

# Marketing Library and Information Services: International Perspectives

Edited on behalf of IFLA

by

Dinesh K. Gupta

V. M. Open University, Kota (India)

Christie Koontz

Florida State University (USA)

Àngels Massísimo

University of Barcelona (Spain)

Réjean Savard

University of Montreal (Canada)

# METAPHORS ON MARKETING : SYMBOLIC AND EFFECTIVE ATTEMPTS IN THE "LUCIAN BLAGA" CENTRAL UNIVERSITY LIBRARY CLUJ-NAPOCA, ROMANIA

Melinda Bükkei  
István Király V.

Motto: "Concentrate on the results, not on the activities"  
- Sergio Zyman

**Abstract** *The paper grasps and outlines the concepts and practices of library marketing as well as generally the marketing of non-profit institutions or organizations, conceptually defined as symbolic marketing. However, what is termed here as symbolic should not be understood as a "weaker" version of marketing, but as the proper way in which marketing perspectives can be actually implemented in such institutions; that is, as a practice which concerns and mobilizes all services and activities of such institutions. The paper also presents the factual initiatives which have been going on for years – quite successfully – in the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library, Cluj-Napoca, Romania, especially around the library's periodical, the review Philobiblon, and on the basis of which recent "projects" can also be conceived more consistently.*

## INTRODUCTION

Before being a simple, mechanical need, or more than that, a fashion, *marketing* is and remains, in its essence a *challenge and a fundamental possibility* for the libraries. That is, a possibility and a challenge which focuses and touches upon the institution's structure, internal dynamics, the ensemble of institutional relations, but also the whole range of its mission and means of achieving and developing it. Any possibility is, in its turn, the outline of a *horizon*. A horizon which - even if it is mainly oriented towards the future -, touches and embraces in fact all temporal dimensions of the institution: its future, its present, and also its past.

These aspects are valid – obviously, with due particularities – in the case of those libraries, perhaps even the majority of them, which are non-profit organizations or institutions and therefore their products and services are not

*merchandise* meant to be *sold*. Consequently, the products and services of these institutions have a different view of *market*, which we here call *symbolic*.

## SYMBOLIC MARKETING

*Symbolic marketing* though, in our understanding, is by no means a *weaker* form of *real* marketing, nothing of the “as if...” kind! We are not talking about shaping the services and products in such a way “as if” they were goods meant for the “market”. That is, *pseudo-goods*, the presence and acceptance of which would only be validated on a merely *imaginary* market.

On the contrary: symbolic marketing is the most suitable and authentic way for non profit institutions to conceive and fulfill their traditional, actual or prospective efforts and attempts in order to meet the challenges of the contemporary world. Thus, the horizon of symbolic marketing fundamentally implies and concerns library institutions as a whole, as well as in their complex relations.

What is new then in this concept of marketing for libraries as compared to the previous, and already traditional, concepts of “public relations”? The answer to this question has to consider, first of all, a certain effect of *explication* and *indication*. No matter how intensely PR actions keep in mind the dynamics of meanings of an institution in its relationship with a real or virtual public, they are not automatically able to mirror and focus the challenges of the society towards the interior of the organization. No matter how efficient PR departments seem to be in institutions of public administration, they can still leave many of the bureaucratic structures untouched, which are mostly convenient, inert and inflexible as to their functionality. Marketing concepts, and especially marketing practices have as a first result, precisely the revelation, the explanation and indication of insufficiencies unidentified before. In the same time, marketing also offers a new and efficient possibility for a dynamic reconsideration and outlining of the institutions, establishing itself as a change-management “engine”. Beyond these aspects, marketing concept and mentality offer the possibility of *current institutional opening*, receiving not only the needs and demands from the “outside”, but conceiving its own shapes and offers. This last aspect becomes more obvious, especially through the theories and practices promoted by Sergio Zyman.

As it is shown, we think that marketing is no mystery and no fashion, but, in the words of Sergio Zyman[1], it’s an extremely serious discipline, not only and exclusively in business, but generally in taking our institutional and organizational efforts seriously. That is why we have to make it clear, also in the case of “symbolic” marketing, that all its costs turn to a good account, always and invariably. First of all these are “symbolic” benefits, as a result of prestige and positive institutional image, which normally influence fundraising activities, and on a different level help us achieve some *experience*, *competence* and *self-reliance*, which can guarantee the success of the *real products* on the market and direct incomes. Or, this means not a “symbolical marketing”, but a real one.

Most services offered or created by libraries are in fact *produced* by them. The core of these products is *information*. It is nowadays unanimously accepted that the libraries not only administrate and mediate information, but they also create it on a daily basis, making it specific and specialized. We have to admit, though, that in the process of orienting users, clients, beneficiaries, these pieces of information get in touch, at least contextually, with the *information market*. Or, during that dynamic and lively daily contact, it is often the gaps of offers which may show, related to some unidentified and unshaped needs or possibilities. We can identify and shape these needs, by using specific products from the libraries.

