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Introduction

Library and Information Service (LIS) professionals play a very active role of information intermediaries. As information intermediaries or facilitators they have been engaged in acquiring and serving info-products produced by commercial agencies. These include books, indexing and abstracting sources, reference books, databases, etc. Commercial agencies develop info-products by applying the knowledge and skills of librarianship, i.e., information consolidation, evaluation, and repackaging. Such info-products are developed by considering larger and thereby general information needs. As such, many a time, they do not match the micro-level information needs of users. Analyzing micro-level information needs and applying their specialized skills of information consolidation, evaluation and repackaging, the LIS professionals should develop their own info-products. The present paper discusses the entrepreneurship and partnership approach and rational for developing micro-level info-products by LIS professionals.

Entrepreneurship Approach

There is still a wide impact of the philosophy that libraries and information centers are non-profit making agencies. However, the economic scenario changed due to globalization is forcing libraries and information centers to adopt commercial approach to become at least partially self-sufficient for their financial needs. Adoption of entrepreneurship approach means to develop and market profit-making info-products and services based principles of commerce and modern marketing.

Micro-level Info-products

Info-products are the reference sources consulted for finding specific information. Reference sources such as a dictionary, directory, yearbooks, almanacs etc produced by commercial agencies are readymade info-products. They are produced by considering larger market, and so they are macro-level info-products serving general information needs.

Micro-level info-products are the products developed by considering specific information needs of specific user community. For example, info-product for wine yard (grape) farmers, health info-product for senior citizens, research info-product for research scholars in a specific country, info-products to satisfy children's daily information needs, etc.

Micro-level info-products give in-depth information about a micro subject area. So they become tailor-made info-products as against readymade info-products. Directories of legal, medical specialists in a specific geographic area; directory of engineering education in a specific geographical area handbooks.
Developing Micro-level Info-products:

Info-products enable to sell information. It substantiates the concept that information is a commodity. Developing micro-level info-product involves following activities.

- Identification of market / user segment: This is the basic step for developing any product or service. Market segment differs for each product and service. Identification of market segment means identification of users who need the proposed info-product. For example, school children, university students / researchers, farmers, senior citizens, women (Allison, 2007), etc.
- Assessing information needs: Study of specific user group’s information behaviour helps in developing suitable info-products (Hepworth, 2007). Illustrative examples in the following table indicate how the micro-level information needs differ from one user group to another.

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<th>S/N</th>
<th>Name of the user group</th>
<th>Information needs</th>
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| 1   | School students (Intending to create a project on a specific subject) | • List of probable topics for projects and pre-requirements  
• List of background reading material such as encyclopedia, dictionary, etc  
• List of sources for current information, e.g., yearbooks, journals, websites  
• List of pertinent institutions and persons that can be helpful in collecting required data  
• Information sources that guide in analysis, interpretation, presentation of collected data  
• Information about how to use the various sources, writing and editing instructions |
| 2   | Farmers (for example, grape farmers)                        | • Climate, soil, rain-level etc. needed for the grape farming  
• Types of grape crops and their specialties, requirements  
• Grape diseases and their symptoms, precautionary, preventative and protective measures to be adopted  
• Insecticides, their contents, purpose, manufacturer’s and distributor’s names and addresses along with telephone numbers, web addresses  
• Storage and preservation methods and techniques  
• Market, prices trends, export facilities, government’s regulations, etc. |
| 3   | Senior citizens                                            | • Information needed for maintaining daily health  
• Common diseases, symptoms, precautionary and preventative measures  
• Directory of medical experts along with their names, addresses, specialization, fees, facilities available etc.  
• Names, contents, uses and effects of medicines that can be used as self-medication  
• Social, insurance and emergency medical service agencies, |

their names, addresses, telephone numbers
- Government and non-government schemes and services
- Services to utilize leisure time, for example, libraries, local tours, date schedules of regularly organized social programmes, etc.

