The four 'C's of museum marketing: proposing marketing mix guidelines for museums

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Abstract

This article proposes marketing mix guidelines to empower museums to achieve greater visibility thereby achieve their missions. The four 'C's of museum marketing are customer value, cost, convenience and communication. The proposed museum marketing mix guidelines are informed by an extensive literature review. In order to create customer value, museums should develop product offerings that match the ever-changing needs of all the segments of their target audience. In terms of determining costs, museums should take into account their missions with some museums having to serve public interests. In an effort to increase convenience, museums should use travelling exhibitions and virtual exhibits. Marketing communication tools should be deployed in an integrated manner to ensure message consistency and maximum impact. The article provides a marketing mix framework to guide museums on how to package and sell their value propositions and also makes some useful general recommendations.

Keywords: museum marketing, arts marketing, customer value, cost, convenience, communication

Introduction

Cultural tourism products such as museums are still challenged by decreasing attendances, increased competition, and limited resources (Kotler and Kotler, 1998:38-51). Izquierdo and Samaniego (2007:809) echo this view when they assert that "there is ever-increasing pressure on museums to raise visitor numbers and earn revenue". However, while earned income may be important, Rentschler and Gilmore (2002:63) argue that it is not possible for cultural institutions such as museums to "exist on earned income alone" and that they should also solicit donor funds. In order to entice and retain donors, Rentschler and Gilmore (2002:63) further claim that sound marketing is a tool "for demonstrating accountability to donors".

According to Lee (2005:289), "the proliferation of arts marketing is regarded as a good example of the penetration of market reasoning into the arts world". Lee's assertion suggests that marketing is becoming an important function of an arts institution. During the 1970s and 1980s, arts institutions considered marketing as a set of techniques used to sell the product offering. In addition, in the 1980s, arts marketing was seen as a process in terms of which the needs of visitors were met (Lee, 2005:289). According to Harrison and Shaw (2004:23), arts organisations such museums started "to give prominence to serving the needs of their customers or the public". This shift to a visitor-orientated approach meant that visitors were no longer perceived merely as a passive audience. However, in order to effect this change in mindset, marketing was seen as a process comprising the following steps: formulating organisational objectives, strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, and threats (SWOT) analysis, audience analysis, establishing marketing objectives, setting targets, implementation and evaluation. The 1990s saw the establishment of marketing departments and the emergence of arts marketing experts (Lee, 2005:290–295).

According to Caldwell (2000:28), museum marketing has been accorded a new status. This statement of Caldwell suggests that there has been an increased interest in marketing in the museum sector. This growing interest in museum marketing is in stark contrast to its dark history. This is clearly illustrated in Blackall and Meek's assertion (1992:51) that "marketing was once a dirty word in museum circles". The history of museum marketing dates back to 1975. Since 1975 museum marketing has undergone a number of changes with these changes being reflected in the different phases of its evolution. These phases include the foundation, professionalism and discovery phases (Rentschler, 2002:7). The foundation phase (1975–1984) was characterised by a focus on educating audiences while the professionalisation period (1985–1994) witnessed the establishment of marketing departments. During the discovery phase (1995–present) museums became more market orientated (Rentschler, 2002:7).

According to Falk and Sheppard (2006:44), "marketing is becoming an increasingly important part of the museum's core business strategy". In endorsing Falk and Sheppard's view (2006), Boorsma and Chiaravalloti (2010:297) assert that "arts marketing has evolved from a functional tool to a business philosophy". There are several reasons why museums have become market orientated including the fact that marketing may help museums to shake off negative perceptions about them, including the perception that museums are places in which old and boring stuff is stored. In addition, museums are under pressure to promote themselves in order to augment the interest in their market offering and, thereby, increase visitor numbers. Obviously, an increase in visitor numbers would translate into an increase in revenue. The changes in the technological environment are another good reason why museums should adopt marketing with public museums, in particular, having no other choice but to inform members of the public about their programmes. This stems from the fact that these museums are funded by the public and, thus, reciprocally, they should serve the interests of the public (Genoways and Ireland, 2003:247–249).

