



## MARKETING COMMERCIAL RECORDS CENTRES IN ZIMBABWE: THE SUCCESS STORY OF ARCHIVE-IT SERVICES®

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### Abstract

This research project presents an assessment that was carried out to investigate the marketing activities of Commercial Records Centres (CRCs). The major aim of the project was to find out how CRCs, Archive-It Services as a typical case, managed to penetrate the Zimbabwean market especially during the economic meltdown period. Of major interest to the study were the marketing strategies that are employed by Archive-It Services in its endeavour to gain ground and recognition. The case study research method was adopted. Questionnaires and interviews were employed as primary data collection tools. Secondary data was collected through content analysis of the company's records such as director's annual reports, company's profile, brochures and registers. For data presentation, tables, pie-charts and graphs were used. The research study found out that, although there are some financial and technical challenges that are being faced, marketing is actually one of the top priority functions at Archive-It Services as manifested by the number of marketing activities that the company carries out. This eventually explains the company's success in introducing such an uncommon idea especially in the Zimbabwean market where the current economic conditions are not so favourable for ventures of such nature. Recommendations include familiarisation with the marketing concept, introduction of advertising as part of its promotion toolkit, aggressive campaigns and continued prioritisation of marketing on resource allocation

**Key Words:** *Business Records, Marketing; Commercial Records Centres (CRCs); Archive-It; Information Products.*

### Background to the Study

Archive-It Services is a commercial records centre (CRC) that offers both onsite and offsite records solutions to corporate organizations. The company was incorporated in 2002 and registered by the register of companies as a private limited company with a mandate to provide records storage and management facilities to corporate companies. The rationale behind the formation of the company was the realization of the need for the safekeeping of valuable corporate records, which contain administrative, evidential or informational value.

The story of Archive-It has to be told to the business world especially those that do not appreciate the value of marketing in order for them to learn from this positive side of marketing. This is not marketing of supermarket or shelf-goods but the marketing of records and information products and services. One has to bear in mind that the marketing of services has the characteristics of intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity and perishability that makes it very difficult to take to the market (Parameswari, B and Joseph, J. K. J., 2002). These could have been further compounded by the economic meltdown in Zimbabwe during the time of inception of the service, where many physical goods shops or supermarkets, financial and commercial banks, building societies and other profit enterprises virtually closed shop or were run under business curatorship. This was the time when the Archive-It rose to break new grounds in Zimbabwe as the first and successful business entity with the mission to honestly serve the needs of clients by providing tailor made solutions to document management problems and the great vision to be the most preferred supplier of superior quality archiving services in Zimbabwe and the region (Archive-It Brochure, 2002).

Using client oriented and market friendly marketing strategies through internal, interactive and external marketing, Archive-It Services managed to defy all odds and built for itself a very large clientele base that has been retained through rigorous market segmentation, using the modern marketing philosophy of the 4Cs as opposed to the traditional 4Ps marketing approach (Kotler, P and Armstrong, G., 2006). The company also made sure that they continuously focused all their total effort on gathering market research data through a well-structured marketing information research strategy to update itself on the obtaining socio- cultural, political, technological and economic situation in the country especially during the period of the economic meltdown.

Barkhuizen (2007:46) states that, since the existence of archival and records management institutions, it seemed that their existence was not well appreciated. Thus, the marketing of records and information management services is critical especially the commercial records centres whose main objective is to make profit. Kotler, as quoted by Rao (2002) defined marketing as the process of planning and executing the conception, pricing, promotion, and distribution of goods, services, and ideas to create exchanges with target groups that satisfy customer and organizational objectives. Kotler further noted that the marketing concept holds that the key to achieving organizational goals consists in determining the needs and wants of target market and delivering the desired satisfactions more effectively and efficiently than competitors. In light of this, marketing therefore can be regarded as the cornerstone for the success of profit driven ventures, hence the need for commercial records centre to embrace it.

The research tried to come up with marketing answers that are specific to the southern African or third world context, in which Zimbabwe is a typical case. The research was necessitated by the realization that, although some literature exists regarding commercial records centres, it pertains mostly to developed countries whose conditions obviously differ from those existing in Southern Africa or in Zimbabwe specifically. Meyers (2009) indicates that the inception of commercial records centres in the developed world came about around 1948, when Emmet J Leafy opened Business Archives Centre. This was the world's first commercial records centre that marked tremendous growth in industry. In southern Africa this is still a new idea which is still struggling to show relevance and gain appreciation. In light of this, marketing of CRCs in Zimbabwe ought to be more informative rather than persuasive as in the developed countries where their services are already known and well understood. The marketing strategies used in these two situations are obviously different hence the need for this research to discover the particular strategies that are relevant to our situation.

### **Statement of the Problem**

Commercial records centres are relatively a new phenomenon in Zimbabwe. The research therefore sought to establish how Archive-It Services, as one of the pioneers of commercial records management services in Zimbabwe, has managed to break the ground and convince the corporate world to consider it as an alternative records storage facility or rather a facility of choice. The questions in this regard were believed to be best answered by exploring into the marketing activities of the company especially the strategies employed in creating awareness about the importance of records and actually persuading the corporate institutions to deposit their records with the records centre.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study was carried out with a view to provide an understanding of the following objectives:

- i. To identify the magical strategies being used by Archive-It Services in the marketing of its products and services.
- ii. To explore and assess the extent to which the current strategies are useful in selling records management products and services.
- iii. To identify the information products and services that are being offered by Archive-It Services.
- iv. To identify the current and potential clients (sphere of influence) of Archive-It Services.
- v. To identify the major challenges that are being encountered in the marketing of records and information services.
- vi. To assess the level of awareness in the corporate world about the services being offered by Archive-It Services and their importance.

