

Application of E-Commerce in the Library Activity: A Descriptive Study

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Abstract

Libraries were perhaps early entrants in the field of e- business by making their online catalogues available via the Internet in the late 1980s. This was among the first instances of organizations promoting their products and services through the Internet. Now, many libraries provide most of their services electronically, pursuing a knowledge management strategy and managing the latest information contents. This article examines trends in ebusiness, and suggests how libraries can utilize these in enhancing their services. This article discusses the issues and challenges which the present day libraries are confronting in their adoption of e- commerce including ecommerce charging models. It also explores prospects of application of ecommerce in libraries.

Keywords:

E-Commerce, Library, Application, Information Service

Introduction

E-commerce is any business which can be done using electronic media. Electronic commerce or e-commerce refers to a wide range of online business activities for the services. Ecommerce is typically combined with buying, selling, and services over the internet. The service industry is the most efficiently using the e-commerce for its business. Now a day, it is also extended to the libraries also. The libraries are also using the e-commerce for the variety of its functions. Some areas are discussed in this paper.

1. Definition of E-Commerce

There is no universally accepted definition of the term e-commerce. It is the pre-eminent buzzword of the online business revolution. It is the art and science of selling products and services over the internet. E-commerce is the buying and selling of goods and services on the internet.

2. Objectives of the paper

- a) To understand the e-commerce meaning
- b) To know compatibility of e-commerce with the library service.
- c) To know the areas of libraries where e-commerce can apply.

3. Research Methodology

This research adopts a **descriptive research methodology** to examine the application of e-commerce in library activities. The descriptive approach is ideal for exploring the extent, types, and impact of e-commerce technologies utilized in libraries. By systematically observing and documenting the phenomena, the study seeks to provide a comprehensive understanding of how e-commerce enhances library operations and services.

4. Benefits of E-Commerce

4.1 Global Accessibility and Sales Reach

An e-commerce can receive orders from just about any country in the world.

4.2 Market Base Expansion

An e-commerce can open its critical information systems to entirely new groups of users, including employees, customers, suppliers, and business partners, who formerly did not have timely access to them.

4.3 Increased Profits

With e-commerce companies reach more and different customers and gain exposure in new markets not covered by existing physical channels.

4.4 Improved Customer Service and Loyalty

E-commerce enables a company to be open for business whenever a customer needs it. It provides day-night service.

4.5 Shorter Time-to-Market E-commerce makes for fast and flexible execution and response to market opportunities.

4.6 Supply Chain Integration E-commerce enables the full integration of a business, making the entire supply chain more efficient from the point of customer contact all the way back through physical distribution, warehousing, manufacturing, resource management, and purchasing.

4.7 Reasonable Price

As the marketing cost is negligible business houses can offer goods to the customers at minimum price.

5. Application of E-Commerce in Library Activities

5.1 In Improvement of Information Services

An important goal for many libraries is to improve its information services by increasing access to information. The library may achieve this goal through the use of e-commerce. Some corporations are now digitizing many internal documents and presentations for access by others in the corporations; this is something the library may take an active role in.

a) Access to Information

With the proliferation of computers and Internet access in homes, libraries and workplaces across the world, increased access to information is possible for many people throughout the world. Ecommerce opens up a whole new global market for the libraries. Anything chosen to place on the library's web site will be available for anyone to access at any time of the day or night (sometimes referred to as 7/24).

b) New Information Resources Libraries which are part of bigger organizations such as a college or university are now including information regarding other departments or campus libraries. Corporate libraries with resource centers in different cities, states or countries may also follow this approach.

c) Delivery of Information

Using e-commerce will help the library deliver information quickly to large groups of individuals. This may range from information regarding the library's policies to information on how to access the library's collections or services.

d) Broaden Information Market

If the library is not currently using e-commerce, it may only be reaching people who live in the same city as where the library is located. However, if e-commerce is used to increase the market to which information is distributed, not only may the library reach more patrons in the city, but throughout the state, and throughout the rest of the country and worldwide. The library may also reach those patrons who may be unable to come to the library not only for geographic reasons, but also because of disability or illness. Broadening the market not only increases awareness of the library and the services it offers, but may generate more visitors to the library and possible donations to the library in the future.