Of course, we realize every day that contemporary marketing is not limited to the identification of existing needs for different clients, customers, buyers, etc., but involves itself in the “birth”, shaping and articulating the effectiveness of needs, in an active and creative way.

### **LIS MARKETING IN ROMANIA: SOME OBSTACLES**

In spite of all these, there still are a lot of various obstacles against the implementation of marketing techniques and practices in libraries, and not only in Romania. The first obstacle, which is a quite complex one, is that of mentality, with multidirectional ramifications. Although most librarians are aware of the necessity of marketing in libraries, at least on a “verbal” level, there are very few who can actually “make time” for it. The argumentation “lack of time” however proves to be totally ridiculous and compensatory if we acknowledge the fact that marketing activities open up, gain and complete the meaning of any library activity. “To have no time” in this case means, strangely and intriguingly enough, to have no time to analyze and shape everything else that one does *during the time of having no time!*

The mental “time barrier” is associated with one of the most frequent problems: “lack of money”, money which could be allocated for the marketing activities and efforts. In reality, the outlining of the problem is exactly the opposite. That is: instead of asking ourselves if we have enough money to conceive, to support, develop and implement marketing activities in the libraries, we have to ask if we have enough money to give up the direct or indirect incomes, profits and benefits gained by their help.

We can also mention as a mental barrier the fact that for a traditional type librarian, the connection between his daily activity and a modern economical discipline as marketing can be only obscure. So, we have to admit, there is still a serious lack of understanding, competence and opening towards the importance of marketing in the field of library science. However, if we try to imagine and reflect upon the relations between library services and the (possible) entirety of its beneficiaries as a *global confrontation*, also involving the costs and requests, then marketing will become totally justified.

Generally speaking, we can ask ourselves, if it is not inappropriate to leave the implementation of marketing techniques in the care of librarians? Shouldn't this task belong to the policy of total management? And librarians to be chosen and shaped only afterwards? All this for the simple reason that marketing today, and especially in this perspective, is not an optional matter at all!

Beyond mentality obstacles, there certainly is another category of obstacles in implementing contemporary marketing. If we refer to the Romanian situation, especially regarding the budgetary university libraries, we can talk about administrative barriers. The major university libraries are all budgetary institutions maintained by the government, but the allocated sum of money doesn't only depend on the libraries' marketing performances, but also on some quantitative and administrative indicators, applicable invariably and undifferentiatedly to all libraries in the "network". This means that, although it allows, the system does not encourage, support or *reward* marketing performances in libraries. Even if successful activities can improve a library's financial situation, they will not bring supplementary money from the budget, and this fact has a negative influence upon the interest of the libraries to deploy such efforts. And all this in spite of the fact, as we shall later see, that there are real possibilities to use money from the budget in a profitable way, by even doubling or tripling their utility value.

We also have to talk about another barrier in the way of marketing implementation: the institutional one. The habits, the institutional structure and the traditional managerial attitude of most major budgetary Romanian university libraries very rarely represent a favorable factor for changes, essentially led by the idea and motto of our study: to concentrate not on activities, but on *real and consistent results*.

From the year 1998, the Romanian Governmental Ordinance No. 84, par. 3 allows Romanian university libraries not only to obtain incomes from individual activities, but also to use these for self-benefit. This represents an excellent opportunity to complete the incomes of the libraries. In spite of all these, Romanian library legislation requires, encourages or recompenses neither marketing efforts, nor the implementation of marketing-concerned approaches.

Nevertheless, library marketing is a well known notion discussed in Romanian specialized literature, dealing, more *in abstracto*, and unfortunately rather as an unapplied *desideratum*, with the necessity of introducing marketing concepts and practices in the daily activities of Romanian libraries. Thus, without realizing the fact that "marketing strategy" represents on one hand to re-think, re-analyze, re-articulate and communicate what already exists, on the other hand, with all its efficiency and consistence, to show what is about to be done. Although it is true that generally every interaction with a client/reader is a possible moment of marketing, every interaction and every service also represents a possibility for marketing actions. We have to be aware of the fact that these possibilities cannot be "achieved" and actualized effectively or automatically unless they are planned,

prefigured and outlined from the beginning, in virtue of certain approaches, concepts and practices, themselves also of an inner marketing-substance[2]. The close connections with economic and social life influence library activities, imposing the implementation of marketing procedures as a necessity in Romanian libraries.

