

Why Market a National Library

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When I was appointed to lead the brand new Marketing and Management Department in the National Central Library of Rome in 1997, I happened to be asked by the majority of my astonished colleagues the same question we are asking today: "Is it really necessary to market a National Library?"

Even the Unions asked the Director to know the tasks of the new department and if it meant that the policies of the private and commercial world were erupting, breaking into the public and institutional world of the Library.

The starting point to introduce marketing strategies and to formulate effective marketing plans for such an institutional world must be a question: what is the link between the needs, the goals, the "mission" of private companies and national libraries?

In the past, cultural institutions like national libraries were conceived above all as temples of knowledge, splendid shrines of hidden treasures, a sort of fortress hard to conquer; their prestige derived not only from their preciousness to the nation, but also from their distance maintained from the people: they were elite institutions (How many people could just see a manuscript in the past?). Democracy and mass education together with the availability of information technology deeply changed their role and mission. Once conservation and preservation formed the very core tasks of national libraries; nowadays they maintain their centrality, but information, availability of documents and cultural roles now have the same importance.

Does it mean that even national libraries, as companies, should be "client oriented"? And, if they should, who are their "clients"? If the customer is the client of a company, the reader is not the only client of a national library; the government and sponsors are also clients of the national library.

It is easy to consider readers and customers as very similar: readers use the library and its services: they have become "users" and national libraries have to reach the greatest number of them and satisfy their needs. Services to local and remote users must be increased in quality and number as well as cultural events (exhibitions, readings, etc.). Increasing these initiatives leads to increasing costs and usually the budgets received by governments are not sufficient. Budgets received by governments can be related to the library's performance also in offering services to users. These performances and the "image" of the library are closely bound to the chances to add sponsorships by private institutions and companies to its budget.

To reach their clients, companies use marketing strategies to identify costumers and their needs, to be well known and chosen by them, to evaluate and to reach their satisfaction and to conquer their fidelity. Do national libraries have to adopt these strategies? If yes,

communication, customer satisfaction, target, even competition are words and concepts to be introduced in the lexicon of a national library and to become very familiar to its librarians.

The National Central Library of Rome, as others and authoritative national libraries, believed that marketing was a determinant tool in improving image and performance and in increasing budget and public support. In 1997 the National Library of Rome started to adopt marketing strategies. Communication policies were established: a new logo, web site, a demo CD-ROM and public relations with political and cultural institutions and with the mass media were improved.

To better develop a marketing plan, the National Central Library of Rome has used the Customer Satisfaction Study, commissioned to a private company for a quality management project.

The study was a two-step survey: a first step (Survey A) was oriented to get an "inside opinion" and a second step (Survey B) was oriented to get an "outside opinion." A double approach, qualitative and quantitative, was applied to both steps.

Survey A investigated the opinions of the staff about the Library's mission, the quality of services, the user's needs and their satisfaction. The survey consisted of a focus group of 10 front office employees and in questionnaires focused on the group's results, applied to 70 different front office employees.

Survey B investigated the same topics, but not the same subjects: it consisted of three focus groups formed mostly of professors, scholars, and college students, and 250 questionnaires applied to the same categories of readers, both inside the Library and outside in three state libraries and in two of the most important universities.

The study has been very successful and the results very interesting. We now know how the Library and its services are perceived by staff and users and what kind of expectations they have. The staff was more conscious of the traditional role of preservation and conservation, while the users tended to consider a national library as a public library, stressing their right to read or copy any document, with a scarce consciousness of the preserving role.

It is clear that there was a "conflict" between the readers and the employees in conceiving the Library's mission and tasks. This conflict could be eliminated by quality management and quality services, but also by good marketing actions of communication and training in the Library, oriented both to users and to staff.

As far as expectations, inside and outside opinions often coincided: both subjects requested to update the structure, to give more comfort, to implement new technologies and information, and to simplify procedures.

The Communication plan - cited above - was based on the results of the study and the library web site has won this year the European Community's "Prix Moebius

International," as the best quality web site of Italian language area libraries.
www.bnrcrm.librari.beniculturali.it

The outcome of the Study has been fundamental also in two important improvement projects.

The aim of the "Library Quality Project" was to improve performance, initially through the constitution of five Continuous Improvement Groups in the front office services (this experience ended in 1999 and has been used in the architectural project and in the Communication plan) and then through the ISO 9000 standards adoption. This phase is still ongoing.

The "Qualifying Spaces and Services Project" is an architectural and structural project that has completely renewed all the areas for readers, both inside and outside of the Library. It ended in March, with the inauguration of the Minister of Culture, who doubled the Library budget last year. The project tried to fulfill some of the expectations revealed by the Customer Satisfaction Study, such as an update and rational layout of the areas, a more friendly and comfortable structure, the availability of a great number of computers for bibliographic searches and the introduction of more automated procedures.

Customer satisfaction will be tested again at the end of the two projects and when all the big changes in management and building are complete.

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NATIONAL CENTRAL LIBRARY OF ROME

Why Marketing National Libraries

IFLA August 2001

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Qualified spaces and services project



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MISSION

COMPANIES

- **Increasing business**

NATIONAL LIBRARIES

- **conservation and preservation**
- **availability of documents**
- **cultural role**

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CLIENTS

COMPANIES

- **customers**

NATIONAL LIBRARIES

- **readers**
- **Government**
- **sponsors**

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SIMPLIFYING: COMPANIES USE MARKETING

- **to identify costumers and their needs**
- **to make costumers know and choose them and their products/services**
- **to evaluate and reach costumers' satisfaction**

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CUSTOMER SATISFACTION STUDY

a two steps survey

- Inside opinion (employees giving services)
- Outside opinion (readers getting services)

a double approach to both

- qualitative (focus group)
- quantitative (questionnaire)

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SURVEY A - Inside opinion

- **1 focus group of ten front office employees**
- **70 questionnaires to front office employees**

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SURVEY B - outside opinion

- **3 focus groups** (professors, scholars, college students)
- **250 questionnaires*** (same categories of readers)

*** distributed inside the BNCR, in 3 State libraries and at Universities.**

PERCEPTIONS

- **INSIDE OPINION**
 - **strong consciousness of the preserving role**
 - **conflict between preservation and availability**
 - **little consciousness of the public service role**
- **OUTSIDE OPINION**
 - **good consciousness of the cultural role**
 - **scarce consciousness of the preserving role(33%)**
 - **strong consciousness of the public service role(65%)**
 - **feeling disoriented**

EXPECTATIONS

- **INSIDE OPINION**
 - **structure update**
 - **staff increase**
 - **comfort increase**
 - **burocracy decrease**
 - **politicians' attention**
 - **new technologies**
- **OUTSIDE OPINION**
 - **structure update**
 - **services improve**
 - **comfort increase**
 - **burocracy decrease**
 - **information improve**
 - **new technologies**

OUTCOMES EFFECTS

- **LIBRARY QUALITY PROJECT (1997-2001)**
performances improvement and ISO 9000
standards adoption
- **QUALIFIED SPACES AND SERVICES
PROJECT (1997-2001)**
architectural and functional structures
improvement

Qualified spaces and services project



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Qualified spaces and services projects



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