

New forms of library marketing based on example of word of mouth marketing. The experience of Polish libraries

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Abstract: The paper presents basic rules of word of mouth marketing. It describes the importance of this tool on the book market, and illustrates the possibilities offered by libraries. It discusses briefly the primary role of the sender's message, the types of messages, channels, customers, and the influence of information on the word of mouth marketing. The paper presents also the results of the research.

Keywords: word of mouth marketing, library marketing, promotion services, communication

1. Introduction

Library marketing is presently being dynamically developed and is gaining the interest among librarians. Recently there were introduced some new library marketing methods, i.e. word of mouth marketing. The effectiveness of marketing action largely depends on the way of spreading information. The speed of transfer, kind of used medium and character of transmitted data play a significant role. Apart from the instruments of influence, which have the task of creating positive opinions about library among its every user separately, there are a lot of mechanisms of creating opinions as a result of overlapping group processes.

In a classical marketing, the basis of any propaganda action is one-way, librarian-reader relation. In a classical model it is assumed, that the majority of opinions, beliefs and feelings of the reader depends on the relationship with the service provider – the librarian. Nevertheless, numerous investigations done in a different types of organisations indicate (Balter, Butman 2007, Huges 2008, Rosen 2003), that as a result of intensifying the marketing actions, the clients more and more often come into a wide and complicated network of relations between themselves, which leads to transmitting the information about the service. Its consequence is conferring rank upon the opinions of other users and

limitation of the importance of transfers, whose addressers are the service providers. Such a phenomenon, tested within the theory of the website transfer of information, was called with the name of *word of mouth marketing*.

2. Word of mouth marketing - definition

Malcolm Gladwell, who presented the mechanism of spreading information in social websites based on the spreading of contagious disease theory at the end of the twentieth century in his publication „The Tipping Point”, is considered to be the inventor of the word of mouth marketing theory. In Poland, people started to be widely interested in the word of mouth marketing when the first professional company providing services in this range was founded in 2004. „The marketing lexicon” by Iwona Kienzler describes the word of mouth marketing as „skilful and thought use of the website of human relationships to the marketing strategies” (Kienzler 2008, p. 129-130). According to the definition of Emanuel Rosen, many years’ researcher of this phenomenon, Word of Mouth Marketing (WOM) is: „a sum of all the comments about a particular product, pronounced by people in a particular period” (Rosen 2003, p. 20). WOM is also sometimes called buzz marketing from the English word „buzz” meaning renown or viral. Buzz marketing is more often associated with the set of actions having the aim of become renown among advertising brand or services, but WOM with creating systems of authentic recommendations of the pleased clients (Huges 2008, p. 8). Viral marketing is a system, in which a message with a content specially prepared and transferred to a receiver is created. If the message takes his interest, for example due to some interesting information, form or aesthetic feeling, it can be transferred further (Balter, Butman 2007, p. 51). Classical word of mouth marketing is based on a traditional costly advertisement in a smaller extent, and on a bigger extent it focuses on an original, interesting and attracting attention idea or a concept, which are to cause renown and numerous comments about the service or the product.

According to some theories the word of mouth marketing is a leftover of the primary human instinct, which ordered people functioning in one group to inform each other about the threats (for instance appearing in the neighbourhood predators – and in today's times for example about a defective product), and about the possibilities of using convenient and attractive conditions (for example it used to be the information about a bison herd appearing in the nearest distance – today the messages about a new interesting service or book etc.). Instincts, which used to serve the survival of species, today are used in the communication processes of the word of mouth marketing.

Due to an instant growth of the meaning of the word of mouth marketing, the very same phenomenon is currently tested and subjected to numerous analyses. It is assumed that the instant growth of its role is caused by three main reasons. Among them are:

- an omnipresent accumulation of information, especially transfers of an advertisement character, which are „filtered” and not assimilated by the brain (generally, it is estimated that the consumers do not notice 85% of the advertisements transmitted by the media (Frołow 2007, p. 199);
- a decrease in the confidence to the traditional advertisement and sceptic attitude towards the promises of the service providers and producers, which are often fulfilled with a delay or not at;
- an increase of the costs of a traditional advertisement;
- bigger possibilities of efficient communication between clients in spite of the language, age, geographical or cultural differences, which is influenced by the spreading of the Internet and mobile telephony.

