

Marketing or public relations: a strategic choice for Lithuanian libraries*

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Marketing and public relations (PR) are no longer new and uncommon topics for library and information professionals. In many countries and internationally using marketing and/or public relations strategies in libraries and information sector has become more a rule than an exception. In Lithuania these issues are still considered as rather fresh, they appeared in the professional vocabulary just several years ago and today we can notice the first attempts to implement marketing and/or public relations programs in Lithuanian libraries. A course *Public Relations for Library and Information Services* was introduced at the Faculty of Communication, University of Vilnius, three years ago in the BA program, and one year later we started to give a course in *Library Marketing* for MA students. These topics are discussed in the Lithuanian library journal *Tarp knygų*, are included into the professional education courses and receive great interest from the side of practitioners. *When a*

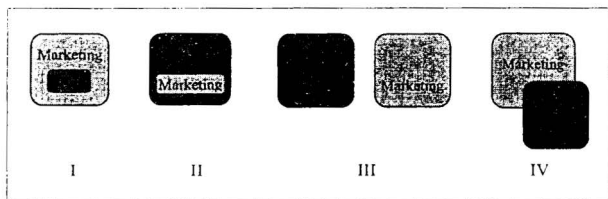
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topic is new and fashionable it is likely to be applied with not sufficient degree of critical consideration. In this paper an attempt is made to analyze which strategy is more relevant for Lithuanian libraries to introduce – marketing or public relations – in the period of transition.

Marketing and/or Public relations: an odd couple

There are hundreds of different definitions both of marketing and of public relations. Relations between these two concepts can be represented by four different sets of attitudes (Picture 1):

- I – marketing includes PR
- II – PR includes marketing
- III – PR and marketing as different activities
- IV – PR and marketing as different activities having some overlapping area.



Picture 1

Marketing is exchange relationship: a process providing mutual benefit to both parties in the transaction. Marketing helps plan how to provide a service which is in tune with what external customers want, and adds perceived value to the organization.

Marketing managers identify markets for products and services of the organization. They supervise marketing communication programs to create and sustain demand for products and services. Public relations managers, in contrast, supervise programs for communication with publics – groups of people who organize themselves when organization

affects them or they affect it. Marketing and public relations serve different functions and public relations can not be excellent if it is subjugated to the marketing function.

Public relations is a management function which enables the organization to establish and maintain goodwill communication between the organization and its publics. Public relations is usually associated with image building, creating positive public opinion and other tasks. But what is too often neglected, is that the image and identity are two sides of the same phenomena. Positive image can not be built on wrong or not adequate reality, that's why public relations should concentrate not only on outside targets however important they are but on persuading the management team and the whole staff to choose and to follow such strategies that are beneficiary both for the publics and for the organization itself. To persuade others of the goodness of the organization, one first of all has to have good organization.

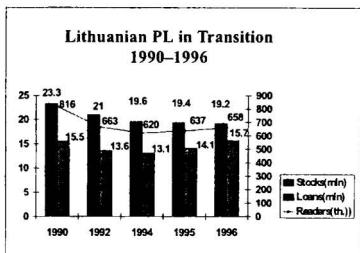
When librarians think of public relations they too often think of it in the simple light of relations between library and its users. Public relations have the goal to inform and to keep informed the publics about the library and its resources and services, still public relations program which begins and ends by concentrating solely upon the users, actual or potential, can never hope to be more than partial success. The libraries must be projected in more different directions than the users and to many different targets. They must be projected internationally, nationally, regionally and locally to governing authorities, to educational institutions, to social services, to book trade organizations and other suppliers, to the library staff itself. The crucial aspect of library staff and its management team first of all is to persuade the governing body to supply adequate and continuing financial resources for the efficient operation and development of the service. Librarians are to be adept at budget planning, report writing, they must be convincing in the replies to different questions, in general they must have complete and detailed knowledge of the service. It is not only a question of training just one or few staff members in communication, analysis and negotiation skills, it is a question of building strong organization with good services and with strong identity and defined organizational culture.

