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**PROVISION OF SPECIALIZED INFORMATION SERVICES IN PRIVATE  
ENTERPRISES IN NIGERIA**

***BY***

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**ABSTRACT**

*The dramatic growth of both public and private enterprises in Nigeria and the vast increases in the quantity and quality of information generated and handled by these enterprises call for the provision of specialized information. Therefore this paper enumerates and discusses the types of specialized information services, which could effectively and efficiently ensure growth and viability while coping with increased risk and uncertainties.*

**INTRODUCTION**

Specialized information services are unique services that are provided to a group of clientele forming a unit with particular and identifiable information needs. The groups usually form an integral part of business, corporations, organization and institutions.

Private enterprises and the private sector are terms that are often used interchangeably. Both terms simply refer to economic activities undertaken by bodies other than governments. Those involved in private are usually motivated by the aim of making profit. Prominent organization in this area is the banks, manufacturing companies, insurance and other business organization.

The dramatic growth of Private enterprises, especially financial institutions all over the country in size, diversity of operations and volume of transaction has been accompanied by a vast increase in the quantity of information generated and handled. Because of the increase in the quantity of information generated and handled in this sector of the economy and the strategic role the information is playing towards organizational development, information is generally regarded as another vital raw material. This undisputable fact, according to Wali (1992:4) is already evident in corporate organization, business and industries, where information is the vital component not only to maintain

acceptable profit levels, but also to cope with competitions. Consequently, most private enterprises have either established a well functional library or created an information unit within another department, mostly Research and Development (R&D) Department, to help the organization in ensuring successful information delivery.

Therefore, the employees in this organization need to be provided with specialized information service. Donnelly and Craddock (2002:40) noted that the assumption that employees had acquired adequate skills to handle information, because many gone through higher education and that they bring to the workplace the skills they need to work effectively, is with is not true. Hence new orientation should be given to employees on adequate information handling skills, because they have to augment and replace their skills many times. Another important reason why employees should be provided with specialized information service is the fact they are always too much engaged in the world of the organization that they hardly have time to look up for the information themselves. Hence they required someone to provide the service to them.

#### Who Provides Specialised Information Services

Specialized information services is provided by a department of an organization designated as information unit center or library. The center/library is specifically and exclusively established for the purpose of acquiring/generating, selecting, processing, organization, storing retrieving evaluating and disseminating information services to members of the organization in a clearly defined field or pertaining to a specified mission in a form most authoritative, timely and useful to individuals groups and management. This is done in order to help the parent organization effectively realize its overall objectives. The center/library specific functions are to:

- (i) Supply refined and evaluated information to employees rather than materials. Lunau (1986:9) noted that special Libraries of Information Centers rather than any type of libraries emphasized the provision of information rather than the provision of citations.
- (ii) Draw the attention of employee to the existence of information and evokes demand for the information.
- (iii) Provide current and up-to-date information timely and appropriately

- (iv) Develop close working relationship with individual clientele so as to identify his schedule of work, working habit and information needs.

#### Types of Specialized Information Services

Both public and private enterprises are today faced with the challenge of survival. The harsh economic policies and the intense competition have forced many enterprises to look elsewhere for strategies not only remains but to make meaningful gains. Successful business today tends to be market-led rather than productive-driven and a lot of attention is paid to quantities, quality and regularity of supply. Thapisa (1994:17) aptly observed that in market led economics, it is imperative to determine what markets exist (potential demand for product) and then produce for those markets. It is also essential as he further observed, to analyze carefully the strength of competitors, to look for new market opportunities, to recognize opportunities when they occur, and even help new markets. This he noted, require an abundance of up-to-date and relevant information and only an information unit or department of an organization can do this.

Therefore to ensure growth and viability while coping with increased risk and uncertainties, companies an organization have to be provided with dynamic and outward looking for specialized information services such as the following:

#### (a) Internal Information Service (IIS)

This type of service is provided through the collection/generation, analyzing, processing, organizing, storing, repackaging and dissemination of data within the internal environment of the organization. This type of information service is called, "Thou shall know thy self." The focal point of this service is to acquaint members of the organization with all the information about the organization in which they work.

Thus data on the vision, mission objectives for which the organization has been established to achieve, raw materials, products/services, customers/clientele, etc should be systematically collected or generated, processed and repackaged. Data on the entire structure of the organization, individual departments and their assigned work, individual work schedules, etc should also be collected, synthesized, repackaged and disseminated.

It is a great service to provide information to the entire members of an organization in such a way that every member knows what is happening in the organization.