For example, the readers on forums devoted to literature can exchange their opinions about the books they read, not knowing each other in person, and even living on different continents; in a smaller extent, insinuating with the advertisement of a publisher, and in a bigger extent suggesting with people who have already read a particular title and relying on traditional promises for a great reading.

The channels of the flow of information can be very varied in the word of mouth marketing and they depend on the mean, which the clients have. The opinions can be transferred both verbally and during a personal contact, and by the means of an e-mail, telephone, letter and many other ways. Anna Aniszewska and Katarzyna Kant have made an interesting analysis of the new forms of marketing communication between librarians and readers in their paper (Aniszewska, Kant 2008).

Another feature distinguishing the word of mouth marketing from the traditional marketing is a small possibility of controlling the transfer of information. Thanks to invisible websites of transferring information, the transfers reach the place, where thanks to the traditional marketing they would not have a chance of spreading. As far as in the classical marketing the sender has an influence on the content of the messages, in the word of mouth marketing he does not have such an influence. This is why there is a positive and negative word of mouth marketing. The positive word of mouth marketing appears when the users evaluate favourably the actions of the library and they are pleased with its services, so when the „noise” has a positive connotation. According to this, one of the basic rules is not to induce expectations by the service offer, but only such that will be able to realize, so as not to cause the feeling of disappointment among the visitors of the library because this may become a reason for numerous negative opinions and comments. In some trades, the clients get used to such exaggerated advertisement, that in situation when a product has fulfilled or exceeded their expectations, they immediately and willingly share the positive impressions with others. Generally, messages discussing the taboo topics, topics touching some mysterious events, revealing secrets, arousing indignation or humour or such that are unusual in a way are also spread faster.

One of the attempts of controlling the word of mouth marketing is examining the mood of clients. In order to do so, comments on the discussion forums are analysed or also special web pages with opinions, where the clients can comment freely. On many Internet services, the opinions are marked and arranged separately, according to the degree of utility (popularity), and the extreme comments, which are exaggeratedly enthusiastic or critical, are isolated on separate subpages. Many organisations, including libraries, decide to carry on the company's blogs, or to introduce their employees to closed forums, on which they are to analyse the moods of potential clients and the promote company. The word of mouth marketing spreads better if the employees have a good contact with the potential clients. For instance, in academic libraries it is easy to notice that the students more willingly use the services and advice of the librarians at a similar (or close) age, who have related habits, customs, beliefs, or even the way of expressing themselves. The advice, which is put forward by such a staff, meets greater acceptance and understanding.

3. Word of mouth marketing book market and libraries

The word of mouth marketing is a mechanism which more and more often occurs among the users of libraries. The opinions, which are uttered by the readers, may be an extremely useful source of information concerning the service offer of the library and its image. The very same books are included in the group of products, which are attractive for the clients and induce vivid sensations that are a base of a successful word of mouth marketing and easily subjected to its mechanisms (Rosen 2003, p. 42).

When analysing the scale of intensity of the word of mouth marketing in the context of book market and the library services, it is essential to take into account the role of some important factors: the type of service, which the library wishes to promote; the category of receivers of the word of mouth marketing; the type of communication interactions overlapping between the potential users of the promoted service; the strategies adopted in the library-information sector and the ways of action in the marketing campaign.

