

## **IMPROVING THE EXISTING INFORMATION FACILITY IN SPECIAL LIBRARIES IN VISAKHAPATNAM USING A MARKETING APPROACH**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

*The study examines the marketing practices of three special libraries of Visakhapatnam City, Andhra Pradesh, India. This survey gathers data from library professionals and users, covering various aspects of their libraries. It is observed that some aspects of marketing strategies are used. Users also showed interest in obtaining value-added information services and expressed their willingness to pay for such services if necessary. The findings of the survey revealed the relevance and importance of marketing practices in non-profit organisations such as libraries and information centres.*

**Keywords:** Marketing of information services; Library survey; Channels of information used; Mode of information delivery preferred; India

### **INTRODUCTION**

Marketing is a pervasive societal activity and its application in libraries and information centers has become significant in recent years as more library professionals have realised its importance as an approach oriented towards satisfying users need.

Marketing is an exercise of identifying the needs, wants and demands of users and matching them with the design and development of new services and products. Within this context it involves the following activities:

- knowing the different segments of users and their needs;
- assessing the needs and demands of users;

- developing and designing new products and services; and
- assessing the strength and weakness of existing environment.

The situation in India however, does not present a good picture. Indian libraries in general provide routine and traditional services. There is hardly any effort on the part of the library professionals to identify the genuine needs of their users. The development and design of new products and services to meet the expressed needs are still quite rare. On the other hand libraries are often considered last in the allocation for financial assistance. The information facility unfortunately, is still seen as a luxury rather than a necessity.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

There has been a number of papers published in India which touched on the marketing of information services. These range from case studies describing basic concepts of marketing individual libraries and information centers to studies conducted by institutions aimed at determining the existing pattern of marketing in different libraries in India.

Roy and Chatterjee (1989) carried out a survey of 150 special libraries in India to explore the possibilities and problems of applying marketing techniques. Lack of awareness among users, low demand for the services, availability of parallel services and low image of the librarians themselves, are some the major problems which were identified.

The Center for Documentation on Public Sector renamed as the library of the *Institute of Public Enterprise* conducted a survey which was sponsored by NISSAT (National Information System for Science & Technology) (Marketing, 1998), Department of Scientific and Industrial Research, India. Apart from administering structured questionnaires, the study also interviewed academicians, practising librarians and representatives of the information industry. The data collected focused on the marketing policy, market study, product, services as well as their sales, distribution, pricing and problems of marketing. The study observed that information professionals were unfamiliar with the contemporary approach towards marketing. Performance of centers was assessed based on the total volume of sales. The study recommended NISSAT to sponsor courses and training programmes

on marketing management of information services for the librarians and to develop guidelines for the marketing of information services and products.

In 1988, IASLIC (1989) (Indian Association of Special Libraries and Information Centers) organized a seminar on marketing of library and information services in Calcutta, India. In that seminar, Sultan (1988) presented a paper which explored the possibilities of introducing a pricing policy in well established libraries which have installed all the modern contraptions of information services such as computers, and online services in India. Bhattacharya and Mahapatra (IASLIC, 1988) confined their survey to a district in Orissa, India, focusing on the marketing of local information to users of public libraries in that district. Chary, Ghosh and Vaishnavi (IASLIC, 1988) delved on the role of public relations in promoting library and information services, which is an important aspect of marketing. A more recent study analyzed the existing pattern of marketing of information services in university libraries in Orissa (Panda, Padhi & Barua, 1998). A workshop, held in Ahmedabad in 1995 had also focused on the existing marketing practices and strategies of information services and products adopted by libraries (Marketing, 1995).

All the above studies brought forth concepts of marketing in the daily operation of libraries and information centers. Identifying user needs, segmenting, developing information products and services based on user needs, obtaining feedback from the users, pricing of information services are but some of the activities which are studied under the purview of marketing.

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### **OBJECTIVES**

The present survey aims at studying the application of marketing techniques adopted by three different libraries in Visakhapatnam, the second largest city in the state of Andhra Pradesh, India. It reviews the existing information facility by collecting varied information about the collection, users, services and other activities from the librarians and compares these with the views of the users about their library facilities. It also attempts to ascertain the attitude of librarians towards the application of marketing techniques.