Marketing strategy is usually based upon the acquaintance of the "customer", who in our case is the active or passive, real or potential reader. But in order to acquaint the customer, we need to do market research with result to reflect information about the necessities, expectations and opinions of present services, in order to be able to re-think them through marketing actions. To re-think the services with maximum efficiency, we have to direct our attention towards library staff, who not only contributes to the improvement of services, but also represents a special user stratum, whose positive or negative opinion influences the image of the library. In the same time we should not forget about our partners, financing and cooperative institutions, which represent the most structured and important segment of public opinion which also decisively influences a wider public opinion.

The success of marketing actions is ensured precisely by obtaining exact and necessary data. It can be obtained not only by testing the public opinion, but also by direct interaction with readers and institutions, these having a direct feedback. Market research and public opinion are very important elements for libraries to find out useful information about their users needs and as an effect of the information to satisfy their needs. Without these actions no library would be functional. Every library elaborates their own marketing concept, which has to correspond with necessities, requests and local conditions.

## **MARKETING AT THE UNIVERSITY LIBRARY**

The Central University Library of Cluj, which some years ago adopted the name of a Romanian poet and philosopher, Lucian Blaga, is one of the largest libraries in Transylvania, Romania, and at the same time one of the largest from Central Europe, having an encyclopedic, scientific and didactic profile. Due to its Special Collections and Legal Deposit, the library also has a museum character. After the 1989 changes, the necessity of information intensity imposed the re-sizing of library activities. This required in the first place, the introduction of new professional techniques and solutions, but also more or less outlined efforts towards institutional evolution.

So far, our particular, significant and relevant experiences in the marketing field show very clearly the possibilities, abilities and reserves in elaborating some works which are really selling, that is, can be put to account on the real market, but also numerous obscure and un-functional aspects not only from the marketing point of view, but also regarding the administrative and institutional ones. These are aspects and problems which influence the development of potentials and chances in a negative way.

First of all we have to mention the publishing of the library's Bulletin *Philobiblon* beginning with the year 1996, a product meant to be sold from the very beginning. It is also very important that the publication was conceived for international library exchange[3]. Of course, it is very clear that "exchange" is a market operation, a transaction. A publication produced, *ab initio* for exchange, is a real marketing action, attested and verified by the exchange market and its challenges. The review had outlined a quality and professional level to satisfy a direct and effective marketing vision.

The review, as an international exchange product, was published in English. Studies and analyses were made in order to situate it within the framework of other publications of major libraries – e.g., Bodleian Library Record, Harvard Library Bulletin, Knygotira, etc. – and to establish its specificity. For a better knowledge of the different levels of international partners we used the experiences of the International Library Exchange Department from our library, questioning new possible partners. To promote the publication and to confirm its solidity, we required some speciality analysis by international reviews as: Bulletin des Bibliothèques de France, Libraries & Culture etc. Beyond this we succeeded to intercept the attention of Romanian intellectuals and specialists, who work or study in the USA, and who have launched a signal about the review on the Internet as well. Simultaneously with the international promotion, there were some internal promoting actions too. On the one hand with the purpose to obtain intellectual, culture and professional support for its program, on the other hand to obtain extra-institutional financial support. The publication was analyzed and appreciated in several prestigious cultural and scientific (library science) reviews, signed by prestigious Romanian personalities. As a result, the review could now compete with success for extra-institutional financing, its appearance being provided until then by the Soros Foundation for an Open Society, supported by the American millionaire of Hungarian origin, George Soros.

If we regard its economical efficiency on the international exchange market, we can assert that the review brings a 200% profit to our library. This profit means valuable and indispensable publications: books and periodicals, which in the lack of financial resources could not have been bought. Beside all this, there is also a symbolic profit, for our image.

We have to underline the fact that the first volume and volumes from 1999 to 2002 had to be financed by the library, meaning from its budget which is distributed in a centralized way. This challenge, this need and attempt offered us and still offers the possibility for meditation and attempts to use budgetary resources in concordance with marketing criteria.

The regularly ensured, anticipated and calculated budgetary resources offer not only certainty, stability and comfort, but also opportunity to deploy horizons. The use of these resources to produce quality "objects" which not only cover their own costs, but also bring some profit, means in fact the doubling of that particular segment of the budget. For example, the same quantity of paper – allocated

from budgetary resources – used for editing the review *Philobiblon* and/or other publications linked to it, when sold on marketing basis, becomes “useful” for the second, the third time. But the same quantity of paper used for purposes not analyzed on a marketing basis (even in a symbolical way) regarding their efficiency and utility, represent a loss for the institution, for the budget and for the tax payer. Symbolic or not, marketing has to be a responsibility for every library, even for the budgetary ones.

These attempts materialized in a relatively short time in the year 1998, with the publication – in Romanian – of a *Philobiblon Anthology: Hermeneutica Bibliothecaria (I)*, [4] supported by the Soros Foundation for an Open Society. However, despite of the volume’s solid conception, it was not sold, because of moral obstacles and lack of internal market knowledge. Anyway, the volume was published with external (extra-budgetary) and central budgetary resources, its symbolical benefits having a redundant effect. That experience pointed out the necessity of special efforts towards marketing.