However, in spite of the growing interest in marketing, some museum officials still consider marketing as a concept that is alien to museums and, according to these museum officials, marketing is the domain of profit-seeking organisations. This view is shared by Talboys (2011:88) in a statement that "there is certainly a feeling among some that marketing is part of a commercial world that has little or nothing to do with museums". Moreover, there are museum officials who lament that the staff members at museums have had "little or no training in business or marketing" (Genoways and Ireland, 2003:247). This lack of training may be the reason why the marketing efforts of most museums leave much to be desired with Blackall and Meek (1992:99) claiming that "museum brochures are often tediously designed and distributed in a wrong way: exhibition posters are often sent to other museums.

The public media – press, broadcasting and television − are not always sufficiently assisted and motivated by the museums to place their contributions somewhere else than in a cultural programme with a small audience". Blackall and Meek's statement clearly indicates that museums are currently not making use of the publicity opportunities available and that they should; therefore, endeavour to elevate their profiles in the mass media by demonstrating the news value of their activities.

Another serious challenge facing museums arises from the fact that most museums have separate marketing and public relations departments. This separation is a cause for concern from a message consistency point of view as the separation may result in separate communication campaigns which may, in turn, be characterised by internal contradictions (Genoways and Ireland, 2003:247). In this section, the history of arts and museum marketing was outlined. The next section will focus on the meaning of the concept of "museum marketing".

Research approach

As indicated previously, the objective of the article is to propose marketing mix guidelines for museums. The article is informed by literature review. To this end, relevant books and articles were consulted.

Defining museum marketing

The American Marketing Association (AMA) (as quoted by Pride and Ferrel, 2010:4), defines marketing as a "process of creating, distributing, promoting and pricing goods, services and ideas to facilitate satisfying exchange relationships with customers and develop and maintain favourable relationships with stakeholders in a dynamic environment". Similarly, Kotler and Keller (2009:45) define marketing as "the art and science of choosing target markets and getting, keeping and growing customers through creating, delivering and communicating superior customer value". There is a range of items that may be marketed. These include goods, services, events, experiences, persons, places, properties, organisations, information and ideas (Kotler and Keller, 2009:46–47).

A museum is a tourism product and, therefore, it is important to look at the meaning of tourism marketing as a prelude to the discussion on museum marketing. Lumsdon (in Fyall and Garrod, 2005:44) defines tourism marketing as "the management process of anticipating and satisfying existing and potential visitors' wants more effectively than competitive suppliers or destinations". Lumsdon's definition suggests that, in terms of tourism marketing, the focus should be on the needs of the visitors.

According to Hausmann (2007:176), marketing is an integral aspect of the management of a cultural organisation and, as such, it may be defined as "a process of identifying potential target groups, and their needs and wants, pricing the products appropriately, communicating their appeal to target markets and delivering them to visitor's satisfaction".

Consistent with Hausmann's definition, Lewis (1991), as quoted by Mclean (1997:47), defines "museum marketing as a management process which confirms the mission of a museum or gallery and is responsible for the efficient identification, anticipation, and satisfaction of its users". This, in turn, implies that museums should identify the needs of both current and potential visitors and match those needs with an appropriate market offering. In addition, Lewis's definition demonstrates a shift from a non-profit organisation orientation to more market orientated thinking. Amenta (2010:25) adds that "marketing is considered as the managerial skill that can best help museums to accomplish their mission". Furthermore, marketing is important if museums are to achieve greater visibility (Gürel and Kavak, 2010:43). This section looked at the definition of the concept of "museum marketing" with the marketing concept having evolved over time. The next section investigates the marketing concept within the museum context.

The museum marketing concept

Mokwa, Dawson and Prieve (1984:xiv) are of the opinion that museums face marketing challenges such as attendance stimulation, audience development and membership development. Other challenges include expanded exposure to the world's cultural products and a decline in public funding (Kolb, 2005:20). Izquierdo and Samaniego (2007:809), Geissler, Rucks and Edison (2006:70) and Mottner and Ford (2008:179) argue that, as a result of the revenue squeeze, museums have been forced to adopt the marketing concept. Kotler, Bowen and Makens (2010:17) and Moore and Pareek (2010:21) define the marketing concept as a philosophy which

claims that organisational objectives may be realised only if the needs of the customers are met. The philosophies pertaining to the marketing concept include product orientation, sales orientation, marketing orientation and competitor orientation.