- Form of information required
- Services preferred
- Frequency of use of services
- Preferred mode of delivery
- Willingness to pay for the services

The survey covers 20% of the user population in each library of the Bharat Heavy Plates and Vessels (BHPV), Visakhapatnam Steel Plant, (VSP) and the National Ship Design and Research Center (NSDRC). The Technical Information Cell of NSDRC has a strength of 70 users, while the BHPV library has 700 and VSP Central Library has 1,500 users (Table 1).

### **METHODOLOGY**

In pursuit of the above objective, data collection was conducted in two phases. Two questionnaires were administered. The first one was designed for the librarians and collected the following data.

- Total number of users
- Subjects covered by the collection
- List of services provided
- Periodicity and physical format of each of the services
- Basis for introduction of new services
- Distribution channels used
- Promotional methods adopted
- Feedback mechanism used
- Problems and prospects of applying marketing techniques

During the second phase, the questionnaire was administered to the users of the three libraries to elicit information about:

- Purpose of visit
- Frequency of visit

Table 1: Number of users

	No. of Users	Questionnaire Administered	No. of Respondents
NSDRC	71	15	15
BHPV	700	140	115
VSP	1500	300	150

### **PROFILE OF LIBRARIES**

#### **Technical Information Cell, NSDRC**

The National Ship Design and Research Center is the only one of its kind in India which is under the administrative control of the Ministry of Surface Transport. Its functions include integrated ship design, marine consultation, maritime economics and research services to the shipping, ship building sector, ports and other maritime organizations.

The Technical Information Cell, established in 1989 has been servicing the information needs of engineers and scientists of the Center. It has a collection of 12,000

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documents consisting of books, journals, reports, proceedings, catalogues in the area of shipping, navigation, ship building, ship repairs, fishing, marine pollution, energy generation, floating plants, management, computers, economics, quality control, quality assurance and other fields of interest to the maritime sector.

Current awareness service, selective dissemination of information, ready reference, manual and online retrospective documentary search are some of the prominent services offered (Table 2).

**Central Library, Visakhapatnam Steel Plant**

Visakhapatnam Steel Plant is India's first shore-based integrated steel plant which

was set up by the Government of India. It produces pig iron, steel, angles, wide rods and squares.

The Central Library of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant was established in 1984 to serve the information needs of the 17,500 employees of the steel plant. On an average 150 users visit this library per day. Its collection covers the subjects of metallurgy, civil, chemical, ceramics, electrical, electronics, instrumentation, mechanical engineering, power engineering, computers, management and other allied areas. Its rich collection varies from reference books to standards and specifications pertaining to the steel industry. Table 3 shows the different services offered by the Central Library.

Table 2: Services Offered at the Technical Information Cell, NSDRC

Type of services	Physical format	Duration	Ave. no of users	Free	Priced to outsiders
Current awareness service	Electronic	Quarterly	80	X	X
Selective dissemination of information	Electronic	Weekly	20	X	X
Indexing services	Printed	Monthly	30	X	X
Ready references	-	-	10	X	X
Translation services	Printed	Fortnightly	3	X	X
Photocopying Services	Printed	-	10	X	X
Inter-library loans	Standard Books	Based on demand	6	X	X
Online literature search	Electronic	On demand	60	X	X

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Table 3: Central Library, Visakhapatnam Steel Plant

Type of services	Physical form	Duration	Ave. no of user	Freq	Price
Current awareness services	Printed	Monthly	150	X	-
Translation	Printed	On demand	40	X	-
Ready reference	-	On demand	20	X	-
Reprography	-	-	30	X	-

**Technical Library, Bharat Heavy Plates and Vessels Ltd.**

BHPV was established by the Government of India to fabricate process plant equipment for fertilizer, petroleum, chemical, petrochemical and allied industries. The Technical Library of BHPV was established in 1968. It has a large collection of 10,000 books, 1,800 reports and 9,000 standards and specifications pertaining to production, planning, combustion, system engineering, cryogenic engineering, pressure vessels, storage vessels chemical engineering, and management. Table 4 shows the various services offered by the library.

**RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS**

**Planning of Information Services**

Table 5 shows the reasons for starting an information service in each of the three libraries. The reasons given have been categorized as survey of users, demand from users, and requests from heads of departments, projects or programs of the organisation. However, all the librarians were unanimous in stating that perceived user demand was the main criterion for introducing the information services. At the same time TIC of NSDRC tried to ascertain the opinion of users about the

Table 4: Technical Library of BHPV

Types of service	Physical form	Duration	Ave. no. of users	Freq	Price
Current awareness services	Printed	Quarterly	300	X	-
Selective dissemination of information	Printed	Half-yearly	50	X	-
Reprography	-	-	50	X	-
Inter-library Loan	-	-	10	X	-

Table 5: Reasons for the Introduction of Services

Reasons for providing service	NSDRC TIC	VSP CL	BHPV TL
User survey	X	-	-
Perceived / assumed / anticipated user demand	X	X	X
Request from heads of departments	X	X	-
Project / program of organisation	-	X	-

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proposed new services apart from considering the recommendation from the heads of departments. The planning and introduction of new information services as required by the organisations' projects was provided only in the case of the Central Library, Visakhapatnam Steel Plant.

**Promotion of Services**

All the three libraries promote their services through personal contact. TIC of NSDRC is the only library which promotes some of its services by demonstrating them to the employees. The Central Library of VSP and the Technical Library of BHPV use circulars and sample mails to promote their services. Table 6 shows the different promotional methods adopted by these libraries.

Table 6: Promotion of Services

Promotional methods used	NSRDC TIC	VSP CL	BHPV TL
Personal contact	X	X	X
Brochure	X	-	-
Posters	-	-	-
Circulars / sample mailing	-	X	X
Demonstration	X	-	-
Workshop / exhibition	-	-	-
Telephone	-	X	-
Any other	-	-	-

**Channels Used to Provide Information Services and Distribute Products**

Information services are provided and products distributed to different points

through various channels depending upon the nature of service. The use of office circulars as an avenue for promoting the service is the only common feature among all the three libraries. Table 7 shows that only TIC of NSDRC is using its computerised information bulletin to promote its services.

Table 7: Channels Used

Channels used	NSDR C TIC	VSP CL	BHPV TL
Office Circulars	X	X	X
Messengers	-	X	X
Library Display	-	X	-
Sample mailing	-	-	-
Computerized	X	-	-
Infor.. Bulletin			

**Feedback**

All the libraries sought feedback from users to determine the effectiveness of the services offered. The libraries of NSDRC and BHPV obtained information through personal discussions whereas the VSP Central Library collects information through a survey.

**Marketing of Information Services**

Table 8 presents the opinions of the librarians about the advantages of marketing. All the librarians felt that some kind of awareness and understanding of the value of the services can be introduced into the system by marketing them. They felt that by adopting a marketing policy, the status and usage of the library in their respective organisation can be improved.

Table 8: Opinion About Marketing of Information Services

Advantages of marketing services	NSDR C TIC	VSP CL	BHPV TL
To strengthen the library's financial position	-	-	-
To add values to the service	X	X	-
To avoid rush for services	-	-	-
To create awareness among users	X	X	X
To ensure proper use of allocated funds	-	-	X
To increase the self-confidence of library staff	X	-	-
To improve the status / image of library	X	X	X

**Problems of Marketing**

The problems of marketing information services as perceived by the librarians are multi-faceted. All the librarians expressed their difficulties in relation to finance and the extra workload on the existing staff in introducing marketing activity aggressively. As Table 9 shows, except for BHPV, the other two librarians felt there is a need to have specially trained personnel in marketing. The lack of proper infrastructure was also stated by the librarians of VSP and BHPV.

**Frequency of Visit**

Extensive use of the library is a major factor which emphasises the importance of a library in the organisational setting. It also shows the efficiency of the library in meeting the information needs of its users. Table 10 indicates the frequency of visits made by the users of the three organisations. Most of the users of all the libraries visit the library daily. Visits made once in a month or fortnightly are very low as compared to the other frequencies.