Since this volume contained an innovating analysis on Romanian bibliological literature from the periodicals of the field, and regarding the importance of newly used methods, data and results, outlined the intention to a more detailed analysis. But this time through a *Bibliographic Database*, which uses not only new bibliometric techniques, but also content analysis. The database was actually sold in the year 2000, making a profit of 120 million leis.

In the same year, 2000, the *Philobiblon*’s editors published a new volume: *Management for the Future – Libraries and Archives* [5], which was also meant to be sold, obtaining in a relatively short time orders for all copies, making a 25% profit (7 million leis) beside its costs [6]. This year, 2004, at the end of October, we are about to publish the second volume of the *Philobiblon Anthology: Hermeneutica Bibliothecaria (II)*. Obviously we are going to take it out to the market and sell it, the marketing efforts concerning this action developing at the moment. After an ample promoting and advertising action, *Hermeneutica Bibliothecaria (II)* gathered the necessary orders in order to bring profit.

We are convinced that our experiences show and argue for the fact that even in libraries, while being non-profit organizations, there are challenges for the implementation of real marketing actions. It is also important to realize the fact that using these possibilities in a narrow manner, it reduces our general, actual and future possibilities, weakening the “background” of potentiality, necessary for future development.

## CONCLUSION

Generally, “Lucian Blaga” Central University Library should increase the transparency of its services, so that users may appreciate their complexity and use them for their educational experience. It is important to think first of all about new users, fresh-mates, who confront with problems of orientation, use of our databases,



information search, not being aware of all the free or fee-based services they can make use of. It is necessary to improve the library's offers and to attract more students by this.

Our library shows some lacks, disfunctionalities and needs offering a high standard of quality services, indispensable for an institution with different categories of users, to provide quality information as a support for teaching, learning and research. We have to consider first of all the need to have an information desk, very important for new users, visitors, partners and everyone who needs information about our services or library. Near the entrance, as a first orientation point, we should have a legend tag containing every location in our library.

As a marketing point of view and not only, it is very important for the users, the potential users, the partners, the financial supporters and the public opinion to be acquainted with the institution, the services and even the personnel involved in offering the necessary information, but also the possibility to explore new horizons. It is highly important for the library's partners and financial supporters to get in touch with the functioning system, through efficiency. So, it would be necessary, at the beginning of the university year, to initiate some library presentation, not only for our library, but also for other similar institutions; this way, these actions become not just some simple presentations, but real experience exchange. The publicity and advertising also contribute to outlining the library's image, through the distribution of informational "flyers", posters, mass-media (press media, radio, television) and the Internet.

As long as the readers are the main segment of users, it is necessary for us to find out their own opinions about the services we provide, as well as their needs, upon which we should reorganize some of the services.

One of the information strategies concerning this matter is represented by the "suggestion boxes" placed in accessible locations, nearby reading rooms and even on the library's web-site, where users can express their opinions and suggestions without indicating their names. Many of these practices are extremely simple and traditional. That's why it is crucial to understand: they do not automatically become marketing techniques just by re-naming them with a marketing terminology, but also by including them in well-structured and determined conceptions. In the same time these conceptions have to be sufficiently opened, "lively" and dynamic to once again re-open the horizons for creative metaphors[7].

## REFERENCES

1. Sergio (Z). Sfârșitul marketingului. Editura Nemira: Bucuresti. 2001: *Introduction*.
2. Association of Research Libraries, Marketing and Public Relations in ARL Libraries, SPEC Flyer no. 240. Online: <http://www.arl.org/spec/240fly.html>.

3. Philobiblon, Bulletin of the "Lucian Blaga" Central University Library, Vol.I., Issues 1-2/1996, pp. 134; Vol.II., Issue 1/1997, pp. 136; Vol. II., Issue 2/1997, pp. 237; Vol. III., Issues 1-2/1997, pp. 319; Vol. IV-V-VI-VII., 1999-2002, pp. 538; Vol. VIII-IX., 2003-2004, pp. 573.
4. Ili° (F) and Costea (I). Biblioteca Bibliologica, Editura Presa Universitarã Clujeanã. 1998: 283.
5. Anghelescu (H G B) and Király (I V), Eds. Biblioteca Bibliologica. Editura Presa Universitarã Clujeanã,. 1998: 216.
6. István Kiraly (V) and Florentina ( P M) *Proiect pentru implementarea viziunii si a practicilor de marketing în biblioteca*, under way of appearance. 2004
7. Ricoeur (P). *La métaphore vive*, Études. Éditions du Seuil. Paris. 1975.