Lithuanian libraries in Transition

Lithuania is a post-communist country. During the six years of independence the whole society, nation and state has undergone radical social, political, economical changes, so have the libraries and librarians. We are moving from ideologically indoctrinated towards the democratic library system, from closed, inwards-oriented libraries towards open, user friendly information, recreation, education and cultural centers, from deeply centralized decision making to decentralized responsibilities for each library's profile and performance.

There were 3949 libraries in Lithuania in the end of 1996; 1491 libraries belong to the Ministry of Culture, 2247 – to the Ministry of Education and Science, 15 academic libraries, 10 agricultural, 84 technical and 101 medical libraries. Lithuanian Library Law was introduced in 1995 and it envisaged an essential reform of the public libraries first of all. For the public libraries which were used to safe and state – guaranteed existence in Soviet times, transition to the new market orientation was a shock. Librarians were not ready to fight for their share of the budget, they considered it as an insult and in most cases took the defensive position. Proactive and “aggressive” management was not considered as suitable strategies for libraries. When the Law on the Fundamentals of Local Government was passed in 1990, libraries found themselves under subordination and care of local authorities. The needs of the libraries were met with not sufficient understanding. During 1991–1995 a total of 200 local public libraries were closed. All figures representing library activities were constantly diminishing till 1994: the percentage of readers dropped to 22.8%, the book delivery to 15.4% (Picture 2). Changing social values and orientations, unstable social and political situation had influence on reading habits as well.

Public libraries had a reputation of ideological institutions during the Soviet period and the reputation can not be changed overnight. Libraries were loosing their clients: only 17% of the population found public libraries worth to visit.



Picture 2

It must be stressed that Lithuanian libraries are exposed to challenges and pressures not only of a national character and special conditions. They also face the pressures of the same nature as libraries in other countries world-wide. Trends of modern librarianship require of Lithuanian libraries to accept and introduce new thinking, new strategies and approaches.

Financial difficulties make Lithuanian library acquisitions and the whole operation very difficult. In 1993 the governmental subsidies for acquisition in public libraries were 211,5 thousand Litas which means 5 cents per inhabitant, and in 1996 it has increased 10 times: 55 cents per inhabitant. Grants by the Lithuanian Ministry of Culture could cover only 50% of financial requirements of libraries. For school library acquisition about 60 cents were allocated per pupil. Central libraries received 1–5 copies of most of publications which were directed mainly to central and town libraries. Village libraries, especially small branches, almost did not add new books to their collections. There were cases of total yearly acquisition ranging from 5 new titles and from 10 to 20 copies. In 1994 central regional libraries' subscriptions averaged 110 titles, with 18 titles for town libraries and 2–10 titles for village libraries accordingly.

When the environment is turbulent and threatening, an organization, i. e. library, faces problems which are not related to marketing. That is why public relations are to be chosen as a libraries' strategic priority in our country.

Image, reality and identity

PR has an aim to build mutual understanding between the organization and its public, to create and sustain favorable and adequate image of the organization and profession as such, to ensure and increase funding. These aims can not be achieved by marketing activities only. A library which offers a comprehensive, efficient and prompt service is its best recommendation. Library must be absolutely certain to be able to deliver qualitative service before shouting their qualities to the outside world. Good image can be created and communicated effectively only if it corresponds the reality of the library itself. Using public relations as a management tool, not just publicity or advertising is the key concept of successful library performance.

On the other hand, library and information services, as Irene Wormell indicates, are difficult to promote in a meaningful way because information is intangible. The client of the information service can not really see what he is about to buy; “the product” does not exist until he has actually bought it.

The image is not what the library and librarians believe but what the client believes – or feels – about the library from his/her observation and experience, from what he/she knows about the library, from what other people say about it. Strictly speaking, the library can not create the image. It can create elements of the identity for the library and its reputation.

