

Librarians' personal branding through information technology for effective service delivery in Nigerian university libraries

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Abstract

In the contemporary age and corporate world where there exist a lot of competition among various scholars, librarianship has changed from the traditional service delivery to Information and Communication Technology (ICT) service delivery. This paper assesses librarians' personal branding through information technology for effective service delivery in Nigerian university libraries. To carry out this study, documentary survey method was used, and the concept of librarians' personal branding was highlighted. It further suggests how librarians can create their personal branding to optimize effective library service delivery. The study concludes its high time librarians left their traditional comfort zones because the global ICT train is moving so fast that they may be left behind. It recommends the need to enhance the skills and ability to appropriately acquire, process and disseminate digitized information for effective service delivery and also make great untiring efforts to create personal branding through information technology that would announce them to the world of various clients, employers and contemporaries.

Keywords

Effective Service Delivery, Information Technology, Librarians, Nigerian University Libraries, Personal Branding

1. Introduction

Since the inception of library profession, there has been this notion that librarians are traditional practitioners. The existence of librarians proved that of analogue-minded set of individuals that dust books, shelves and serve library patrons with materials they need for their researches. Then there were no traces of information technology being imbibed in the library for operations. But now, the 21st century has brought a lot of dynamism within the library and information science profession. This has come as a result of the sophisticated nature of the present day library user. Library patrons are constantly prompting librarians to be more pro-active in their service delivery. The advent of the Internet has also compelled librarians to work at providing

services in more dynamic ways. Library and information service is an umbrella term covering all services obtainable in the library. This does not only imply 'within-the-library services', but also includes mobile library services which in essence is the provision of library services to clients outside the library building.

Owing to the need for librarians to embrace the new technology both to reach their clients and employers and to compete with their contemporaries, the librarians are expected to build a lasting positive image, and reaching the apex in the library profession. Librarians have qualified their status as 'professional librarians' owing to the fact that technology is being utilized by such librarians for self-marking and branding of services. The society now holds librarians in high esteem because they have started involving themselves in self-upgrading or branding as the

case may be. Librarians now brand themselves in the online medium so as to fit into the digital society.

Librarians' personal branding is about creating a positive image of oneself as a practitioner. This creation of a positive image involves putting extra effort than to make oneself pronounced and valued by clients. For the librarian, it is paramount to add value to services to clients by positioning oneself in a strategic point where information seen through us wherein we serve as pointers in a classy way, to information. Librarians' personal branding involves much more than what was taught in the library school because not many teach about librarians' personal branding to librarians in higher institutions. As a librarian, branding oneself should involve knowing who you are, who your patrons are, what your values and goals are and the importance of information.

Success in library practice should be tied to librarians' personal branding efforts. For instance, take away the library building, but the librarian still remains a librarian; take away the library furniture, but the clients will still need the help of the librarian. In such a situation where there exists no building, no chairs, no tables, no books, what would the librarian do? This is where librarians' personal branding comes in to play. It is only a librarian that has the tips of personal branding that can be relevant in such a situation. The difference between a librarian and another librarian is 'personal branding'. A branded librarian will succeed with all brands of clients and situations. That is when one graduates from ordinary brand to building a strong brand. A strong personal brand will help you succeed because it means that you are communicating the sense of purpose, vision and values that reflects and embodies you to other people. It is pertinent to note that, there is a dearth of literature in the area of branding in libraries and personal branding of librarians in particular. This is in agreement with the observation of Singh (2011) that "there is a dearth of literature concerning branding in the library world. As a consequence, the LIS (Library and Information Science) profession lacks a deeper understanding of the process of developing a deliberate branding culture". This paper is not meant to serve as a pure research paper or empirical study, rather it is a mini-guide to helping librarians just like any other professionals, build their brand, optimize their brand extension level by a digital branding and possibly the library for effective service delivery in Nigerian university libraries.

