

Information Overload

Issue 75, April 2009

Welcome:

Welcome to the April edition of IEA's e-zine "Information Overload".

This particular edition of Information Overload, we take a step back to the first year of publication and have another look at Marketing of what can be deemed to be Intangible Services, namely our library and records management services. Why "Intangible"? Well, unless people can see the benefit of your service, they won't use it, and even when they need something – they won't think to use your service – because they don't see it, or see the value in it. And there are many reasons why.

We hope you enjoy reading. Have a great week.

Lorraine Bradshaw
Marketing Coordinator and Projects Manager

In this issue we will look at:

- Marketing intangible services
- Inductions for new starters
- The importance of training in the marketing mix
- A Thought to ponder.

Marketing intangible services

Marketing should be "an ongoing response to change in the marketplace", which is a nice catch all statement marketers use. But what does it mean really? Well in basic terms, if you don't know what your customers want or need, it is unlikely you will be able to deliver "it" – unless you also happen to be a mind reader, or very lucky.

The problem with marketing and promoting intangible services are many:

- What are we trying to promote?
- What service are we trying to "sell" to our organisations?
- Are they "buying" what we are offering?
- Can we provide the same level of service to everyone or are we guilty of serving those people who shout loudest to the detriment of those who barely make a noise, yet need our help?

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- Do we try and provide a service that is not needed / required by our organisation – but because other organisations are doing that – feel we should too?

Before you say – but I work in library / records / information and I don't have anything I "sell" therefore can't market anything. I would suggest you need to re-think what you do.

No matter what part of an organisation you are in, you are "selling" and promoting yourself and your services to others who need what you have to offer. Which is why, when times get a little tough we see libraries being closed down and very good library personnel on the job market. Is it because we don't know how to market ourselves properly, or are our organisations simply not in a position to buy what it is we can offer? But let us not just limit ourselves to the libraries within our organisations, but all those seemingly intangible services we provide.

Marketing your services is more than just gimmicks and giveaways, it has to be based on sound strategies – namely – what service are you providing and who is your audience? So a few suggestions:

- Do you know who your core audience is?
- Who currently uses your services?
- Where are they based?
- Who should be using your services?
- Do you serve a captive audience or are you dealing with the general public?

What is your marketing message?:

- What do you tell your audience?
- How often do you speak to your audience?
- Do you follow up?
- If not – why not? – Never be afraid of what people tell you, everything can be used to do things better, differently. If you don't know – how can you do things better, differently?
- Do you suffer from leaky bucket syndrome? – This is the term used for when clients stop using your services (for whatever reason) and you have to find new clients to top up the bucket again.

Did your client base change – as in your biggest users left, got promoted / demoted, you took on another division or your organization bought another one. Each one of these situations will make a difference to your target audience.

Inductions for New Starters:

One of the best ways to market your services is during an induction for all new staff, which means working closely with the HR department to ensure you are part of the orientation process.

Things to know / Ask:

- Who will they be working with?
- What projects will they be working on?

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- Where you will be in the induction and orientation process for the new starters. Note: When discussing with HR your role in the orientation of new staff, it is a good idea to wait for a day or two after the new person has started before taking them through your services. As we all know, bombarding the newcomer with too much information too early into their new job, will significantly reduce their retention rate for information. And we need them to remember what it is we do and what we can do for them.

Once you know who will be joining you, where they fit into the organisational structure and the project areas they will be working in, you will be able to provide a pro-active service to your client base, and that goes for current staff as well as newcomers.

Pro-active: *"I see you are moving into a new project area – would you like me to do some background research for you, to see what has already been written on the subject. It will save you some time, and we can build on what has already been done."*

For newbies: *"This is all going to be overwhelming for you during your first week. But it is important for you to know what services we can offer you. As you get to grips with your projects, we can discuss in more detail what information you will require."*

This approach works especially well for records – can you imagine what would happen if you found a report that said – been there, tried it, didn't work – and because "you" didn't look – re-created the work! Truth is, a lot of organizations do exactly that – as in they don't know what they've already done, partly because the original work is not indexed properly (or at all), the system is so clunky you have trouble searching it, therefore don't bother, or your search cannot be performed properly because of the way the information was added to the system.

You can show the records management system and provide training on how to search the indexes. Whilst this should be done as soon as possible, again it is a matter of information retention. You know yourself what it is like when starting a new position. You get told so much it is hard to remember where everything is, and who everyone was, let alone how to search the RM system for a report you vaguely remember hearing about.

So, like all good marketing strategies – follow up is important. Make time to work with the newbies and you will be rewarded by their grasp of how things should be done, and you will be the go-to person for information. Counter that with the people who dislike the "new" system because it's not the "OLD" system and have bad habits we need to change – and who refuse to ask you for anything because you wanted to change the way things worked – and you will see that your marketing message has to be very different.

Then there is the re-active approach to service provision.

Re-active: *"I've just been given a new project; could you get me this book / article / report?"* (And we all know how long these things can take to arrive.)

"Have you checked the catalogue?"

"Err no, didn't know we had one"

One of the best ways to be more proactive in your marketing strategy is to ask:

As we have mentioned with the newcomers and working with the HR department to know where they will be sitting in the organisational structure and projects they will be working on. When it comes to existing staff, it becomes even more important to know what they will be working on in the next 12 months.

We need to discuss with the senior members of the organisation, the future developments and directions. When we know what the organisations medium to long-term strategies and plans are, we can provide a much better service, and in marketing terms – this strategy is priceless, which makes me wonder why it is not adopted by more library and information centres.

The reason why we need to know this information becomes a major selling point to management for our services. In library terms we need to know this kind of “stuff” so we can ensure our collection development strategies are correct.

We can use this information to make sound judgements for our current collection. In simple terms, we can remove items from stock that are no-longer relevant. We can cancel journal subscriptions that are no longer important so we have the space and the budget to get the ones that are. But if we don't know what people are working on, we can't make those decisions.

So, engage your work colleagues in meaningful dialogue, personally I feel it's one of the major tools in our marketing strategy.

The importance of training in the marketing mix:

Training is about educating people how and why they should do something and / or use something....in the way “we” want them to do it.

Can you imagine what a disaster it would be if you rolled out a new system and didn't tell anyone how to use it or what it was supposed to be used for? We 'expected' everyone to know instinctively what it did.

When it comes to marketing – one of the biggest ways to engage your customers is through training. But not just once, but by repeated follow ups, especially for a) new starters – through the induction process and b) new systems – where everyone is a new starter.

With many thoughts

Lorraine

A Thought to Ponder:

“No matter what your product is, you are ultimately in the education business. Your customers need to be constantly educated about the many advantages of doing business with you, trained to use your products more effectively, and taught how to make never-ending improvement in their lives.”

Robert G Allen

Your comments and suggestions on the subject of this newsletter are most welcome. Or if you would like to see other issues covered in future editions, please email me at training@iea.com.au. Please feel free to pass on this newsletter to your colleagues' friends and associates. To subscribe they should send an e-mail to training@iea.com.au with “subscribe newsletter” in the subject line.

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