

**Walking the Talk**  
**Market Orientation in Academic Libraries**  
**A Case Study of**  
**Queensland University of Technology Library, Australia**

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**Introduction**

Libraries are increasingly vocal about the need to adopt strategic marketing management which is the process of creating and facilitating the exchange of products of value with others. However, the largest proportion of library and information science literature on marketing deals promotion and public relations which is only a small part of the marketing mix. There seems to have been a fragmented application of marketing principles in the management and operation of libraries because they have lacked strategies to translate the marketing management into their functional management.

The concept of market orientation provides a framework for applying marketing principles into library management and operations. Market orientation means the customer is the focal point of all organisational goals and integrates structure, management and operations. Four elements under pin market orientation:

- Client orientation – satisfy customer wants and needs
- Continuous market research – know your client and their wants and behaviours
- Integrate all activities and systems –from management to front line staff everyone share information and same client focus
- Client relationship management – a repeat customer is an advertisement for others and sustains your business position

In a market oriented organisation, marketing isn't pushed off to one side as promotion or public relations. Marketing orientation is an organisational management style.

Using the 7 P's of service marketing (product, place, price, processes, people and promotion) this paper examines how QUT Library has translated strategic market management into applied management strategies by cultivating a market orientation.

## **Queensland University of Technology (QUT) Library Overview**

Queensland University of Technology (QUT) has 39,000 students and 3,000 staff. The Library is a department within the Division of Technology, Information and Learning Support Services, along with Information Technology Services and the Department of Teaching and Learning Support Services.

The Library has a strong line management structure from the Director, two Associate Directors (Development and Information Resources), Library Resource Manager, Systems Manager and Branch Library Managers. Within branches, Reference Services Managers and the Lending Services Managers report to the branch manager.

However, QUT Library also has several positions responsible for coordinating library wide functions such as information literacy, lending and document delivery services, web service delivery and marketing and external relations. Cross library coordinators work extensively with line managers and supervisors to implement strategic initiatives and maintain consistent procedures and performance across all branches.

## **Market Orientation and the 7 P's of Service Marketing**

The 7 Ps of service marketing are:

- Product
- Price; Processes
- Place; Physical Evidence
- Promotion
- People

As previously stated the marketing concept is a management style or attitude. By looking at the 7 Ps of services marketing, we can break down the overall concept of market orientation into indicators against which we can measure our performance. Many of the strategies discussed here will be in place in many other libraries. The difference is to understand how an explicit market orientated focus can enhance your management and operations as well as inform your strategic term vision, annual planning and organisational culture in order to sustain your business growth and market share.

### **Product: Market Research**

Before you can be market or client orientated, you need to understand your clients' wants and needs, your competition, your resources and strengths, where your priorities lie. Your clients are not a homogenous group so you need to identify which products are valued by different client segments. Also, not all client groups will be as "important" as others and market research helps to establish resource priorities.

QUT Library can't afford market research companies but does have many mechanisms in place to collect market data, including

- Print and electronic suggestion boxes
- Biennial Client Satisfaction Surveys
- Staff feedback
- Client complaints
- Informal polling – exit interviews; small focus groups
- Statistics – peaks and troughs in demand
- Library and information science literature

- Organizational statistics – enrolments; staff numbers etc

This data comes from many sources and must be synthesised as a basis for management decisions. At QUT Library, the Development and Administration Manager coordinates the collection and analysis of the library's statistics and monitors the Library's key performance indicators as part of the library's quality framework. This position is instrumental in turning statistics into meaningful market research.

### **Product: Segment, Target, Position**

Libraries always have many constituents or clients groups and each library has to determine their main target market segments. You can segment clients many ways such as:

- by type - academic staff as teachers and as researchers, community members; students; general staff
- by level of study - U/G vs P/G
- By information seeking behaviours (coursework vs research)
- Attendance – full-time vs part-time
- Age – under 24; over 25 and under 34

A numerically large segment with homogenous needs will potentially be most demanding but will respond to economies of scale. Smaller politically important groups may need specialist services but their number allows for tailoring services with a minimum of resourcing.