Product orientation is a philosophy that emphasises product improvements, regardless of the needs of customers (Kotler *et al.,* 2010:17). Accordingly, product-orientated museums emphasise the production of new cultural objects, regardless of the needs of visitors. On the other hand, sales-oriented museums employ a variety of communication techniques in order to attract visitors. Some of these techniques include subscription programmes and increasing the size and scope of the museum store operations (Middleton and Clarke, 2001:21).

In terms of a marketing philosophy, product development is informed by the needs of customers. In line with this philosophy, environmental scanning should precede the development of marketing strategies and that this environmental scanning should also involve both internal and external factors. Once the environment has been scanned, the marketer should select a segment of the market and develop a marketing mix that matches the segment selected. The marketing philosophy implies that museums should satisfy visitors through their product offering. Accordingly, more and more museums are becoming visitor-centred and, to this end, they conduct research into the needs of their visitors. This research usually takes the form of customer satisfaction surveys. The research findings are then used to inform the improvement of existing exhibitions and the development of new ones (Izquierdo and Samaniego, 2007:814).

The increased competition in the marketplace has exerted pressure on museums to become competitor orientated. Competitor orientation implies that a museum should develop some understanding of the weaknesses and strengths of other museums. There are four types of competitors, namely, preferential competitors, generic competitors, formal competitors and business competitors:

> *Preferential competitors*: Such competitors offer ways to satisfy all the desires that potential visitors could have (travelling, reading etc.).
> *Generic competitors*: Such competitors offer all the ways in which potential visitors may satisfy their cultural needs rather than visiting a museum.
> *Formal competitors*: Such competitors offer alternative services that could satisfy the type of culture selected (e.g. visiting an exhibition or a museum).
> *Business competition*: This refers to all the museums open for visitors in the same town as the specific museum (Izquierdo and Samaniego, 2007:814–815).

The previous sections presented the concept of marketing, with special reference to museum marketing. In the following sections the discussion will focus on the elements of the marketing mix within the context of museums.

The four 'C's of museum marketing

The history of the concept of marketing mix may be traced back to the 1950s. The concept was the brainchild of Neil Borden with the concept arising from the notion that the marketer is a mixer of ingredients. On the other hand, Vignali (2001:98) asserts that the four Ps – product, price, place and promotion – constitute the "the principal foundation on which a marketing plan is based". Amenta (2010:25) and Rentschler, Hede and White (2007:164) concur with Vignali's view that the four Ps are at the core of an organisation's marketing effort. However, scholars such as Goldsmith (1999:180) and Kasper, Van Helsdingen and Gabbott (2006:465) claim that there are additional variables in the marketing mix with these variables including procedures, physical assets, people, and personalisation. As indicated previously, the traditional marketing mix comprises the four Ps. However, contrary to the traditional view, Genoways and Ireland (2003:250) argue that the

traditional four Ps are seller centred. Accordingly, organisations such as museums should move to a more customer-centred approach with such an approach involving the four Cs, namely, customer value/product, convenience/place, customer cost/price and communication/promotion (Duncan, 2002:14).

Customer value

According to Silk (2006:10), customer value or product may be defined as "the total package of benefits obtained by the customer". Consistent with Silk's definition, Kotler *et al.* (2010:230) define a product as "anything that can be offered to a market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need". Significantly, a product is the most basic component of the marketing mix and represents the product features, package, brand name and post-sales services support.

In addition, the product is a key variable in terms of the marketing strategy in the sense that all the other marketing decisions relating to methods of distribution, marketing communication and prices are based on, and coordinated with, product decisions (Connett, 2004:7; Perreault and McCarthy, 2002:248; Assael, 1993:89). In an effort to create customer value, Kotler and Keller (2009:74) suggest that an organisation should develop an offering that matches the needs of the target market. In line with this view, Caullton (1998:76) advises that a museum should develop products that meet the ever-changing needs of all the segments of their target audience e .g The Newark Museum in New Jersey uses research to inform its product development processes**.**

A museum product may be defined as all aspects of the museum's operations with these aspects including parking, cleanliness of restrooms, appeal of the collections and special events (Black, 2005:269; Anderson, 2004:184). Kotler and Kotler (1998:174) add that a museum offering should include services such as food, shopping and seating. The New York City Metropolitan Museum of Art has a number of stores in the USA and Europe.

