ABSTRACT

Library exhibition is an aspect of public relation services in the library. Some big libraries have relations units which oversee their public relation aspect. But in most academic libraries, the Readers’ Services Department handles issues relating to public relations. Library exhibition is a common feature in libraries. The University of Lagos Library holds an exhibition once a month and patrons are advised to visit and browse. They could sign the register. A twelve month period of library exhibition in the university is the focus of this paper. It was found that more patrons signed the register for Arts, Business Administration, Social Science, and Law. Few came from Science, Education and Environmental Science. There were patrons who visited the exhibition is popular among the patrons and it provides some feedback on their needs with regards to collection development.

INTRODUCTION

Organizations usually employ public relations to tell the story of their vision, mission and service to their stakeholders. University libraries, no doubt, employ public relations skill to get information across to their communities. In some large libraries like the National library and big public libraries, a separate department is responsible for their public relations activities. What some libraries call marketing, others call public relations. Libraries that have such activities regard them as important and effective.

Not all university libraries can afford the luxury of crating a public relations unit. They may not be able to afford the expenses involved. The Readers’ Services Department usually performs the duties of public relations with the cooperation of other departments within the library. There is no doubt that library exhibition is a part of public relations. Smyka’s (1999) explanation of public relations for libraries is instructive in this regard:
“Public relations is like more than a plan of action the seeks to disseminate public information for an organization… part of every library’s mission I would argue is to first understand and then to transmit the idea that its services are unique and integral not only to the quality of the community. It is also vital that library stakeholders understand that the absence of these services would be catastrophic to the community in a practical and symbolic way” (Smyka, 1999).

In a nutshell an exhibition can be defined as what is displayed or held forth for the Public a display of works of arts, skills, pictures, books and other materials Libraries usually hold exhibitions for a variety of reasons. These may include the following:

i. Exhibition of new materials stocked by the library. These may be books, journals or new technological materials to inform the patrons about their existence in the library.

ii. Libraries can hold exhibitions to mark important events and bring to the attention of their patrons important documents, pictures and other materials associated with that particular event.

iii. Libraries can hold exhibitions to call attention to important issues of the moment. For example, the menace which HIV/AIDS pose to humanity and to the local community deserves the attention of all. The library can call the community’s attention to it through exhibition of literature on this.

BRIEF OVERVIEW

Research conducted by American Library Association indicates that libraries are popular but they are often taken for granted. They found that while libraries were ubiquitous, they were not often visible. The report encouraged libraries to embark on public outreach strategies and make use of abundant materials on the ALA Website for free downloading and individual libraries can customize them to help them conduct their own marketing and public relations. The libraries should find appropriate answers to these questions:

(a) Is your library responsive to the feedback of your patrons?
(b) Do your policies meet your community needs?
(c) Is your programming appropriate for your patrons? Interesting? Diverse?
(d) Do you communicate your programming, your purpose and your aspirations for community involvement in a simple and direct way that invites participation?
(e) Do your patrons understand that ‘that’ library gains little without the entire support of their community and “their” library exists to serve their multiplicity of interests and needs” (Southern, 2004).
Library exhibitions and comments by library patrons on these exhibitions can provide some answers to some of the questions raised above. It has been reported how exhibitions of treasure brought attention to libraries. The Treasures Exhibitions in Australia attracted over 115,000 visitors. This was more than the previous best attendance of about 43,000 for the ‘World Upside Down and Paradise Possessed’ exhibition when they closed (Young, 2002).

The experience of Australia discussed above emphasizes the importance of exhibition. The treasures exhibition provided people with what they wanted to see and gave them the attention and publicity they would not ordinarily get.

Libraries usually provide a space for free display and posters. What should be noted is that the materials allowed for display must satisfy some criteria. They must be legal, decent, honest and truthful. They must be prepared with a sense of responsibility to consumer and society.

There must also be some guidelines which can include the following:

(i) How many posters can you take? It is best to take one copy for display.
(ii) The size of the materials to be displayed must be indicated.
(iii) The length of time when such materials can be displayed.
(iv) There may be a waiting list as all posters received may not be displayed at the same time.

The library should have a display policy. It can receive materials on education, politics, religion, culture and others. It is in the interest of the library to accept materials that fit into its policy and are produced in accordance with minimum standards for such display. Materials that can constitute a breach of the peace should be avoided. Information on those who provide such materials for display must be made available. When violent or abusive language is used, the material must not be used (Ascham, 2005).

The University of Waterloo has designated a member of staff who would be responsible for ensuring that the exhibition policy is implemented in accordance with the operational practice of their strategic plan. (University of Waterloo, 2004).

All these point our attention to the fact that library exhibitions must maintain a minimum standard to ensure that we obtain useful results and responses from library patrons.
BRIEF BACKGROUND OF THE UNIVERSITY OF LAGOS LIBRARY

The University of Lagos was established in 1962 and it has ten faculties including the College of Medicine. It has three libraries within the system. These are the Main Library, Education Library and Medical Library. The faculties are Law, Arts, Science, Social Science, Business Administration, Environmental Science, Engineering, Education, Pharmacy and Post Graduate School.

The Medical Library caters for the College of Medicine and has some autonomy. The Education Library is under the Main Library. Materials are acquired and processed for the library. Materials related to the programmes run by the University except medicine are acquired by the Main Library.

The library occasionally mounts exhibitions on important events or for topical issues that are of interest to the institution and the nation. There is a special space designated for library exhibition and this is used for all types of exhibitions and for the display of all sorts of informative materials. The library has a permanent stand for the exhibition of new books. But once a month the library mounts elaborate exhibitions for three days to appraise library patrons of materials that have been acquired, processed and ready for patrons’ use.