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<th>4</th>
<th>Researchers</th>
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|   | Current research trends in a specific micro subject
|   | Probable topics / subjects / challenges / problems
|   | Specific research methods useful for carrying research on those probable subjects
|   | Funding / sponsoring agencies along with their criteria, conditions, etc.
|   | Institutions specialized in the specific subject area
|   | Names and addresses of experts in the subject area

- Deciding language of the info-product: Since the micro-level info-product is developed considering a very specific user community, it is worth to decide the language in which the info-product is to be produced. For example, in country like India, where Language based States are formulated, the language of the specific state may be an important criteria. For example farmers of a specific geographic area may know a specific language, and so the info-product in that language will have an added advantage. Depending on demand it may be worth to translate the info-product in more than one language.

- Identification of information sources: The information to be given in info-products is mostly collected from primary, secondary and tertiary sources. So the librarian developing an info-product must identify the various appropriate information sources from which the required information can be consolidated. These sources can be government publications, journals publications, research reports, pamphlets and brochures, directories, prospectus, newspapers, websites, etc. Particularly the information to be given in the micro-level info-product may need to collect using a questionnaire. These days e-mail questionnaire are most cost efficient tools for collecting data from larger population. It saves times too.

- Decide the format of the info-product: The info-product can be produced in print or digital format. Even though, day by day digital info-products (DIP) are becoming popular, the print info-products (PIP) have their own advantageous features. The format of the info-product has to be decided by considering the potential users, their convenience, facilities / infrastructure needed to use the DIP. Facilities available at the user's disposal should also be considered. For example, the university students and research scholars usually are digital ready generations. So they will prefer DIP. On the contrary, the senior citizens, farmers and their like who may not have the necessary infrastructure and even the technological literacy to use the DIP, will prefer PIP. The PIP may be preferred even by those who don't like to read computer screen (How to crate information products by eHow Business Editor). Developing an info-product in dual format i.e. print as well as digital may also prove advantageous as it will enable to cover larger market.

- Information consolidation, evaluation and repackaging: The quantum of information is continuously increasing. The formats used for presenting the information are also multiplying. Thus the user community is overloaded by information. They are bewildered by quantity, variations in quality and newer formats in which information is made available. Such features of information have made information finding a difficult task, even for the experienced information user. So there is a need to consolidate relevant information from vast number of sources, evaluate it in the context of the needs of potential users and repackage the same to produce micro-level info-product.

Information consolidation (IC): IC means to collect known/new information from variety of sources on the pre-determined topic/s. Wide variety of current and retrospective, primary, secondary and tertiary,
print and digital information sources are browsed to consolidate relevant information for the proposed info-product. Information can also be consolidated using questionnaires.

Information Evaluation (IE): IE is also referred to as information analysis. Because of its excessive availability and varied nature information has to be evaluated before it is repackaged in the info-product. The consolidated information is to be evaluated for accuracy, currency or update-ness and context. The integrity of information depends on the root source, so information collected from the publicly edited sources, such as wikipedias, must be evaluated for its validity. IE enables the infopreneur to provide valid, accurate and context-based content as content is the king (Today's libraries operate in a dual existence, divided between in-person and online services).

Information re-packaging (IR): Reorganization of specially consolidated and evaluated information to fulfill specific user group's specific information need is IR. IR adds value to information. IR puts information in a user-expected structure such as tabular, charts, graphs, comparisons, alphabetical, etc. the IR activity also provides multiple and easy access points to search the pinpointed information from the info-product. This is done by specific organization methods and by providing various indexes and search facilities. IR intends to put the consolidated information in a user-friendly and easy to search format.

- **Pricing:** Deciding price of the info-product is entrepreneur's one of the roles. Fixed and variable costs should be considered while arriving at the price of the info-product. Margin of profit on the info-product has also to be considered at pricing. PIP and DIP have their own impacts on pricing. Market life and market size are the other criteria that can have their impact on pricing. Sponsorship, if any, can help to reduce the price of the info-product. Length and type of distribution chain can also alter the price of the info-product.