2. Objectives of the Study

Although the paper is not a pure research paper, there is need to bring out the objectives. The objectives of the study therefore intends to help:

- 1 Reposition librarians in Nigerian university libraries as relevant information professionals through their personal branding and;
- 2 Suggest how librarians can create their personal branding through Information Technology to optimize effective library service delivery in Nigerian university libraries.

Librarians' Personal Branding through Information Technology

Branding does not only pertain to products that are queued for sale in the market place; librarians' personal branding is now a function of a paradigm shift from the world of product marketing to that of human marketing. This singular shift has resulted in what is termed librarians' personal branding. If branding in itself is all about the building up of the value of products, therefore librarians' personal branding becomes the value updating of librarians in a bid to make a positive mark in the corporate world. Librarians' personal branding is a personal identity that stimulates precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person or librarian stands for (Montaya, 2002). Wikipedia (2012a) reveals that personal branding, self-positioning and all individual branding by whatever name, was first introduced in 1937 in the book *Think and Grow Rich* by Napoleon Hill. Montaya (2002) wrote:

Personal branding does the same for people as the marketers do for products ... Personal branding is a strategic process – it is about intentionally taking control of how others perceive you and managing those perceptions strategically to help you achieve your goals ... A personal brand, then, is “the public projection of certain aspects of a person’s personality, skills or values that stimulate precise, meaningful perceptions in its audience about the values and qualities that person stands for” (<http://www.Petermontaya.com/pdfs/tbcy-chapter 1.pdf>).

Librarians are responsible for the way their clients and the public view them and the services they render. To create a brand of you as a librarian, the writers suggest the following steps:

- 1 Mind-set to boost the personal brand opportunities of librarians: Many librarians today are accidental librarians. This means that many librarians ventured into librarianship probably because their dream course failed them an opportunity. This of course, would contribute to the low self-esteem of many librarians. In fact, according to the writers of this paper, “the reason for the low self-esteem of many librarians is the fact that some of them were employed as Library Assistant in their junior cadre and have grown through promotions to senior/librarian cadre as such they would not want to leave the library. This is their career and they prefer to retire here. This affects their personal branding opportunities”. This hampers their contribution to the society. This should be tackled seriously as to boost the personal brand opportunities of such librarians. When a librarian prepares his mind to be a librarian, there is the tendency to map out goals and visions. This helps in building librarian’s personal brand. Personal brand has to do with understanding your purpose first, then how you would add value to your purpose to reach out to the crowd.

- 2 Develop a positive and unique vision statement: A vision statement reveals your aim as a librarian. People have different visions in life; what they pursue and how they want to be viewed. Your vision statement comes in concise terms that summarizes what you represent as a professional; what you aim at, your long-term goal.
- 3 Get a Signature: A signature is a purposed indelible mark representing an individual's name or initials. It usually comes at the end of a letter. In the online medium these days, there is room for creation of e-mail signature where one can scan and paste a signature and it remains there for every mail sent out to recipients. Signatures involve more than the scanned signature. A signature could be someone's initials or name(s) followed by address, phone number, online identification like e-mails, blogs, face book profile page, and other social networks wherein the individual is involved. For building a positive brand, it is good for librarians to include their title such as: University Librarian, Deputy University Librarian, Senior Librarian, Principal Librarian, and others. This should be consistent in all mails or letters sent out as it creates a lasting impression. As promotion comes, there is also need for update in cadre.
- 4 Get a complimentary card: Most often, librarians attend conferences/workshops and meet with fellow librarians from other places, and further meet with fellow academic/faculty staff and researchers, and they wish to exchange contact details. This is where the use of complimentary card is important. This is because, a complimentary card contains not just the person's name, but qualification, cadre, contact address and phone number. Complimentary cards help shape your brand and would help project the librarian to the outside world. These elements should be consistent. Consistency is the key to developing a lasting positive brand.
- 5 Create a Positive Personal Branding of Yourself: This is the crux of this paper. This entails taking personal branding to a higher level – that of projecting the image of the librarian beyond the local level; crossing the threshold of invisibility and locality to that of visibility and internationality, respectively. First, we ought to grasp the concept of information technology and then marry it with how it can optimize the personal branding of librarians.
- 6 Participate in online discussion forums: Participating in online discussion forums like Nigerian Library Association (NLA) forum announces you in the digital society. Here, you are advised to leave your posts with a signature of your name and affiliation. This activity does not just identify you among your professional colleagues, but registers your name in the digital world.