5.2 In Collection Development

The traditional acquisition problems can be solved to some extent with the use of e-commerce. The advantages can be shown below :

a) Financial advantage

E-commerce can solve the financial problem of LICs by decreasing delivery cost of the materials. Besides, online ordering and online payment can give some relief to the libraries. The marketing cost is also negligible in comparison to traditional marketing. Besides, discount given to some of the items is very attractive.

b) Easy access to far-off markets

The problem of access to far-off markets now has been solved by the Internet. The publishers and suppliers can be given order by the help of e-mail facility as most of them have their

c) Selectivity and availability

Internet provides the facility to select the required items from a vast collection. If someone is not finding the appropriate one he can search it in other online shop. It solves the problems of local book-sellers, which may not have the publication of interests of the libraries in their stock.

d) Quick / instant delivery of foreign publications

As the foreign publications are costly and to procure them is very much time consuming in general way of ordering, E-commerce can make possible to procure within a short period of time (within two or three days). Besides, the formalities are also very less in online purchasing.

5.3 In Marketing of Library and Information Products

a) Libraries on the Web

As libraries shift more services to the Internet, the library web site becomes increasingly important - as a product (service) in its own right and as a major tool in marketing other products of the library. Libraries can use the Web to provide services, to market services, or as part of the marketing process. For many users, the web site is the library. Some users never visit the library. For others, a web site is just another branch of their favorite library - and a great place to shop for information 24/7. More libraries are providing services and marketing on the Web as a response to changes in the way the world accesses information.

b) Demand is growing for 24/7 access to all services

The technology now exists to allow libraries to offer 24 hours a day, 7 days a week reference. This service will allow librarians to share both digital and print information with the patron, instruct patrons on how to access information and will do so without the limitation of library hours or building constraints. The use of this service will drive traffic to library sites, providing great opportunities for library marketing on the Web.

c) Advantages over traditional paper-based libraries Selling documents, or charging for their use, over the Internet offers many advantages over traditional paper-based libraries. It provides the customer with more choices and customization options (e.g. choice of font). It decreases the time and cost of search and discovery, both in terms of customers finding electronic documents and object and authors finding customers (e.g., advertising, target marketing). It expands the marketplace from local and regional markets to national and international markets with minimal capital outlay or equipment, space, or staff. Indeed, it makes it possible for a single digital library to act as the sole storage of a digital document, with other libraries and users from around the world accessing the document from this single library with equal ease to a resident living next door to the library. It decreases the high transportation and labor costs of creating, processing, distributing, storing and retrieving paper-based information; and of identifying and negotiating with potential customers and suppliers. It facilitates increased customer responsiveness, including on-demand delivery.

d) Creation of database

One can create a database of valuable information on where people can be contacted and what their key interests are. The tactic of using a separate mailbox for information replies can also be used to track the number of responses from a particular source.

5.4 E-Acquisition

The acquisition area or the section is the vertebrae for any kind of library such as special, academic, and public library whether it is a small or a huge library. It is sectioned in a library with substantially separated or without any separation. It is an activity which deals with the procurement of library materials. The section deals with the main factors of library viz. approvals purchase orders, receiving, and data processing the materials. It is now a day, using the e-approvals, e-purchase orders, and its payment is made by electronic way by E-Banking. E-Banking is for the payment for the purchased document.

5.5 E-Vendors

The libraries deal with vendor to acquire the materials for its patrons. There are so many evendors but in this paper mentioned some top ten vendors' in India viz. www.flipkart.com, www.amazon.in, www.ebay.in, www.snapdeal.com, www.shopclues.com, www.myntra.com, www.homeshop18.com, www.yebhi.com, www.tradus.com, www.pepperfry.com, etc.

5.6 E-Help Desk

Libraries always act as reference or help desk to join the reading materials with the readers. A department within a library that responds to user's questions. Most of the large libraries have the help desks to answer patron questions. Questions and answers can be delivered by telephone, e-mail, or fax. There is even help desk software that makes it easier for the people running the help desk to quickly find answers to common questions. The softwares like skype, google talk, Gizmo, iChat, Jajah.