PR involves the creation and maintenance of a favorable climate of opinion towards the organisation. Image creation itself is not adequate since the image must mirror reality, otherwise distortions will quickly appear and credibility will be lost. PR built only on imagery alone is built on shifting sands.

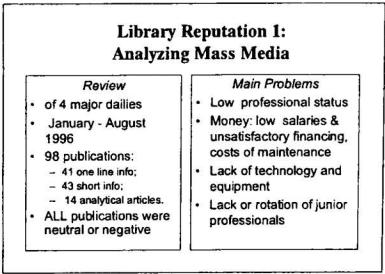
PR is not a part of advertising. It is a separate area of communication. Its function is not to sell a product in a persuasive way, as does advertising; its functions are to create and sustain a favorable image of the organisation. This gives the customer an understanding and knowledge of the organisation which creates good will towards it and helps make

advertising work. In this respect, PR reaches the areas which advertisers cannot reach.

Library Reputation: Case studies

Two case studies were carried out in Lithuania in 1996–1997. The first one is monitoring and evaluation of the library image in mass media and the second one – case story of Alytus city public library.

During nine months of 1996 there were 98 publications about libraries in 4 main Lithuanian dailies. More than a half of them contain brief information, short messages about events in the libraries (Picture 3). Only two discussions with a bigger group of participants and one interview with the librarian were presented to the Lithuanian reader. It means that libraries are shown in the press as not problematic and not dynamic sector. Even more, the titles and the contents in most cases prove that libraries get media attention in emergency or even scandalous cases mostly. Poor premises, lack of seats, low salaries, ineffective performance, not sufficient funding are usually mentioned when writing about the library matters. *In most cases the negative or neutral message is communicated.* It adds more negative features to already wide spread opinion about the library as neglected, not flexible and not adaptable to the new environment. As in the worst case described in public relations manuals, libraries just face the fire not prevent it.



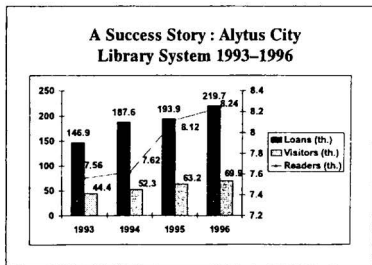
Picture 3

Library Reputation 2: Alytus City Library	
• 77 thous. inhabitants • City library & 4 branches • Founded in 1992 • Over 8.24 th. readers • 20 personnel • 32 publications about Alytus City Library during 1992-1996	In 1996 • Budget 277.499 Lt. – 265.495 Lt. from municipality – 15.500 Lt. from the state for acquisitions • 0.59 Lt. (0.20 + 0.39) per inhabitant • 17 events & 97 exhibitions

Picture 4

Case study of Alytus city library (Picture 4) could be called a success story and demonstrates the importance of creation reality first and only then the image. Operating only for four years Alytus city library has succeeded to become a visible and attractive institution in the community. Although the funding for the library is as modest as in other communities, library staff did not wait for better times but acted. Extremely proactive leader – chief librarian – created a good team which is innovative and flexible. They have a very simple but essential aim: to create and sustain a good library for the community. What the staff of this library is concerned about is library reputation first of all, that's why they concentrated on public relations program. Public relations program aims at the improvement of the reality first and then on creation of favorable and positive image of the library. There are several clubs functioning in the library, art exhibitions, meetings with popular authors, discussions are organized regularly. Unexpected and creative decisions help to attract visitors, for example, a winner of city beauty contest was invited to be a princess at the children's book festival; one night exhibition of nude male photos was organised and the vice major of the city was invited to open it. They created a reputation for the library as a dynamic (not slow and conservative – as usually), creative, even challenging but very attractive institution in the community.

Number of visitors in Alytus city library increased from 12 thousand in 1993 to 32, 3 thousand in 1996, amount of loans – from 51, 6 thousand to 106, 7 thousand. There were 76 visitors per day in 1996, and there are 122 this year (Picture 5). The chief librarian was nominated as the most popular person in the city for 1997.