- **Publicity:** It is noticed that users *(usually)* lack of awareness about info-products (Popoola, 2008). In order to create awareness about the info-product the librarian has to adopt an aggressive publicity policy. It must make use of various medias such as pamphlets, brochures, banners, posters, newspapers advertisements, cable TV etc. Awareness about info-products can also be improved through user education programmes (Popoola, 2008). The eHow Business Editor has suggest the following three means to advertise an info-product. (a) Seminars and workshops (b) Writing an outline of talk which takes listeners from problem to solution (c) Giving a booklet, report or series of articles to take home instead of just a handout.

- **Distribution:** Principles of entrepreneurship suggests that the info-product must be distributed effectively to reap the advantages of commercialization. It is noticed that the library and information service professionals usually do not tend to use commercial channels to market their info-products. By entering into a well-thought agreement with the local book distributor the info-product entrepreneur can ensure smooth, timely and adequate supply of the info-product in the market. Particularly the micro-level information product developing considering the local market segment should be marketed through local book market. Student salesmen working under schemes such as earn and learn can be used for door to door marketing of the info-product. Library science students may have an extra edge in explaining the info-product and convincing the potential customer.

- **Finance and accounting:** The info-product developing librarian may initially, face some procedural problems regarding finance and accounting. This may happen because most of the libraries are sub-systems of a academic, non-commercial organization. For example, against whose name the payment of the info-product has to be made, what discount has to be offered, who should look after the sell and related activities can be some of the possible problems to be addressed by the info-product developing librarian. However in the changed globalized environment every supervising, controlling, governing, financing agency (such as NAAC, NAB) is encouraging academic institutions including libraries to generate funds through their products and services, these problems may be solved easily.
Partnership Approach

Adoption of partnership approach by libraries in developing info-product is advantageous because:

- Intellectual work *(of developing an info-product)* can be shared between library professionals and information technology professionals, and information designers (Orna, 2007, Moon, 2008). The intellectual work to share can be evaluation of consolidated information, repackaging, developing programmes and using hardware, software and other technologies for developing and uploading DIP.
- Partnership between different libraries can also be beneficial because there can be common user / customer base to be availed to develop and market the info-product e.g. college libraries in a specific geographical can compile an annotated reading list useful for post graduate students of say, agricultural economics, human geography etc. More the partnering libraries economical will be the info-product.
- Financial investment can contributed by the partnering libraries
- Profit earned be shared

The partnership approach to the development of an info-product helps achieve overall economy. Oberweis, et.al. (2007) describe a well-thought model for developing partnership-based digital info-product called, 'Product Lines for digital iNformation producTs' (i.e.PLANT).

Rational for developing info-product by LIS professionals:

- Macro-level info-products are developed and marketed by non-library agencies or commercial agencies. However, the author thinks that the LIS professionals are skill-wise more competent and resourceful to develop info-products. Following are some of the reasons why the LIS professionals could and should develop info-products.
- Generating finance: Library budget in almost all types of institutions are experiencing retrenchment. Development of info-product will help libraries to have at least partial financial self-sufficiency.
- Knowledge of information sources: The library professionals know various sources of information, which can help to achieve comprehensiveness and completeness in information consolidation. Also they knowledge of various criteria to be adopted in information evaluation. Further the library professionals are well familiar with information organization skills. These skills are useful in the repackaging of information. Thus the knowledge and skills make the library professionals most competent forces to develop info-products than any other agencies.
- Value addition: The development of info-products by LIS professionals will be a value addition activity by the librarianship. This will also help to enhance the status of library professionals and the profession as they are developing their own info-products.
- Information literacy: Info-products such as library pathfinders can help in conducting information literacy and user education programmes.
- E-learning: The development of DIP such as library portals can help in creating information literacy though the e-learning medium

Conclusion

In the light of information overload and for the purpose to help develop knowledge societies the LIS professionals should develop micro-level info-products. Considering the current situation the LIS professionals have wide scope to develop variety of info-products in print as well as digital format. The entrepreneurial and partnership approach helps develop info-product in systematic and economic manner. LIS professionals are best judge of information needs of users based on which they can develop most suitable info-products. Also they have the right knowledge and skills required to develop info-
product. Development of info-products will help the LIS professionals to generate funds and it will also add value to their services.

References