### **Product: Segment, Target, Position**

Targeting is the process of deciding the most “profitable” client segment. At QUT Library it was evident that undergraduates are our primary client segment. Undergraduates are numerically our largest group and, in a university with strong teaching outcomes, they are an important segment to satisfy because of their political influence on decision makers.

At QUT :

- 77% of students are undertaking undergraduate degrees
- Attendance for u/g is predominately full-time (63%)
- 58% of students are under 24 years old – (Y generation born after 1977)
- 33% work at least part-time
- They are paying for their education and are discerning consumers
- Technologically literate – “the connected generation”; the “Y generation”

While undergraduate students are our primary focus, academic staff are an important niche market for two reasons. Firstly because they have specialist needs to meet teaching and research information needs. Secondly, they are the major influence on the information seeking behaviour and information skills development of students through their teaching and assessment techniques. Many marketing strategies can be directed at those that influence the primary target segment.

### **Product: Segment, Target, Positioning**

Positioning is about how an organisation wants clients to perceive them. It defines the bundle of attributes you offer in relation to your customer and in relation to your competitors. This then becomes the core message and focus of marketing efforts.

Positioning makes it easier for consumers to identify and remember a particular product/service provider. It strengthens the association of a product with one or more attributes of quality; and it creates a distinction between other products or services that may satisfy a customer's need.

At QUT no department can have a “position statement” or “slogan” of any kind. However, the overall positioning statement used as a basis of marketing communication is “Search Our Web”. This positions us with the attractiveness of our greatest competitor, the internet or WWW, and also against it by personalising the web as “our” web – the web within in the chaos. Search is a direct positioning with the need of the student. This statement services as the message platform on which to base key communications with our client segment. If articulated within the library to staff it can also shape their perceptions about and attitude to their role and its relevance to clients.

### **Product: What does QUT Library “sell”**

In their management structures many libraries organise their processes and performance by functional and line management sections. In a marketing oriented organisation, this is can be overlaid by the library’s product line, into which all the functional and management structures are integrated.

<b>Library Orientated</b>	<b>Market Orientated</b>
Acquisitions	Access
Cataloguing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Web</li> <li>• Opening hours</li> <li>• Learning and studying places and spaces</li> <li>• Borrowing</li> <li>• Document delivery</li> <li>• Reciprocal borrowing with other libraries</li> <li>• Sorted and catalogued</li> <li>• Stored for easy retrieval</li> <li>• Navigability of web site</li> <li>• Course reserve (print or electronic)</li> </ul>
Web site development	
Collection development – print and electronic	
Document Delivery	
Borrowing	
Reference services – information desks; reference service; liaison services	
Information literacy	Resources
Systems infrastructure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Selected for quality and relevance</li> <li>• Multimedia</li> <li>• integration into study and teaching - CMD</li> </ul>
	High Tech/High Touch Relationships
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Service points – face to face</li> <li>• Information literacy classes</li> <li>• Help and teaching documentation</li> <li>• Curriculum integration</li> <li>• Virtual reference - telephone, email and chat reference service</li> </ul>

This product line in the right column of the table above is more meaningful to our clients than our functional services. In addition, if staff and management think along these lines, sectional and functional boundaries become blurred encouraging more integration and cooperation between sections and thus a more seamless service to clients.

### **Price and Processes**

Academic libraries are not free. Students pay a price in terms of their time and also in terms of the kind of experience they have when using the library.