6. Recommendation

It is necessary that Libraries should redefine their objectives and roles in changing context and to respond to the changing and challenging needs. Merely changing the name from library to information centre will not help. The present trend of collection development, marketing and information service should be renovated and in this regard some suggestions are brought forward on the basis of the study

6.1 Library Website

The Library should build its own Website with the information regarding location, staff, library rules, working hours, services, facilities, resources, etc

6.2 Remote access to library

With the availability of Internet, libraries can use their homepages to advertise their services, such as, calendar of events, new IT services, new collection of topical subject, local heritage, sales of library publications in their homepages. People can also access library's OPAC from homes and offices. Libraries can introduce Online Reference Inquiry Form (ORIF) in their home page. Library users will be able to key in reference inquiries through the ORIF or to search libraries' databases from any locations at any time.

6.3 One-stop information centre

Libraries can be developed as a one-stop community information centre for IT services. By allowing library users to access variety of online databases available through the Internet, users do not have to go to different places to get information. They can navigate the WWW by themselves or with the assistance of library staff.

6.3 Repackaging of information

For personalized services, library staff should be able to response to request for literature search on specific information. Such literature search will include: compilation of bibliographies on selected topics of interest to specific user needs; compilation of addresses for contact; developing metadata on relevant websites; creating hyperlink of relevant websites to cater for special user needs, etc. The library staff should be able to search for such information either from available reference sources or from the Internet, and repackage that specific information according to specific individual request, thus providing value-added services. Such services can be charged accordingly as it includes some cost.

6.4 Hyperlinking relevant sites

Library should maintain a database on user profile that includes information about their specific subject interests. Librarian should make regular scanning on relevant databases and websites as well as from latest journal publications that matches the interest of registered users. Information from various sources that match users' interests should be consolidated and repackaged in a systematic way in accordance to specific users' needs. By doing so members will always exposed to their subject interests.

6.5 Establishing E-Journals Consortium The Libraries can establish e-journal consortium so that users can carry out searches on a single table contents of database and access, view, download or print full-text electronic articles from any publisher provided the library has a valid subscription. In India, UGC-INFONET E-Journals Consortium, INDEST Consortium, FORSA Consortium, CSIR Consortium, IGCAR Consortium, IIM Consortium and URL (Urdu Research Library) Consortium are playing a great role in reducing costs and increase access by evaluating products and negotiating directly with publishers. The consortium can help in marketing of Library services in a cooperative way.

6.6 Database management system (DBMS)

Libraries should develop well-enabled DBMS in order to provide on-line database access through the Internet. Web-based library and information services would motivate the users and maximize the utility of the library resources in a more effective and efficient way.

7. Conclusion

With the increasing dependency on Information Technology, there is a need to take a bold step by the libraries and information centers in adopting and utilizing e- commerce technologies for making themselves financially

self-sufficient. The increasing cost of maintaining the library and information centers need some way of earning money. The platform for libraries to innovate within its designated roles is reaching new heights with the aid of technology and e-commerce. Traditional methods of doing things can be performed more effectively through an electronic exposure. The World Wide Web has created new avenues of delivering traditional services and created an environment of creative business development within the realms of the library world. E-Commerce has the ability to solve the problems of traditional transactions of the libraries and provide substantive solutions. There are a good number of efforts for consortia being done throughout India by the consortium for group of libraries falling under certain disciplines like, FORSA for Astronomy, CSIR for Scientific Labs, INDEST for Engineering & Technology and Management libraries, through which the member libraries can share the resources and also sell the library and information products and services to the information seekers. Though the concept of charging for information, particularly in developing countries like India, is a difficult task, the libraries must consider the ways to generate the funds. The impact of information technology and adoption of e-commerce techniques will help improve the services to the users and enhance the reputation of the library and information services and professionals. A comprehensive e-commerce strategy can help the libraries successfully attain their goals.

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