A museum is a cultural tourism product and encompasses three levels, namely, core product, tangible product and augmented product. Core product refers to those benefits that match the needs of visitors while tangible cultural product refers to the tangible cues pertaining to the cultural offering. On the other hand, augmented product entails the extra benefits derived from the cultural tourism product (Chan, 2009:177). The collection, together with its conversation and exhibition, comprise the core product of a museum while the other services provided by a museum comprise augmented products (McLean, 1997:106–107).

However, Kotler and Kotler (1998:175) recommend that a museum should not focus on collections only but also on other services. Accordingly, museums may also offer lectures, classes and tours while musical, theatrical and film programmes may also enhance a museum's offering. Educational workshops, for example, may help museums to diversify their product offering. Museums may also use social, recreational and celebratory events that are not related to their core business in order to attract audiences who would, otherwise, not be interested in their offering (Kotler and Kotler, 1998:181). In addition, in order to meet the ever-changing needs of their target audience, museums should engage in improving their existing exhibitions and programmes. However, they should also develop new exhibitions and programmes as these will assist the museums to attract new segments of the market (Kotler and Kotler, 1998:182). Kotler and Kotler (1998:182) further state that "great museum exhibitions offer visitors transcendent experiences that take them outside the routines of everyday life and transport them into new and wonderful worlds of beauty, thought and remembrance". Courvoisier and Courvoisier (2007:193) concur with Kotler and Kotler (1998) to the effect that the use of objects of nature, culture, history, science

and arts help museums to offer satisfactory experiences to visitors and it is these unique experiences that serve as a draw card to visitors. However, Rentschler, Radbourne, Carr and Rickard (2001:118) are of the view that museums have shifted focus from product development to audience development. In order to increase the customer value museums such the Walker Art centre in Minneapolis, Minnesota in the USA give young visitors an opportunity to work with collections and art thereby making them an active audience.

According to McLean (1997:106–107), a museum's product offering is more "psychological than physical", with this assertion suggesting that the museum's market offering is not tangible, despite the fact that the provision of this market offering is made possible by tangible cues. Despite the fact that museums sell intangible products the quality of their services is determined by tangible cues such as physical facilities, equipment and personnel. For example, if the museum bathrooms are dirty, visitors to the museum may develop negative perceptions about the quality of the museum itself and this, in turn, may lead to negative experiences (Genoways and Ireland, 2003:251). As a typical service, museum visits are characterised by inseparability. This means they are produced and consumed at the same time. In the case of museums, it is not possible for the visit to the museum to take place until the visitor has arrived. In other words, museum visits require the active participation of visitors. Furthermore, in a museum, visitors are supposed to move around freely in order to enjoy the exhibitions of their choice (Black, 2005:84; Lagrosen, 2003:134).

Cost

According to Du Toit, Erasmus and Strydom (2009:335), cost or price refers to "the exchange value of a product or service". Connett, (2004:9) and Kotler and Keller (2009:161) maintain that customer cost or price includes the monetary, time and psychological costs of acquiring a particular product. The concept of price or cost carries different labels, including rent, tuition, fares, fees, rates, tolls, retainers and wages (Kotler and Keller, 2009:416; Rentschler, Hede and White, 2007:165). According to Anderson (2004:184), in the museum context, price refers to both the admission and the membership fees.