(b) External Information Service (EIS)

This service is provided through the collections and processing of data collected from the external environment of the organization. The external environment of an organization is thoroughly scanned in order together all the relevant data that will in one way or the other assist the organization to achieve its goals/objectives, thereby enabling it to realize its vision and mission statements. Newsome and McInerney (1990:255) rightly observed that environmental times of rapid change. Similarly, Ibrahim (1997:54) noted that increasingly, forces in the outside world of an organization have greater impact on the future of an organization than internal forces.

Some of the data to be collected and processed includes Government policies and legal issued especially as it relates to the organization, information on different sources of raw materials, information on customers/clients, especially customers/clients observations, comments, and satisfaction about the product/services. Other external information to be collected and processed may come from associations, e.g. MAA, NIVA, NI insurance etc. Internal information juxtaposed with external information will no doubt go a long way in assisting individual performance and organizational development.

(c) Intelligent Information Service (IIS)

Today, both profit and non-profit organizations are living in a very competitive environment. Therefore for organizations to succeed and excel, it is essential to collect information on similar organization performing the same function. This information will no doubt help them to resituate their organization. Hence, such information as products and customers' preference, style of advertisement, product branding and relaying, etc should be collected and processed.

(d) Consultant Information Service (CIS)

Technical assistance should be provided to clients using the information systems. We are now living in a digitalized world; clients should therefore be assisted in

information retrieval from different information and communication technology (ICT), such as Internet, databases and CD ROMS. In situation where the information center is automated, clientele should be taught basic information searching and retrieval skills, patent searching techniques, overviews of new data analysis, etc. The use non-book materials and other ICTs, such as microfilm, microfiche reader projectors, fax machine, etc may also require some assistance.

(e) Reference and Information Service (RIS)

This type of service usually requires on-the-spot answers to queries asked by the clientele. The provision of this service is facilitated when there is a reasonable collection of reference and information resources. Therefore, it is pertinent to the provider to see to the acquisition of these reference and information materials. It is good to note that the references and information materials in this situation may not necessary be the conventional encyclopedias, dictionaries etc. Reference and information materials may first be information on stock exchange found in one corner of financial or business newspaper.

(f) Bibliographic Information Service (BIS)

Bibliographic Information Service is provided through the compilation of Indexes, abstracts, bibliography etc on specific area of accomplishment. Every news item about the organization should be indexed, where necessary abstracted and be brought to the attention of clientele. Periodicals can also be scanned in order to provide individual and groups with information such as forth-coming events, reviews, and conferences/seminars.

(g) Referral Information Service (RS)

This is sometimes called Directional Information Services (DIS), as the two names suggest, members of the organization are directed or referred to the relevant place(s) where the required information services can be located either within or outside the organization. The basic aim of this service is to facilitate easy location and contact between the seeker and the information resources and services irrespective of their destination. Directories of related organizations must be always handy.

(h) **Current Awareness Service (CAS)**

For members of organization to continue to work effectively and efficiently they need to be always abreast of what is happening in and outside their organization. Current Awareness Services is therefore provided as special information service. It is to draw the attention of these members to the existences of some vital information.

Publications that come out frequently and regularly are usually places where CAS can be extracted. The Internet is also very good for this service. Information is updated almost on daily basis, including databases.

(i) **Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI).**

Selective Dissemination of Information (SDI) is also another current awareness service, which alerts the end user about new information that might interest him. The purpose of this type of service as noted by Mondschein (1990:265) is to personalize information provision. Therefore, to provide this type of service, the information manager must compile profiles of the end users. The profile should contain among others information on the end user's area of specialization, the job he performs and user's special interest with regard to the kind and type of new information he would prefer. Ibrahim (1998:72-73) demonstrates that the profiling not only allows the information manager to keep track of individual users information needs but it would allow the information manager to identify and group users with similar area of specialization, job schedules, special interest and project teams. This process will no doubt encourage and improve intellectual interaction, job performance and collaboration. Additionally, the profiling should be done in such a way that can be readily modified, as information needs change.

The above specialized information services are by no means exhaustive. The limitation is a by-product of among other things; the extent of financial and material support and assistance the information center receives from the parent organization, the competence, commitment, capacity and ability of the information manager to initiate and maintain varied specialized information services.

The private enterprises exist within a multitude of overlapping and increasingly turbulent environments, and competitions. Therefore, for private enterprises to effectively grow and develop, and survive the global competitions, specialized information services should be seen as an integral part of their essential raw materials. However, to ensure that the provision of specialized information services is paying the desired dividend, there is the need to monitor and obtain feedbacks on the result of these services.

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