The type of service, which a library wishes to promote by the means of the word of mouth marketing, has a considerable significance for the process of transmitting information. The opinions about the services known to the readers from other libraries or little innovative, not having an effect of novelty or surprise, appear less often, they are more predictable and they do not arouse interest. The services, which are new in the whole information trade or which arouse controversy, cause a wave of increased comments and agitation. A good example is the application of OPAC catalogues in a libraries. The first libraries introducing this system were endangered with many various comments, both positive and negative, related to the fear and hopes of the readers. Nowadays, offering this service by the newly founded libraries or by the libraries scarcely going through the process of computerization does not arouse so many emotions

and it takes place mostly without echoing much. A totally different reaction of the environment may be expected in the case of offering a rare or controversial service. An example can be one of the Silesian libraries, which, as a promotion of the library, published information in the city newspaper on the April Fool's day that on that day the librarians will serve the readers wearing only a thong. As one could expect, the information caused a vivid discussion of the supporters of the proposed solution as well as of the outraged opponents. The library achieved the intended effect in the form of interesting the environment with its services.

The second extremely important element, which has a significant meaning for the effectiveness of the word of mouth marketing, is the group of receivers of the library service. It should be clearly specified to whom a particular service is addressed and what the marketing messages concerning it are, and in a situation when the target group has a highly heterogeneous character, the process of segmentation should be carried out. This can make the identification of the communication habits of the chosen group of people possible, because these habits may sometimes differ from one another, so separate marketing strategies are required. For instance, a process in which a group of students inform each other and receive an education as learning from distance service may be run in a totally different way than when a group of elderly readers regularly meeting each other in a library classes of the University of the Third century or „senior cafe”.

The degree of integration of the library users and the frequency of contacts, in which the information about a service is transferred, are also important. The more frequent the contacts between the users, the bigger probability of exchanging opinion, so there will exist the word of mouth marketing. It should be underlined, that among the individuals there are significant differences in the degree of leadership in creating opinions. In the social groups there are people who particularly often contact with others (many information transfers), and people whose opinions are valued more than the beliefs of an average service user. These are people who have an authority, they have an influence on other people's decisions, and they are called in the communication theory the leaders of opinion. The leaders of opinion constitute from 10 to 15% of the society (Rosen 2003, p. 127). Those can be people with a big social reliance or experts in a field, whose opinion is appreciated particularly in this sphere. For instance, for a reader buying a book for a child, during the process of making choice of the title, both the opinion of an educator, and a statement told by a tv presenter, who has trust and sympathy despite not being a specialist, may be of big importance. A good example of a leader of opinion, who has affected the increase a sale of a book, is Oprah Winfrey, who took the patronage over the book club promoting „The book of Ruth” by Jane Hamilton. It is estimated that as a result of the presenter's engagement, the sale of the title increased from 50 thousand to more than one million of copies (Rosen 2003, p. 185).

When planning actions under the word of mouth marketing, it is essential not to focus them only on individuals, who are not opinion leaders and have a limited web of contacts, do not share their views, so they are not an active source of information.

To the characteristic features of opinion-creating people Emanuel Rosen included: openness for newness, numerous contacts with other people, frequent travels, both private and business (trainings, conferences which have an influence on a better knowledge of the market and openness for newness), continual willingness to gain new knowledge and information about new products and services, easiness in communication, including transferring information to others (Rosen 2003, p. 70-73).

In order to identify the opinion leaders various research tools can be used. The basic scientific methods are: the sociometric method, the ranking method and the self-determination method.

After the identification of the opinion leaders in the surroundings of the library, it is beneficial to keep in touch with them systematically and strengthen the ties with the library. Many libraries regularly invite such people to take part in a different kinds of parties, events, correspond vividly and creates database including personified profiles and contact details.