In view of the fact that price exerts a major influence on buyer choice (Van der Walt *et al.*, 1996:442–443), it is recommended that a museum's admission fees should be in line with the mission of the museum. For example, a museum of which the purpose is to serve children from a poor community would not be able to charge high admission fees and still realise the purpose of its existence (Genoways and Ireland, 2003:252). For example, the Iziko Museum in South Africa charges discounted fees because it is a public museum In addition, Caullton (1998:76) recommends that a museum should set admission fees appropriate to the ability of target visitors to pay and in accordance with the financial objectives of the organisation. Kotler and Kotler (1998:266) are of the opinion that there are alternatives to charging admission fees. These alternatives include "charge the same price to every visitor, charge different prices to different classes, establish a membership programme, request visitors to contribute whatever they wish, and charge a price, but establish one or few free days". According to Camarero and Garrido (2011:269), in order to attract and retain visitors, museums may offer incentives .These incentives may be in the form of trust-related benefits (maintaining long-term relationships), social benefits (personal relationship and personal recognition) and preferential benefits such as discounts.

Convenience

According to Connett (2004:10), convenience or place refers to the distribution of a product to the final consumer. Connett's assertion implies that place, as an element of the marketing mix,

involves the customer's access to the product offering of an organisation (Shaw and Morris, 2000:12). Most museums are located in the central business districts of major cities. Regrettably, this trend tends to exclude those people who live on the outskirts of the cities while it is of special note that these people are usually poor members of the community who do not have the means to travel and then still afford to buy cultural offerings (Genoways and Ireland, 2003:252; McLean, 1997:129).

Notwithstanding their overconcentration in the central business districts of major cities, Kotler and Kotler (1998:193) maintain that "museums have the opportunity to deliver their offerings and services far beyond the bounds of that physical structure". Hence, in order to increase the convenience of their product offering, museums may establish branches at shopping malls. Significantly, museums may also use travelling exhibitions in order to reach those people who live in far-flung areas. In addition, technological advancement has meant that the use of virtual exhibits is on the increase, while mail order or online catalogues have broadened the international audience's access to museum offerings (Anderson, 2004:184). In addition, Kotler and Kotler (1998:203) suggest that museums should lend their collections to other museums, thus enhancing the access to their collections. There are number of examples of museums that have come up with initiatives to increase convenience. In South Africa, the Ditsong Museum is a cluster of museums located in different places in the Gauteng Province. In the USA, the Freer and Sackler Galleries has an online shop. The Gandhi Memorial Museum in India uses books, a website and audio-visual material as its distribution strategies.

Communication

Kotler and Keller (2009:74) suggest that an organisation should communicate the value of its offering by using promotional tools. They further define promotion "as a means whereby an organisation can establish dialogue and build relationships with consumers". In the same vein, Clow and Baack (2004:5) assert that communication/promotion is a process "of transmitting and processing information".

The marketing communication mix comprises eight elements, namely, advertising, sales promotions, events and experiences, public relations, direct marketing, interactive marketing and word of mouth (Kotler and Keller, 2009:7). According to Duncan (2002:20), other marketing communication functions include marketing public relations, merchandising, point of sale purchase materials, packaging, licensing, e-commerce, internal marketing, trade shows and customer service while, according to Morrison (2002:373), the goals of the elements of promotion are to inform, persuade and remind customers and prospects about an organisation's market offering.

Hooper-Greenhill (1994 in McLean, 1997:129) maintains that "communication in the museum includes those aspects of the institution that impinge either on the museum's image or on the general experience of the visit". A museum's promotional tools may include annual reports, newsletters, brochures, the museum website, public service announcements, print advertising, news releases, feature articles, letters to editors, documentary and public education programming, film and slide shows, speaker bureaus, bulletin boards, posters and flyers, speciality advertising (t-shirts, balloons, pens and calendars), classified advertising, chambers of commerce, promotions, public address systems, billboards, corporate sponsored advertising, personal contacts, business cards, and service clubs (Anderson, 2004:184).

Traditionally, an organisation is a source of information about its market offering. In contrast to this traditional view, consumers are, increasingly, obtaining information from their fellow

consumers. Consumer-generated information sources include online media which, in turn, include search engines, e-mail, web logs, chartrooms, personal mobile communications and social networking (Nandan, 2005:269). There are different categories of social media, namely, macro blogs (Word Press, Blogger, BlogSpot), micro blogs (Twitter, Yammer, Yelp), content sharing sites (YouTube, Flickr, Delicious) and social network sites (Facebook, MySpace, Orkut) (Bodle, 2011:112). Significantly, the evolution of the internet has made it possible for museums to reach visitors beyond the borders of their countries. This development means that museums have a bigger challenge of meeting the needs of a more diverse target audience. However, the opportunities to interact with visitors are abound with the result that the museums are in a better position to understand visitors' needs and to translate them into the right market offering (Kotler, Kotler and Kotler 2008:34). Museums are such Great Britain' Tate are using digital media effectively. The museum uses websites, e-mail, social media, online advertising and word of mouth.