Some of the areas QUT Library has concentrated on:

- Reliable network and systems – the library catalogue is maintained on a different server to the internet/database server therefore ensure both do not go down at the same time
- Cross campus services – as a multi-campus university QUT offers free intercampus delivery on books and articles
- Turnaround times for reshelving, document delivery, intercampus loans – QUT monitors these closely to ensure that the times stated in our Client Charter are met.
- Navigability of the web page – the layout of the web page simplifies the complexity of the information environment
- Help is available – print and web documents are readily accessible at point of need; loans and information desks are staffed all hours library is opened, the Ask a Librarian email and chat reference service available, telephone assistance is available from 6am to 1am
- Reciprocal arrangements – QUT has a fast-track interlibrary loan system for undergraduates with another local university library; also has established reciprocal membership for students and staff with local university libraries
- Self-service options – online renewal of loans; online placement of holds/reservations; self checkout units.
- Problem solving procedures – missing item search; fast track cataloguing and processing
- Multiskilling of staff – some general queries can be handled by staff at both the Loans and Information Desk rather than referring clients to the functional service point eg PIN changes; directional inquiries.
- Information literacy classes and orientation are held on weekends and evenings as well as in business hours.

### **Place and Physical Evidence**

In discussing “place” of delivery of library service all libraries and QUT Library are justifiably proud of the 24/7 access now able to be provided through the internet. Besides the online web catalogue, we now provide online access to databases and ejournals. QUT Library has also developed a system to provide access to copyrighted lecturer-recommended readings through its Course Materials Database. We are also making services available online such as reference services, the Ask a Librarian email and chat service, online requests for intercampus loans, local reciprocal loans and interlibrary loans; enrolling in library information classes; renewing loans and reserving items on loan via self service options. This “virtual placement” is increasingly comfortable and time saving for our clients.

However, we cannot forget our physical place. The majority of undergraduates still come to campus and need to find spaces for individual and group study, as well as

socialising. Since our library buildings are still and will continue to be an important resource for students, we must remember that clients partially judge the quality of our service by the physical environment.

Even when we are not blessed with new buildings, old buildings can remain functional and attractive through innovative refurbishment. Students are wanting different spaces in libraries today such as

- QUT VLab, the information commons at Gardens Point Library,
- group access to PCs for group assignments, as at Kelvin Grove L
- Training rooms with PCs and multimedia lecture facilities
- Lounge and eating areas as in all QUT Library libraries; and
- Group study rooms and talking areas for group work.

QUT Library also pays attention to details.

- There is a University and Library signage policy to ensure that both permanent and temporary signs are consistent and clear across all branches
- Promotional signs and library promotional publications are professional designed and displayed in purpose build display units.
- Make sure the facilities are clean and tidy. Libraries regularly dust the collection and the library also pays an extra cleaning charge to have the libraries restrooms cleaned over the weekends when the normal university cleaning service is not available.
- Furniture – desks covered in graffiti; age of chairs and tables. Branch libraries check furniture for graffiti, age and damage each year and where possible it is cleaned and repairs.

## **People**

In services industries, staff are part of the production and delivery of the “product” as they are part of the service interaction. Customer service goes beyond a “cheerful attitude” to the key “moments of truth”. Clients want assistance when needed; sympathy not indifference; resolution of problem, not excuses; extra effort; individualized solution; seamless assistance, not the run around.

QUT Library employs 190 people across central services and five branch libraries, which is equivalent to 160 full-time staff members. Of these 63% work in branches in direct client delivery positions. It has an extensive staff development and training program in place. It employs a Staffing Officer, an Assistant Staffing Officer (part-time) and a Staff Development Officer (part-time) which represents a higher level of staffing support personnel than in any other part of the University.

The staff development and training program includes:

- Skills training needs – all positions have a set of necessary and desirable skills needed for the performance of that position
- Front of House Customer Service training – at the beginning of each year all casual staff are paid to attend a one to two day session covering customer service skills; new policies and procedures and new branch operations
- Direct Client Contact – all non branch staff are required to undertake some desk shifts. All staff with reference service experience does a 2 to 4 hour a week shift in one of the branch libraries, staff who do not have library qualifications and senior staff undertake an 4 hour observation shift once a semester.

- Staff exchanges – Staff can gain experience and knowledge of other sections of the library by undertaking an exchange with another section or library through the exchange program.
- Study assistance is provided to staff undertaking tertiary studies relevant to their position.
- Secondments – Opportunities to undertake temporary secondments to projects or more senior positions are open to all staff.