Moreover, many librarians and booksellers appreciate big trust among the readers and are believed to be opinion-creating people (opinion leaders) when choosing literature, which facilitates the fast spread of the word of mouth marketing thanks to these people. According to the research made by an author in 2009, and 2010, in the Tri-city libraries of different types, among more than 400 readers librarians are considered to have very big knowledge about literature (100% of answers). 90% of readers take the advice of librarians in the choice of a book, during the visit in a library. 86% of them are pleased with the choice of the book recommended by a librarian, and 65%, without any objections and doubts (as they write "blindly") borrows the books recommended by the library worker. It is also pleasant that librarians are considered by many readers' authorities, who are well aware of the book market, to which one can have a bigger trust than to friends or people from the family (79%). However, analysing the presented results, one should remember that these are beliefs representative for a group of reading people, who use the library services. Readers, who do not visit libraries or people, who do not read, may have a little different beliefs, possibly less beneficial for librarians.

The degree of the receiver's satisfaction influences the way of information about a service or a product spreading. It is estimated that an average user, pleased with the service, shares his or her observations with three people on average, and when he or she is not pleased – this figure increases to

seven. Of course, these are estimated values, as it was said before, the people, who have more contacts, transfer a bigger amount of information. The research also indicates that the brand, in which the transaction was made, is also important. The more expensive a purchase or a service, the more often we discuss a made decision. In the food industry, an average client comments of a made purchase with 4-5 people if it was successful, and with 9-10 people if there were problems. Analogically, for the automotive industry, those values are 8 and 16 (Rosen 2003, p. 60-61). The Technical Research Programs estimates that on every complaint of a client there accrue 26 unpleased clients, who, in spite of their disappointment, do not inform about it in any way (Huges 2008, p. 236).

In the case of the library services, information spreads in a similar way and it depends on the rank, which the users gave to it. So, according to the research made in one of academic libraries, the information about high library punishments is transferred by the readers to 9 people on average, about buying a wanted for an exam reading by the library – to 12 people, and about the appearance of the order of foreign literature service – only to 2 people (the research made on a group of 324 readers of an academic library by the author of the report in 2009 and 2010).

The last essential element of the word of mouth marketing are the patterns of behaviour and procedures of actions, characteristic for different fields. Also, in the library-information sector some mechanisms of action are preferred, which are mentioned for example while preparing marketing strategies. For instance, it is unacceptable to promote children library, financed from public sources, using offensive, unmoral, brutal or other contents, which are incompatible with the widely accepted morality. What is interesting, directing the same contents to juveniles, for example by computer games producers, may not rise a common dissatisfaction, because the sender is a self-sufficient and self-financed organisation from the entertainment field.

The force of the word of mouth marketing is primarily the belief that thanks to other people's opinions we minimise the risk connected with using a service or a product (which is usually connected with the necessity to incurring expenditures of different kinds: financial, for example while buying a book, time, for example for arriving to the library and browsing its collection of books, or even emotional risk, in the sense of disappointing with a reading, after which the reader expected much better impressions etc.). Everybody has a sort of threshold, which indicates how many have to behave in a particular way or make a particular decision so that he behaves in the same way. Of course, this threshold changes, depending on the rank of the decision - with a different risks when purchasing a book or a luxury car. This is why the amount of people, who tell to a client some positive opinions concerning this two products, has to be different, so the decision about the purchase or a rent is made. Other important elements influencing the effectiveness of marketing transfer is the degree of

confidence, which we feel to a person sharing an opinion and the size of emotional cargo (even if the most reliable person, with a big authority, will not persuade us to read a book if he or she speaks about with indifference).

Of course, the word of mouth marketing can be a source of a book's success on the market, providing that the very same book will be characterised by appropriate literary qualities. It is similar in the case of library services, which can have user's interest, but only when they are interesting and attractive. However, there are both library services and books which, in spite of the fact that they could achieve success and become bestsellers, do not cross the borderline of the narrow group of receivers. The quality of a product or a service does not mean the same as achieving a success on the market, although it facilitates it without any doubts. It is widely believed that the word of mouth marketing is multiplied by any untypical, unconventional and unexpected behaviour. The editorial advertisement mechanisms and examples of unconventional campaigns, which promote books on the Polish market, were more widely and unusually interestingly described by Kuba Frolow, in his book entitled „How was a bestseller promoted” (Frolow 2007).