Picture 5

Conclusions

In general there is no doubt about the marketing as useful and appropriate tool for library and information services in the market-oriented society. *Still there are circumstances in which marketing alone could not be convincing and effective strategy for libraries.* When financing is more than unsatisfactory, when the image of the library in the society is very poor, when even increasing number of users and loans, amount and quality of the service do not influence the fiscal policy, marketing would remind building a sand castle which ruins at the very first moment of truth when the public encounters the library. *If not supported by reality, the image advertising will merely aggravate distrust and cynicism. We should attempt to change organizational reality and have life-like PR image reflecting that reality which an organization can be proud of and which can disseminate to all of its publics. Further, this realistic image when based on quality and customer care can only help the marketing initiative and the overall customer orientation of the organization.*

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Įteikta 1998 m. kovo mėn.

Marketingas ar ryšiai su visuomene: strateginis Lietuvos bibliotekų pasirinkimas

Santrauka

Straipsnis paruoštas 1997 metais IFLA 36-ojoje generalinėje konferencijoje Vadybos ir marketingo sekcijoje Kopenhagoje (Danija) skaityto pranešimo pagrindu. Straipsnio tikslas – išanalizuoti marketingo ir ryšių su visuomene, kaip šiuolaikinių bibliotekų vadybos svertų, tinkamumą Lietuvos bibliotekoms. Marketingas ir ryšiai su visuomene daugelio šalių bibliotekose taikomi jau seniai, o Lietuvos bibliotekose jie dar nauji ir neišbandyti, nors susidomėjimas šiomis madingomis priemonėmis yra akivaizdus. Teoriniuose darbuose marketingas ir ryšiai su visuomene apibūdinami labai įvairiai. Galima išskirti keturis pagrindinius jų sąveikos modelius: ryšiai su visuomene kaip marketingo dalis, marketingas kaip ryšių su visuomene dalis, ryšiai su visuomene ir marketingas kaip atskiros ir kaip tam tikrą bendrą sferą turinčios sritys. Straipsnyje teigiama, kad neretai madingos priemonės taikomos jų kritiškai neįvertinus.

Kol bibliotekos nevykdo planingos ir kryptingos savęs pristatymo ir komunikacijos su svarbiausiomis publikos grupėmis, tarp jų ir žiniasklaida, programų, spaudoje formuojamas jų įvaizdis yra ir negatyvus, ir fragmentiškas. Šis teiginys iliustruojamas bibliotekų įvaizdžio pagrindiniuose Lietuvos dienraščiuose tyrimo rezultatais. Kitas svarbus straipsnio teiginys yra tas, kad organizacijos įvaizdis gali būti sukurtas tik kokybiškos realybės pagrindu. Šiam teiginiui pagrįsti naudojamas Alytaus miesto bibliotekos pavyzdys. Ši biblioteka buvo atidaryta Nepriklausomos Lietuvos laikotarpiu, kai šalyje vyravo bibliotekų uždarymo ir sujungimo tendencijos. Šios bibliotekos ištekliai kuklūs, tačiau jos veiklos rodikliai nuolat gerėjo. Bibliote-

ka per trumpą laiką sugebėjo tapti žinoma ir vertinama bendruomenės. Biblioteka turi aktyvią, išradingą ir energingą lyderę ir darnią komandą. Iš kitų ši biblioteka išsiskiria optimizmu, netradiciniu profiliu. Straipsnyje daroma išvada, kad Lietuvos bibliotekoms, kovojančioms dėl tinkamo finansavimo, visuomenės palaikymo ir reputacijos, svarbiau susikonsoliduoti į realybės gerinimą, o ne į reklamą, todėl šiuo metu tinkamesnė yra ne marketingo, o ryšių su visuomene strategija. Iš esmės neky-la abejonių dėl marketingo strategijos tinkamumo bibliotekoms, tačiau, esant nepastoviai, kintančiai ir nepalankiai aplinkai, ji gali būti nepakankama ir neįtikinama.