Table 9: Problems of Marketing

	NSDR TIC	VSP CL	BHPV TL
Extra budget is needed	X	X	X
Consumers are not ready			
No demand from consumers / users			
Overburden to the staff	X	X	X
Lack of trained manpower	X	X	
Lack of infrastructure facilities		X	X
Any other pricing is a problem		X	

Table 10: Frequency of Users Visit to Libraries

	NSDRC(15)	VSP (150)	BHPV (115)
Daily	8 (53.33%)	90(60%)	42 (36.2%)
2 to 4 Times a week	7 (46.67%)	32 (21.33%)	42 (36.52%)
Once in a week		14 (9.33%)	10 (8.6%)
Once in a Fortnight		12 (8%)	10 (8.69%)
Once in month		2 (1.33%)	

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**Purpose of Visit**

The purpose of library visits vary from user to user. Table 11 shows that enquiring for a piece of information is the main reason for visiting as in the case of BHPV and VSP libraries whereas reading journals and consulting reference sources are the major reasons given by the users of NSDRC's Technical Library. Only a few users indicated other reasons.

bliographic information or statistical data is minimal.

**Use of Other Sources**

In order to find out the relative importance and use of the library as compared to the other sources in getting information, the users were asked to mention other sources they use to obtain information. Table 13 shows that most of the users are making efforts to get their information from other sources. The study reveals that users are dependent on their personal collections and superiors for required information. A significant percentage indicated the use of outside sources or libraries.

**Types of Information Required**

Table 12 shows that most of the users require data specific information relating to particular topics. The demand for bi-

Table 11: Purpose of Library Visits

	NSDRC (15)	VSP (150)	BHPV (115)
Read journals	13	30	60
Consult reference sources	13	60	32
Read books	11	24	12
Borrow books and periodicals	12	60	64
Research work	3	4	16
Enquire a piece of information	7	98	72
Other reasons	1	8	8

Table 12: Form of Information Required

	NSDRC (15)	VSP (150)	BHPV (115)
Bibliographical	3	27	4
Statistical	4	33	22
Data on specific Topic	12	68	102
Descriptive information on specific topic	10	73	78

Table 13: Use of the Other Sources

	NSDRC (15)	VSP (150)	BHPV (115)
Personal collection	7	67	41
From superiors within the organisation	8	52	41
From subordinates within the organisation	2	11	12
From press within the organisation	1	58	23
Outside sources (other libraries)	4	30	31
Other sources	3	46	11



**Preferred Mode of Delivery**

The choice of channel for circulating information and providing service also influences the extent of the use of the various services. Table 14 shows that most of the users do not use intermediaries as a mode of delivery but wanted information to be sent directly to their place of work.

**Willingness to Pay**

Charging for information services is not a new concept as far as developing

countries are concerned. But in Indian libraries the only service which is charged is the repro-graphic service. All libraries in this study offer their services for free, but external users of TIC of NSDRC are charged. More than 73% of users of NSDRCs TIC are willing to pay for certain services as compared to 41.73% of BHPV users and 30% of VSP users. Only 9.09% of NSDRC users and 55.55% of VSP users are willing to pay the full cost of the services (Table 15 and 16).

Table 14: Preferred Mode of Delivery

Services	NSDRC (15)	VSP (150)	BHPV (115)
Provided directly	8 (53.33%)	105 (70%)	61(53.09%)
Provided through heads of departments	3 (20%)	4 (2.66%)	21(18.26%)
Provided through personal visit	4 (26.66%)	26 (17.33%)	33 (28.69%)
Provided through subordinates	-	8 (5.33%)	-
Provided on hierarchy	-	7 (4.66%)	-

Table 15: Willingness to Pay for Information Services

	NSDRC (15)	VSP (150)	BHPV (1150)
Yes	11 (73.33%)	45 (30%)	48 (41.73%)
No	4 (26.66%)	68 (45.33%)	47 (40.86%)
No response		37(24.66%)	20 (17.39%)

Table 16: Types of Cost Users are Willingness to Pay for

	NSDRC (11)	VSP (45)	BHPV (48)
Willingness to pay for full cost of services	1(9.09%)	25 (55.55%)	-
Contribute partially towards cost of services	3 (27.27%)	10 (22.22%)	10 (21.27%)
Only if it is reasonable	7 (62.63%)	10 (22.22%)	38 (79.16%)