How Librarians Can Create their Personal Branding through Information Technology to Optimize Effective Library Service Delivery

- Training and Retooling for the IT Work Environment: It is no gainsaying that we still have practicing librarians in Nigeria that are not ICT literate. Some who are even literate have limited skills in exploitation of ICT. This will definitely have a negative impact in their professional duty of information provision and services. The use of technology requires a significant investment in time, money, and training of both librarian and patrons. The evolution of IT requires that librarians' skills and competencies must be continually upgraded and maintained through training and re-tooling to make the best use of these technologies (Hanson, 2002). Training is the cornerstone of any effort to re-tool librarians to meet the challenges and opportunities of a digital work environment. Peter (1987) posits that training is one of the key areas to be emphasized if an organization is to survive in our changing world.

Tannent (1995) posits that training can take many forms, and each library should use the mix of training strategy that best meets their needs. Among the methods of training are: i. In-House Training Program – Typically, the library, invites a consultant from outside the library to conduct the training program. Also, librarian of the library who has sufficient skills and knowledge can be assigned the responsibility to conduct the training program. ii. Outside Training Opportunities: iii. Self-Paced Training – This offers learning opportunities at the individual's discretion, rather than being tied to a particular day and time for a class. Individual can learn at their own pace and convenience. iv. Workshops and Seminars – Specialized workshops and seminars particularly those organized by professional associations provide very good platforms for information professionals to information technology training and re-tool. v. Training from Library Schools – Many library school have reviewed their curricula to include components of information technology which graduates bring to the employment market. This training should be aimed at how staff members can help education patrons who have questions about the new resources or how to use them. Librarians need constant and regular training irrespective of their areas of specialization.

- Use of Social Media in the provision of information services: They are not limited to face book, Twitter, Google Plus (g+), Flickr, YouTube, Myspace, but also include internet forums (e.g. NLA, Forum), Internet groups, blogs (web blogs) networking sites, among others. This has brought a better concept of sharing and interaction. In these social networking, users could join the library page from the institution's face book account where access to full texts of some literature on the databases provided are available. The adoption, by institutions, of social media like face book, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube,

Myspace, and the likes is evidence of a corporate shift to effectively harness the enormous powers of social media because the voiceless are increasingly being heard and listened to today. Librarians should realized that the world is moving into a post-PC era, where mobile devices determine standards and *modus operandi* in service delivery.

- **Portal Creation:** A portal is a personalized or customized web resource which allows its users to customize information sources by selecting and viewing only those they find useful. Akintunde (2002) maintains that portals creation helps to keep information provides focused because customization of identified sites/databases help providers and users to operate within some knowledge boundaries instead of getting entangled in the maze of data on the world wide web. Librarians should have web navigational skills and must be experts in their subject areas.
- **Web Search:** The ability to search the web to ensure full exploitation of electronic resources is very germane in digital library services. In some libraries where systems analysts or administrators with peculiar IT skills are involved they help to inculcate required skills into other staff and users. Ability to navigate the web, search queries as well as answer specific enquiries is essential. It is an obvious fact that working with ICT in information service requires more skills than what could be given in the contemporary library schools in Nigeria.
- **Virtual Learning Environment:** In this Information age where users have access to information anywhere, the librarian must do something to enable their library keep the users not to go out to cyber cafés for information, the library should allocate space for specific groups of students and researcher to have quiet reading. The virtual learning environment is equipped with computer workstations that are fully connected to the internet. The library should create a resource or chart room where users can make calls using their mobile phone. Libraries can also create blogspots and community networking sites like online forums to foster discussions of issues and generation of new ideas among members of the academic communities. This helps in generating innovative ideas to improve the day-to day running of the library.
- **E-Resource Management Services:** The librarians must procure and subscribe to e-books and journals in different field of study. After procuring and subscribing these e-resources, the librarian must send alerts or notices to these users of the university community via short message service (SMS), Emails and social network tools to create awareness of the availability of such e-resources. This has also helped the library management to plan properly about the subscription and optimum use of the e-resources.

