Marketing of Local History Collection of Public Libraries in the Age of IT

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**ABSTRACT**

The present paper highlights the importance of marketing technique to promote the local history collections of public libraries. It discusses the value of local history collections, essence of a good collection policy etc. and finally touches on the promotional needs for local history collection, methods of promotional activities and influence of information technology in this regard.

Key Terms: Local History Collection, Collection Policy, Extension Services, Information Hub, Promotional Initiative, Information Technology

**INTRODUCTION**

Public library is often called as People's University. It is mainly formed by the public, run by the public and works for the public. The importance of a public library in our society is not less than any other social institutions like school, college, hospital etc. and in some cases even better than these institutions. The main role of a public library is to build their collection to serve the community to which it belongs, in particular to the people of that community regardless of age, sex, cast or any other special discriminatory characteristics. Mc Colvin argued that apart from its various regular services, a public library provides some special type of services to its user community which are often termed as ‘extension services’ of public library [Mc Colvin].

Local history collection is such area in which a small public library can provide a unique service to the community. Local history can be defined as ‘the study of the past of some significant local unit, developing as a community, in its context and compared with such other units’ [Rogers]. On the other hand J. Hobs opine that one of the principal interests of an enlightened or informed community is the study of local history [Hobs]. Undoubtedly, one of the contributory factors to the rise of this principal interest, as suggested in 1959 by Hoskins (cited by Hobbs), is that people become more inclined to study something of which they can reach, easily grasp of, and can find a personal and individual meaning. Mibolos attributed local history as the collective experiences of a certain group of people [Mibolos]. The local public library is a logical place for residents to gather information about their community, its residents, and its history [Chattopadhyay]. The primary purpose of a local history collection department of a public library is to collect, preserve, analysis and make accessible information (about various subject discipline) relating to the local area. But some time access request (for local history collection) may come from a long distance or from a remote place to the library authority [Nichols]. And presently in the age of IT, it is a very common appeal to a librarian which he/she should pay honor.

Technology has been moving rapidly in the direction of enabling the generation, collection, and storage of vast amounts of important information. Now a days internet has become a medium for social networks, which is characterized by the creating and sharing of information. Web is a strong medium or platform for promoting repositories, sharing information about library’s collections, and reaching out to potential new users.

On the other hand, library users expect documents to be digitized and online accessible. They want everything to be easy to discover, access, and share. According to M. S. Sridhar library personnel need to provide options for connecting people with library’s goods and services through internet and web-technology [Sridhar].

The public libraries must provide an information technology based avenue to locally specific materials from anywhere of
the universe. In essence, they must keep local history alive and connect it with its greater context (Hudson). The most interesting and historically valuable items from public library’s extensive collection of photographs, genealogy records, local newspapers, hand written letters and scrap books, and more-need to be promote globally for their optimum use by maximum users. A rich digital archive and internet based ICT can make accessible local history collection of a public library into every user’s hand.

Building up a Local History Collection

Library professional needs to collect and include books, documents, and physical items based on their value and their rarity, checking for their inclusion in other local repositories. Andy Barnett and Don Litzer noted in their article ‘Local history in e-books and on the web: one library’s experience as example and model’, four types of value ascribed to material in the local history collection:

- **Evidential Value**: Establishing the existence of a particular institution or organization in a locality.
- **Informational Value**: Books, documents, items which include information on people, places, institutions, events, occurrences.
- **Archival Value**: Any item of historical value which needs to be preserved permanently for the posterity.
- **Intrinsic Value**: The monetary value of an item arising out of some unique factor such as its age, circumstances relating to its creation, signature etc.

The local history collection in general be broad enough to satisfy the personal and professional needs of all shades of researchers including amateurs and historians.

Local History Collection Policy

Every library needs a distinct policy to govern what they do. A collection policy dealing with local history in the library should be established to guide the library personnel in taking decisions on various aspects that they faced day to day (Ansell). The policy can either stand on its own or as part of the overall policy of the library but should clearly identify:

- Which materials to be collected (e.g. Books, unpublished manuscripts, photographs, maps etc.)?
- Which materials not to be collected (e.g. Artifacts more properly belonging in a museums)
- Which time period to be covered
- Which geographic area to be covered
- other special criteria (e.g. will include publications written by persons living in the community)

Some other criteria include:

- Uniqueness and historical value of the item.
- Physical condition of the item.
- Space constraints for storage of the item
- Time needed to arrange the collection for use etc.

Need for Promoting Local History Collection

- To get attention of the maximum people about cultural, social identity of a place or community.
- To encourage research activities, tourism and community development programme on and about the area by government, social organizations, individuals etc.
- To increase daily user attendance, library usage, enrollment of new memberships and turn the non-users to regular users of the library.
- To accelerate the use of various local information by the maximum local people from a single window system and run the library as a Local Information Hub.
- To aware the people about the local history collection of the library relating to information about local history, geography, education, economy, environment, culture, transport, various local activities taken by government, non-government, private and other organizations, heritage of the region etc. and support their daily information need.
- To foster the local history studies among the common people along with researchers and amateur historians.

Promoting Library’s Local History Collection: How can it be done?

Libraries often design their promotional activities according to their holdings, subject coverage of holdings, institutional policy, target user groups etc. To promote their local history collections to the mass, a public library may consider the following aspects:

- Publishing promotional literature, pamphlets, brochures etc. containing information about the library’s local history collection, their importance and value, rarity etc.
- Displays and organize exhibitions of local history collections in the library and other public areas.
- To publish a quarterly newsletters containing local history collection information, available in hard copy as well as online mode.
- Use of the website, online newsletters, social networking arena, social media to foster awareness of the local history collections as well as collection center.
- To encourage involvement of local community group.
- To encourage involvement of local school students, their parents and teachers and organize ‘Know Your Locality’ type awareness programme.
- To set up close relation with locality’s various educational, social, cultural, government and private institutions through e-mail and personal contact and organize joint venture programme like seminar, workshop etc.
- To publish and share information about local history collection through broad casting media like F.M. Channels, Cable T.V Channels, Community Radio Channels or Ham Radios along with Blog, Pod cast, Social networking sites (My space, Twitter, Facebook etc.), Image sharing sites, Video-sharing sites, Wikis etc.

Increasing Use of IT towards Promotional Activities: Why?

- Increases and accelerates maximum public access from anywhere any time situation.
- Can reach to the mass and deliver audio/visual/audio-visual message within a limited time.
- Target maximum viewer very fast by paying small amount of money in comparison to print and other mode of promotional activities.
- Support the demand of Generation-X.
- Attractive, space saving, durable, easy to remote access and safe preservation.
- Easy to change, repeat, alter and add to the existing promotional data.
CONCLUSION

Now a day information is treated as a marketable commodity. Today, in the age of information explosion, public libraries are serving demand based information services along with their traditional regular service. They are in constant touch with community. And local history collections provide public libraries the opportunities to be recognized as an integral part of the community. Local history collection provides librarians the scope to innovate methods to involve the community to make history come alive. But to disseminate the information relating to library’s local history collection to the potential user as well as to the interested group, a strong promotional initiative needs to be taken up by the library authority. At present situation, IT based promotional activities should be taken into consideration for their various utility. A good information communication technology based marketing approach can ensure the maximum use of local history materials of a public library by maximum user groups of the society.

REFERENCES