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**Ranking of Information Services**

The questions regarding the preference given to various services cover ten conventional services namely current awareness, selective dissemination of information, literature search, indexing and abstracting, reprographic, inter library loan, translation, newspaper clippings, product profile and specialised bibliographic services. The newspaper clippings and product profile service are not offered by any of these libraries. This question was

aimed at finding out the relevance and importance of a service to the users of special libraries. Users were asked to rank the services in terms of their usefulness to them. The majority of the users of NSDRC ranked the literature search service as number one (Table 17). The users of BHPV have ranked SDI as the most preferred service while the current awareness service is stated to be the most useful service by users of the Visakhapatnam Steel Plant's Central Library (Tables 18 and 19).

Table 17: Ranking of Services, TIC, NSDRC

Services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CAS	3 (20.0%)	6 (40.0%)	2 (13.7%)	1 (6.66%)	1 (6.66%)					
SDI	1 (6.6%)	4 (26.6%)	4 (26.6%)		3 (20.0%)	2 (13.3%)		1 (6.6%)	3 (20.0%)	
LSS	14 (93.3%)	1 (6.66%)					1 (6.6%)			
IA	1 (6.6%)	2 (13.3%)	6 (40.0%)	1 (6.66%)	1 (6.66%)	2 (13.3%)	1 (6.66%)	4 (26.6%)		
Repro- graphy	1 (6.6%)		1 (6.66%)	1 (6.66%)	1 (6.66%)		1 (6.66%)	1 (6.6%)	6 (40.0%)	3 (20.0%)
ILL			1 (6.66%)		1 (6.66%)	1 (6.66%)		1 (6.6%)	6 (40.0%)	3 (20.0%)
TS			3 (20.0%)	1 (6.66%)			1 (6.66%)	3 (20.0%)		6 (40.0%)

CAS = current awareness service; SDI = selective dissemination of information; LSS = literature search service; IA = indexing and abstracting; ILL = inter-library loans; TSS = translation services.

Table 18: Ranking of Services, Technical Library, BHPV (115)

Services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CAS	42 (36.52%)	53 (46.08%)	11 (9.56%)							
SDI	74 (63.43%)	21 (18.26%)	21 (18.36%)							
Repro- graphy		32 (27.82%)	74 (64.34%)	9 (7.82%)						
TS				53 (46.08%)	52 (45.21%)					

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Table 19: Ranking of Services, Central library VSP (150)

Services	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
CAS	78 (52%)	31 (20.66%)								
Ready Reference	56 (37.33%)	21 (14%)	4 (2.66%)							
Translation				15 (10%)						
Reprography			62 (41.33%)							

**Use of Different Services**

Information regarding the frequency of use of the different services is gathered to know the extent of use of the services. The newspaper clippings service and product process or machinery profile service are not offered by any of these libraries. Except for the VSP Central Library, two libraries provided the inter-library loan service.

The data in Table 20 shows that about 66% of the users of TIC of NSDRDC are regularly using the current awareness service, while the translation service is rarely being used.

Table 20: Frequency of Use TIC, NSRDC

Services	Regular	Occasional	No use
C A S	10 (66.66%)	4 (26.66%)	1 (6.66%)
SDI	7 (46.66%)	7 (46.66%)	1 (6.66%)
LSS	12 (80%)	3 (20%)	-
I / A	7 (46.66%)	6 (40%)	2 (13.22%)
Reprography	2 (13.33%)	9 (60%)	4 (26.66%)
ILL	-	9 (60%)	6 (40%)
TS	2 (13.33%)	2 (13.33%)	11 (73.33%)

In the case of BHPV, as expected, the current awareness service is being used regularly, whereas inter-library loan and translation services are not preferred at all by about 48% of the users (Table 21).

Table 21: Frequency of Use, Technical Library BHPV

Services	Regular	Occasional	No use
CAS	74 (64.36%)	21 (18.26%)	12 (10.43%)
SDI	37 (32.17%)	48 (41.73%)	14 (12.17%)
Reprography	24 (20.86%)	63 (54.74%)	18 (6.96%)
ILL	28 (24.34%)	18 (15.65%)	55 (46.08%)
TS	8 (8.96%)	24 (20.86%)	53 (46.08%)

The frequency of use of services in the VSP library presents a different picture Table 22 shows that the majority of the users are using the reprographic and current awareness services whereas the translation service is used regularly by only 10% of the users.