- **Electronic Reservation Service:** This service is different from the traditional book reservation, called reserved book room service in some academic libraries. Many students, faculty, and staff time is spent in digital space. To better meet the changing needs of our users, librarians must implement changes in the provision of library services to facilitate teaching, learning and research. They must expand the reserved collection to include books from the library collections; recommended texts from lecturers; online journal articles from the library's electronic journals collection; lecture notes including any material for which the lecturer has copyright, whether electronic or paper; media including videos; DVDs, CD-ROMs and past examination papers.
- **Upload Documents and videos online:** Documents like power points could be uploaded in slideshare and videos could be uploaded in youtube. Pictures are usually shared using flickr.
- **Create websites or Incorporate web tools in the library:** The development of web-based technology has made it possible for librarians to work outside the library. The uptake of publishers to use the web for product delivery has made it possible for students and researchers to access information at their time of need. Library websites are constantly evolving to better match users' needs. It is important that librarians assess the information needs of their student cohort and determine if their library websites, online services and online delivery of programs will add value to the students' learning experiences. Our role is to support, enrich and provide superb services – in person and online.

The librarian must create blogs where they can interact with their users and also get feedback from them. In the blogs, general information about the library is posted. The library and librarians also have Twitter accounts. When librarians interact with users, library management gets to know exactly what the users are saying about the library and this creates room for improvement. Also a librarian can create a personal blog. When a librarian create a blog or website (especially personal ones) for instance, a personal website (or blog of 'Angela Smith' (hypothetical name) should look like this: www.angelsmith.com or where the domain name has been taken by another Angela Smith (because so many Angela Smiths may be in existence), you could have: www.angelsmithwebsite.com. For the blog, you could have: www.angelasblog.blogspot.com (for blogger).

- **Create Google Alerts:** This enables you to know when your name is mentioned online. By registering for google alerts, you get alerted on your mail whenever your books are cited or whenever a tag of you is created. This could also help if any message is sent to your email.
- **Brand your office environment:** Your office

environment speaks a lot about you. If you are an academic staff, your office should contain shelves for books and a conference table, as it projects your image as someone that is ready to collaborate with others. Imagine an office with only one chair and one table. It shows the person as an academic staff that does not have the spirit of collaboration. If there is need to paste a sticker on your door, it should portray your vision statement.

- Data Curation and Digital Preservation: Data curation is a term used to indicate management activities required to maintain research data long-term such as it is available for reuse and preservation. In science, data curation may indicate the process of extraction of important information from scientific texts, such as research articles by experts, to be converted into an electronic format. While, Digital preservation can be understood as the series of managed activities necessary to ensure continued access to digital materials for as long as necessary (DPC, 2008).

3. Conclusion

To deliver world class library services Nigerian university librarians need to be able to create their personal branding and also embrace the use of information technology. Personal branding is important to reposition librarians as relevant information professionals, the global ICT train is moving so fast and its high time Nigerian university librarians left their traditional comfort zones in other not to be left behind. Finally the study recommends that librarians need to enhance their skills and ability to appropriately acquire, process, and disseminate digitized information for effective service delivery. Also librarians should make great untiring efforts to create personal branding through information technology that would announce them to the world of various clients, employers and contemporaries.

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