In addition, the Library seeks to create an innovative and motivated staff culture that promotes client service and commitment to service quality. Through the biennial Staff Perception Survey management collects feedback about staff moral and their major issues of concern. Where possible, the Library Planning Forum develops strategies to address the main issues of concern.

The Library also presents annual Staff Reward and Recognition Awards at its annual all staff meeting. Nominations come from staff and a joint committee of managers and staff representatives decides the winners. Awards presented include:

- Client Service Award
- Innovation and Initiative Award
- Quite Achiever Award
- Making a Difference Award
- Outstanding Contribution Award

### **Promotion – Integrated Marketing Communication**

Marketing communication aims to build an awareness of what the library offers and to reduce the perceived and actual barriers to use of the library

Marketing communication falls into two broad categories:

- A promotion for a specific or new service
- Ongoing promotions and communications about services

For both, you must use all the communication channels your target customer uses. No one channel will reach all clients.

At QUT Library ongoing communication strategies include:

- Library Web News – stories about new resources, services or focusing on a special topic that changes every 14 days (most students admit in surveys to visiting the Library home at least once a fortnight)
- Library Directions (print newsletter) – circulated to all staff and postgraduate students containing stories of new resources and services as well as more strategic concerns
- Web Page –subject guides; database guides; help contextualised into point of need help
- Personal selling - Service points; Liaison librarians visits and email contacts with academics
- Publications – Appropriate publications; displays appropriately placed and attractive.
- Information in other university publications. Always ensure that handbooks, prospectuses or service booklets have an entry about the library.
- Service Monitor – An email service from Information Technology Services that apprises clients of service break downs. This supplemented

by a specific database news list that alerts subscribers to issues about specific database service.

- Self-subscribing email lists – Clients can subscribe to an email list that sends a personal email about any library news from new resources to service outages.
- Broadcast emails – At key times in the semester, email students reminders of services they may need. For example, when the first assignments are coming due, send a reminder about information research classes.

Promotional campaigns usually focus on new services and as such can use both the “ongoing” channels of communication as well as others. For such situations QUT Library has developed an integrated marketing communication action plan that sets out target audience, key messages, communication strategies and channels, time lines, responsibilities and costs. Below is a hypothetical IM Action Plan for QUT Library’s “Search Our Web” campaign, without the details responsibilities and costs.

### Search Our Web: Undergraduates

Key Message	Communication Strategies	Where	When
Search Our Web – Access; Resources & High tech High touch help	Bright green posters – summary	* On school notice boards * In refec * On uni notice boards * In Student Centres	From Orientation Week
	Postcards	* In campus cafes * In Students Centres * In Guild Info Centres	From Orientation Week
	Credit/Student wallet with Search Our Web business card	* Given when students attend a library tour * Given when students register for a library PIN * Given to people attending GSL	Orientation Week plus 2 weeks
	Calendar of Library Classes: How & Why to Search Our Web (publication)	At the GSL orientation program run by the university * On school notice boards * In refec * On uni notice boards * In Student Centres	Orientation Week

This example action plan contains out of home advertising (the poster and postcard) to engage those who don’t come within your physical presence. The card wallet provides a tangible return for those who have begun a relationship with the Library (a reward). These can also be used throughout the semester for similar

purposes. Lastly, the students take away a publication identifying follow up opportunities for training – the semester calendar.

### **Summary**

Market orientation is more than skin deep. It is a management style that focuses an organisation's planning and operations. By looking at the 7 P's of service marketing, I have discussed how QUT Library has cultivated a market orientated focus as a basis for its quality management frame work.

Any library seeking to develop a marketing orientation may consider the following:

1. Understand your client (Market research)
2. Identify your client market (Segment & target)
3. Identify your strengths as a competitive business (Position)
4. Know the product your clients want and where they want to use it (product & place)
5. Develop effective and efficient procedures & systems that facilitate outcomes for clients (processes)
6. Employ and train staff in both work skills and client relationship marketing (people)
7. Communicate the benefits and advantages of your product over competitors (IMC)