of the whole publication process, to participate in the publications programme as part of marketing activity. Utilizing talents of a variety of kinds in this way motivates staff, leads to a higher profile and more effective products.

The 'sales force'

One of the *Concise Oxford dictionary* definitions of selling, is 'to advertise, or publish merits of; give information on value of something; inspire with desire to buy or acquire or agree to something'.

A business organization in the information industry will deploy a sales force in the field, dedicated to selling the important products of the company. It is not envisaged that the libraries and information services which are the market for this text would be employing sales personnel to any extent. It is suggested, however, that all employees be encouraged to recognize their very real role as salespeople for the organization. Their role will be to make customer care a high-level priority, presenting a professional face at all times to establish and develop good public relations. In a restaurant, the food, environment and price may be right, but a customer will only come back as a regular client if the service is good and he or she is made to feel comfortable and a welcome visitor. Kotler (1999, 9) argues that 'meeting customer expectations will only *satisfy* customers: exceeding their expectations will *delight* them'.

All employees must be convinced of their own worth and value to the library or information service so that they become effective members of the sales force. Training and development in the personal areas of self-worth and confidence are as important as job knowledge and skills provision. Staff who are confident in the importance of their own role in caring for clients will be an effective force in building up good public relations. Telephonists, receptionists, porters, couriers, all have their role to play in this culture. So too do the specialist personnel who may need even more convincing that they have a public relations role as well as a professional one.

It is interesting to note that in training sales personnel, there are generally recognized to be two basic approaches: one where high-pressure selling techniques are emphasized and achievement targets are set, the volume of sales being absolute priority; the other, which is much more customer oriented, where the concentration is on analysing and answering customer needs and the consequent benefits to the customer, leading to confidence and loyalty on the part of the customer. The marketing approach of the latter is much more palatable to the librarian or information professional who may still feel that the concept of selling is distasteful.

Another aspect of the communications mix is to identify influential committees or groups and ensure that library or information personnel are nominated and selected as members. The more integrated a department becomes, the more readily the rest of the organization accepts its importance. The effectiveness is doubled when the library or information centre invites others to participate in its own activities.

Membership of internal committees is valuable and effective public relations. Equally so is the active participation of library and information personnel on relevant, and preferably influential, external groups. The strategy should be to identify key areas where a presence would be valuable and to select staff who will make a real contribution, both in the work of the group and in bringing back knowledge and expertise to share with colleagues.

Communication is the vital ingredient

Communication within the organization is a vital component of marketing philosophy and for some information services, particularly within some government sectors, might even be a priority over external communications. The way in which everyday routine activities are tackled, including staff communication, reflects the philosophy of an organization. In the library or information service that respects and truly cares about users this philosophy will permeate all its activities.

Resources

A major difficulty for most libraries is that they will not have an easily identified promotional budget, or that the parent authority or organization will see promotional effort as being a whole-organization policy. Identifying key personnel and committees and appropriate lobbying then become part of the communications mix. Where information units have the same problem, but external communications are very much part of the centre's work, a substantial case for extra funding will need to be made. A good communications mix needs a clearly apportioned resource bank, personnel included, and a good set of evaluative procedures that will provide the needed evidence of the value of a well-resourced programme.

A planned marketing mix is expensive; the costs may be heavily disguised in training budgets, publications budgets, postal costs, staff salaries and the like, but it is wise management strategy to quantify real costs in order to make a persuasive case for more resources. If a public relations consultancy is called in for a specific purpose or campaign, real costs are then inescapable. The control of the marketing policy is a senior management function and, given the sustained effort involved, it should be recognized as a substantial workload and appropriate support given to internal staff, even where an external public relations consultancy is employed.

The marketing mix aims at communicating effectively with the 'publics' of the library or information service and satisfying target user, client and customer needs. It is a significant and substantial part of marketing policy that supports the mission and corporate image of the library or information service. Marketing policy must have serious resources to underpin it. Its success could mean the difference between merely surviving and real growth and development, and this success is very largely based on understanding market need.

References and further reading

- Borden, N. H. (1965) The concept of the marketing mix. In Schwartz, G. (ed.) *Science in marketing*, Wiley, 386–97.

- Brassington, F. and Pettit, S. (2000) *Principles of marketing*, Pitman.
- Christopher, M. and McDonald, M. (1995) *Marketing: an introductory text*, Macmillan.
- Colley, R. H. (1961) *Defining advertising goals for measured advertising results*, Association of National Advertisers.
- Jefkins, F. (2000) *Advertising*, 4th edn, revised and edited by Daniel Yadin, Pearson Education.
- Kotler, P. (1973–4) Atmospheric as a marketing tool, *Journal of Retailing*, (Winter), 48–64.
- Kotler, P. (1984) *Marketing management*, 5th edn, Prentice Hall.
- Kotler, P. (1999) *Kotler on marketing*, The Free Press.
- Kotler, P. (2000) *Marketing management: the millennium edition*, 10th edn, Prentice Hall.
- Lauterborn, R. (1990) New marketing litany: 4P's passé; C-words take over, *Advertising Age*, (1 October), 26.
- McCarthy, E. J. (1978) *Basic marketing: a managerial approach*, 6th edn, Irwin.
- Mazur, L. (1991–2) Silent satisfaction, *Marketing Business*, (December–January), 24–7.
- Meldrum, M. and McDonald, M. (1995) *Key marketing concepts*, Macmillan.
- Wilson, R. M. S. and Gilligan, C. with Howsden, M. (1995) *Strategic marketing management*, Butterworth-Heinemann.
- Zeithaml, V. A. and Bitner, M. J. (2000) *Services marketing: integrating customer focus across the firm*, McGraw-Hill.