Table 22: Frequency of Use, Central Library Visakhapatnam Steel Plant

Services	Regular	Occa-sional	No use
CAS	52 (34.66%)	45 (30%)	13 (8.66%)
Repro-graphy	65 (43.33%)	37 (27.66%)	21 (41%)
TS	15 (10%)	29 (19.33%)	67 (44.66%)

### Suggestions by Users

Suggestions given by users ranged from basic facilities in the library to the provision of online access to different international databases. Most of the users from the VSP Central Library expressed the need to improve the collection quantitatively and qualitatively by subscribing to more technical journals and national and international standards and specification pertaining to their work. A large percentage of users of this library also suggested extensive computerization of the library and LAN facility, so that information could be provided at their terminals in their work place.

The users of NSDRC's Technical Information Cell suggested increased library hours for the Internet facility. On the other hand, users of the BHPV library, suggested the procurement of conference proceedings, the latest books, journals, computerization of the library, improved inter-library loan facility with local university and other libraries to facilitate research work.

### Summary of findings

1. The survey shows moderate use of the library in the three organizations.

2. Engineers and scientists working in the design and research organisations are frequent visitors to the library.
3. Enquiring for a specific piece of information is found to be the main reason for visiting the library.
4. Differences are also identified in terms of preferences shown for different forms of information. Information in the form of condensed data is preferred by the users followed by information in descriptive form on the required topic.
5. Users strongly felt the need for the provision of services at their place of work. However, a significant percentage of the users also preferred to receive services personally whenever they visit the library. The practice of routing the information products in order of hierarchy was not favoured.
6. Under utilisation of services shows that the promotional methods adopted by the library are not effective in encouraging the use of most of the services.
7. A majority of the users are willing to pay for the services in order to contribute partially towards the cost of services.

This finding gives encouragement to the librarians to introduce pricing of information services after thorough researching on it.

### CONCLUSIONS

The survey reveals that there is a passive approach on the part of libraries towards marketing. Although the libraries are not explicitly marketing their information services, their activities include user-

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segmentation, information needs assessment, use of promotional methods, introduction of new services on the basis of users' demand, but in an unplanned way. In other words, the survey provides some interesting insights into the marketing concepts as practiced by the libraries surveyed.

1. A very passive approach towards marketing is noticed in all the libraries. None of the libraries have made efforts to assess their strengths and weakness in a scientific way.
2. The use of services are not encouraged by any follow-up promotional methods. Conducting workshops, seminars or demonstrations for promoting the services are almost non-existent.
3. Information needs of users are varied in nature which necessitates the provision of a variety of information services in a convenient format.
4. Libraries are already interested and involved in various promotional activities to create awareness about their services. However, alternate promotional techniques need to be explored by them.
5. Much awareness among the users is noticed regarding their preference for channels of distribution of services. It allows better planning of the services.
6. Extensive computerization of library activities should be taken up to improve efficiency and effectiveness of the services.
7. Introduction of new services and products are based on the perceived demands of users. They are not scientifically ascertained from users.

The study also revealed that none of the libraries are making efforts to ascertain information about the non-users of their libraries.

There is an immediate need to inculcate marketing attitude on the part of librarians to ensure effective utilisation of services. The libraries of Visakhapatnam Steel Plant and BHPV are not making any effort to initiate other specialized services apart from the routine ones. The under-utilisation of some of the services in these libraries emphasizes the need for initiating the marketing of services in order to sustain the interest of users, the services should be more user-oriented, and to monitor effective utilisation of information services and products, a proper feed-back mechanism should be adopted by the libraries.

The libraries need to be supported by a separate budget for marketing activities. To implement marketing strategies in a scientific way, the librarians need specialised training/orientation program in marketing. Given all the above mentioned facilities, the marketing programs if adopted scientifically, will definitely improve the quality of information services and products in satisfying the goals and objectives of the library as well as that of the organisation.

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