The word of mouth marketing, like all other marketing tools, apart from many advantages, has also some deficiencies. The most important ones include:

1. Problems with controlling the information transfer, and, as a consequence, numerous problems with uncontrolled data spread;
2. There are many groups of people, who do not trust the overheard (not transferred through a formal channels) information;
3. Transferring untrue information to others by some people (deliberately or involuntarily), for instance as a consequence of the informant's mistake or distortion of the transfer (so called silent phone effect);
4. The necessity of advertising an interesting and original service or a very good book. Books and services, which are average, conventional or expectable, do not make a bigger interest;
5. Problems with persuading the readers to the advertisement of particular titles or services (the readers positively speak about the book or library only when they are convinced about their actual advantages, any coercion or pressure are a source of unwillingness and resistance);
6. The phenomenon of hemophilia, that is a tendency to making contacts and joining into groups with people with similar interests, age, work, education, place of living etc., whose result is that the information about services and products spread most often only in a closed group of people, for instance information about an excellent cook book-among admirers of Italian cuisine;
7. Excessive focus on opinions announced in librarian and bookseller's environment, which are not as significant as the readers' beliefs and preferences, which are sometimes skipped.

Despite of these difficulties, the word of mouth marketing belongs to the tools, which give a chance to librarians for an effective service promoting and an increase of their role in society. An example of a successful implementation of the method are the United States, where the Association of Academic and Research Libraries implemented a programme, whose aim was to increase the usage of the library services of the readers of academic libraries, which require significant financial expenditures. Such services include for example the possibility to use full-text database, which were used by a minor percentage of readers, in spite of active usage of traditional information method. Only the usage of the word of mouth marketing resulted in an increase of the amount of people, who used this expensive source of information (Alire 2007).

Another example of the application of WOM are the actions of the Library in Philmont, which belongs to Mid-Hudson Library System. The library, in order to increase the interest of its offer for the youngest readers, prepared a marketing communicate: „Two pirate crews went down on land in w Philmont for the summer period in order to find the missing treasure. For the last time they were seen walking in a city and looking for the local merchants. Arrr! The programme of reading in the Public Library in Philmont is devoted to pirates this year, and young pirates made a break in reading in order to attack the land. In total, 52 brawlers signed for the programme, which will last until the 11 of August” (Word-of-Mouth Marketing 2010). This news was to puzzle a young reader through playing in pirates and the possibility to take part in a project for children from the whole neighbourhood. In the holiday period, when children not always can organise the spare time for themselves, the proposal of moving into the world of buried treasures and sea adventures may have a big interest. The rumour about the pirates spread in the library among parents and children, who, pleased that their child finds entertainment also in the library, transferred to other adults what a great project the institution proposed on holidays. And so, by mouth the advertisement of the project and the rumour about the great actions of the Library Philmont.

4. Conclusion

According to the research made by the author in Poland for period since 2011 to 2012 among the 32 librarians of a different types of libraries, and 58 graduates of library science, conversance of word of mouth marketing tools is small (17%). Although, the tool itself, upon presentation of the principles of its application, was evaluated positively (97%). Furthermore, up to 80% of the respondents are interested in the concept of word of mouth marketing and they would like to introduce a pilot projects of this scope in their libraries.

All in all, it should be underlined that the word of mouth marketing could develop in such a fast speed mainly thanks to the spread of new forms of communication. Traditional media, such as press, radio or television, which until now had a monopoly for the publication of much information and thanks to this monopoly they gained the opinion-creating character, and after the spread of the Internet they lost their importance. They are no longer capable of controlling the transfer of information, given to the public opinion. It is the

public opinion which more and more often „creates” information. This is why librarians should pay more attention to new media, thanks to which their readers can confidently and quickly send notes about functioning of the library, mark the level of its services and offer. Alone, they also can try to build a positive image of the libraries and information institutions, and publicize values, which come after the process of reading.

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