Word of mouth communication is becoming an important tool in a museum promotional toolbox. Fonthill, a museum that is located in Dolylestown in the USA uses word of mouth to engage community organisations and neighbours. Kotler and Keller (2009:512) define word of mouth as "people to people oral, written or electronic communications that relate to the merits or experiences of purchasing or using products or services". According to Grönroos (2007:308), word of mouth refers to messages "about the organization, its credibility, and trustworthiness, its ways of operating, its goods and services and so on communicated from one person to another".

Word of mouth is an effective communication tool. In addition, not only is it effective but it is also cost effective. Satisfied visitors are a museum's best advertisement as satisfied visitors tend to spread the message about their wonderful experience at a museum to both friends and relatives. As an intermediary source of information about a museum's market offering friends and relatives are deemed to be credible sources (Grönroos, 2007:308; Genoways and Ireland, 2003:267). Harrison and Shaw (2004:23) agree that word of mouth advocacy is an important communication tool for both museums and for the arts world in general. Employee messages in the form of grapevines and rumour mills may undo the positive effects of planned messages. In order to limit the effect of employee gossip, an organisation should use internal marketing in order to transform its employees into advocates of the organisation (Duncan, 2002:135). In addition, McLean (1997:21) suggests that museum directors should build personal relationships with influential players as these personal relations may translate into benefits for the museum. For example, these influential people may assist the museum to raise funds.

In order to ensure message consistency and maximum communication satisfaction, museums should deploy communication tools in an integrated manner. For example, a museum can launch a communication campaign through a media conference (public relations) and sustain it through advertising (marketing). Therefore, museums should develop integrated communication strategies with elements of the various communication disciplines.

Conclusion and some general recommendations

The aim of the article was to propose marketing mix guidelines to empower museums to achieve greater visibility thereby achieve their missions. The four 'C's of museum marketing are customer value, cost, convenience and communication. In order to create customer value, museums should develop product offerings that match the ever-changing needs of all the segments of their target audience. In terms of determining costs, museums should take into account their missions with some museums having to serve public interests. In an effort to increase convenience, museums should use travelling exhibitions and virtual exhibits. Marketing communication tools should be

deployed in an integrated manner to ensure message consistency and maximum impact. This article has provided a marketing mix framework to guide museums on how to package and sell their value propositions more effectively.

The need for advertising in tourist publications and in regional tourist boards, must also target specific segments in which the museum is interested such as, tour operators, schools, and the day tripper market. While television advertising is important, it remains costly. Nonetheless, if possible, it is an effective way of reaching a large audience quickly. This aspect is important to further investigate. Museums should then also be using local radio stations to raise awareness. What is highly effective in developed nations is the use of leaflet racks at airports and in hotels. In addition, effective websites provide a great opportunity for very detailed and current news and events.

One of the most critical aspects to consider in greater detail, which is also cost effective in marketing an attraction is the publicity added by free media coverage. Thus, strong media relations is very important to build with journalists, news editors, feature editors, photographers and even cameramen working for the local media. Press releases on aspects of interest should be sent to the media regularly and efforts must be made to involve a museum more in community activities. Equally, promotional and publicity material must be well designed. When it comes to the tourism industry, it is critical to develop good working relationships and personal contacts with all stakeholders, as these will aid a museum to develop a robust positive image in the minds of others who affect the business. Given that the first point of contact for visitors, is the reception area facility, which set the tone for the rest of a tourists visit, this area needs to be very professionally operated. The reception provides the primary welcome for the visitor and useful and interesting guide books should be available to provide information on a museum. Professional staff training is essential to improve job satisfaction and customer service. The use of retailing offers such as the sale of souvenirs carrying the name of the museum is useful, since these are seen by others and create much needed interest in local heritage.

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