METHODOLOGY

There is a notebook placed on the exhibition stand and visitors can make their comments there. The comments by library patrons for a period of one year on the relevance and use of the materials are analyzed with a view to finding out what the patrons felt and their expectations. Exhibitions mounted on special occasions or events in the library are not covered in this paper.

WHY LIBRARY EXHIBITION?

Exhibitions of library materials to users are a Powerful means of advertising the services and educational values of the university in general and the library in particular. It is done in an attempt to present to users recent accessions of books, manuscripts, CDs, etc.

The University of Lagos Library attaches much importance to publicizing its collections. For example, the Cataloguing Section produces regularly the “Library Notes” which announces the arrival of new books and current periodicals. It is a medium to inform the library users about the latest additions to the library collections. The Library Notes are distributed to academic department and members of the Library Committee as a current awareness services. Besides, the library organizes orientation programmes for freshmen and makes available library guides in the form of handbooks to them.
No doubt, publicity is embedded in exhibitions, in that it provides some information to win public interest and awareness. In the University of Lagos Library, materials are frequently mounted. Exhibitions commence during the third weeks of very month for three days. Some new books are permanently displayed at the exhibitions arena as a way of creating awareness for library users. A librarian oversees the exhibition every month.

There is always a visitor’s register at the exhibition arena for them to write down their names, faculties and comments. Table I below shows number of visitors who registered their names per month. It should however, be noted that most of the visitors just admired and browsed through the books.
### TABLE I
VISITORS WHO SIGNED EXHIBITION REGISTER
FROM JULY 2003 TO DECEMBER 2004

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MONTH/YEAR</th>
<th>NO. OF VISITORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>July, 2003</td>
<td>82</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>August, 2003</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>September, 2003</td>
<td>57</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2003</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November, 2003</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>January, 2004</td>
<td>58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>February, 2004</td>
<td>46</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>March, 2004</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>April, 2004</td>
<td>Holiday</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>June, 2004</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>October, 2004</td>
<td>63</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>November, 2004</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>December, 2004</td>
<td>Holiday – No exhibition</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>623</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### TABLE II
VISITORS BY FACULTIES

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>FACULTY</th>
<th>NO. OF VISITORS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Law</td>
<td>64</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Environmental Science</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Arts</td>
<td>71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Sciences</td>
<td>17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Education</td>
<td>11</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Business Administration</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Engineering</td>
<td>45</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Faculty of Social Science</td>
<td>74</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>360</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Statistics shows that more students visited the exhibition stand from Arts, Law, Social Sciences, and Engineering while only a few did from Science, Education and Environmental Science.

We provided below a sample of the comments from the patrons. Most of the visitors did not sign the register it must be noted.

**COMMENTS FROM VISITORS**

“According to Chief Obafemi Awolowo, any nation that is starved of books, especially good books, will suffer from intellectual stagnation, malnutrition. This exhibition will go a long way to correct this anomaly”.

Okuchmiya Stephen  
300L, Faculty of Law

“This is an innovation of the decade. Please, display more books on Public Relations, Mass Communication and Broadcasting”.

Ayandélé Bola  
200L, Social Sciences

“Very good for exposing and arousing interest in the love and culture of book reading. This should be a constant and continuous event”.

Kehinde, P. D.  
Faculty of Engineering

“This exhibition is quite encouraging. Even if one cannot write a book, one should be able to know those available. Book is power”.

Nwigwe, Cletus O.  
Faculty of Law

“This exhibition is a welcome development at least it helps us to find new books on Social Science by intellectual authors and for reference purposes”.

Oderinde, A. T.  
Faculty of Social Science

“The books exhibited reflected on the courses run in the University. It’s a pity that books on Geology, Mining and Mineral processing are not displayed. We will very much appreciate the presence of books in these disciplines”.

Iloba, Egunna  
Met & Mat Engineering
“These are current and updated books. More should be made available in the library to
students for reference to help the less privileged. There should also be maximum security
for the books”.

Akinsanya, Akindele
Architecture Year 1

“The exhibition has been able to project some unknown writers. However, I noticed
there are call marks on the books but I can’t find copies on the shelves. Please let’s see
the books on the shelves”.

Odugbesan, Adedapo
300L English/Arts

“I love this innovation. This is an awareness programme but there is no text on Actuarial
Sciences. We the year 2 students of this University need a Maths textbook that gives
good treatment to functions and series and differentiability”.

Jagunlana, Lanre
200L, Actuarial Sciences

Books exhibited are recent accessions/titles just acquired and processed with
classification number for the library. These books are due for shelving two weeks after
the exhibition. Readers are expected to note the call number to access and borrow them
if necessary. The regular exhibition of new books has alerted the readers to what is
available to them from time to time.

CONCLUSION

The monthly library exhibition has created for the library a forum to interact with
patrons. It affords library users the opportunity to see what the library has recently
acquired and which can be borrowed or consulted for teaching, study and research. The
exhibition affords a feedback on the library collection development with a view to
assisting library management to determine whether users’ needs are being met or not. Using the Online Public Access Catalogue (OPAC) close to the old manual card
catalogue, the patrons can access the materials already captured in the database.

From the comments made by some of the visitors, the library should acquire more books
for these subject areas: Geology, Marine Science, Quantity Surveying, Actuarial
Sciences, Broadcasting and Geographical Information Science.

With the Online Public Access Cataloguing (OPAC), searching becomes easy as
cataloguers key the titles in as soon as they are processed to add to the cataloguing
database.
The University does not have a programme on Geology, but there are programmes on Marine Science, Quantity Surveying and Actuarial Science. These are new programmes and the library is trying to acquire materials in these areas. There is need for user education programme and feedback from the patrons to improve library services generally. The monthly library exhibition has provided a fillip to the book-starved students who receive new books with joy.

REFERENCES