### **Research Questions**

Consequently the study needed to provide pertinent answers to the following questions that were based on the objectives of the study:

- i. What marketing strategies are employed by Archive-It Services to make its services known to the corporate world?
- ii. To what extent are the current strategies useful in the marketing of the company's products and services?
- iii. What are the specific products and services being offered by Archive-It services?
- iv. Who are the current and potential clients of Archive-It services?
- v. What are the major challenges being faced in the marketing of records and information services?
- vi. What is the level of awareness in the corporate community about the services of Archive-It Services and their importance?

### **Significance of the Study**

The only way that any organization, whether profit oriented or non-profit making, can achieve its goals and objectives is by first making its existence and its products and services known to its various stakeholders, that is, through marketing. The study therefore is beneficial to information professionals as it highlighted some of the strategies that are proving useful in the marketing of information services. The Records Management Society (2008) posited that there is potential to substantially increase the rate of success of records management initiatives via improved marketing and raising awareness. It is also in light of the fact that marketing records and information services is believed to be one of the most difficult functions, that the research is beneficial as it explored how other organizations that are involved extensively in it are managing. Furthermore, given the fact that the bulk of literature about records and archives in Zimbabwe pertains to the public sector, the results of this research uniquely add to the existing body of literature by introducing a different perspective, the commercial records centre. The research also gives a general insight into the developments that have been made so far particularly in the industry of commercial records management especially, the extent to which it has gained appreciation from the corporate world.

### **Assumptions of the Study**

The research was based on the following assumptions:

- i. Success of any business venture is based on effective marketing of its products and services.
- ii. Commercial records centres are not a common feature especially in Zimbabwe, therefore the only way they can get a limelight and gain appreciation is through aggressive marketing.

- iii. Commercial records centres are not the corporate world's first choice, not the sole means that can be adopted by organizations for the storage of their records hence there is need for marketing and promotion to justify why they should be preferred.

## Scope of the Study

The research focused on the marketing of records management services particularly by commercial records centres. Since the research is carried out as a case study, the research excludes any other commercial records centres and concentrates on the marketing activities of Archive-It Services and its interactions with its clients. Given the fact that marketing is a total company effort, the research naturally broadens as more subjects eventually come into the limelight as they all affect the marketing of the organisation's products and services.

## Review of Scholarship

Ngulube and Tafor (2010) noted that literature review provides an opportunity to explore relevant research, establish the main methodologies and techniques that other researchers used and also to identify the theories used to conceptualise the variables that are investigated by the study. More so, literature review enables the researcher to discover knowledge gaps that previous researchers did not fill and this brings out the importance of the study.

## Commercial Records Centres Defined

According to Commercial Record Centre (2013) a Westerberg Company, a commercial record centre is an institution that assists clients with developing a storage and retention system for all their records management needs. Most commercial records centres specialises in records retention and information management, secure off-site records storage, certified document destruction, carton pick-up and delivery. Business Records Management (BRM) (2013) further asserts that commercial records centers are businesses that exist in almost every community that generally provide three levels of service to governmental, non-profit, and corporate or firm organizational clients; storage, retrieval, and other professional records management services. Archive-It services as a commercial centre operate in line with the functions stated in the above definitions and offer other professional services as indexing, retention scheduling, destruction and records management consultation. The emergency of CRCs as professional records management institutions was necessitated by the information explosion that characterized the 20<sup>th</sup> century and is still prevalent in this 21<sup>st</sup> century (Hyman, 2008). Bidwell (2008) noted that today's commercial-records centers continue to diversify and expand service offerings to accommodate the growing needs of their clients and this has helped balance businesses by reducing dependency on one source of revenue, that is, 'the box on the shelf'. Professional Records Management (2010) indicated that, for the past 50 years, the offsite storage industry has offered limited service options, functioning as a basic warehousing service and failing to recognize their role as a provider of document management services. Faber (2001) also stated that, for approximately 50 years, the CRC business has evolved from what began as a repository of mostly inactive or, as some have said, 'dead' records, into a much more interactive, high-tech relationship with its clients.

## Benefits of Commercial Records Centres

PAK Records Center (2013), Podraza, A (2011) and Sullivan, M (2012) concur that there are by using a commercial records centre facility your organisation will is most likely to enjoy some of the unchallenged several benefits as follows:

**Space Cost Savings:** Expensive office real estate space is saved, without having to lose access to your records, when you transfer semi-current or inactive paper records to a lower-cost off-site commercial Records Centre. By storing records at a commercial Records Centre you may be able to eliminate real estate leased and costs, or the space saved might be used to meet other space requirements your organization may have. Sometimes the space gained by sending records off-site can even replace planned office construction projects.

**Reduced Operating Costs:** The organisation will not need to purchase and maintain additional filing equipment and software to store and manage inactive records in the office. Records Centres have efficient equipment that can store many more records per square foot than in the office. They also usually provide you access to an online database to manage your organization's records inventory.

**Climate Controlled Environment:** Some information requires special climate controls that can be costly and difficult to implement. Records Centres offer special climate-controlled environments providing complete protection for long-term preservation of records, saving you time, money and aggravation.

**Authorized and Secure Destruction:** Records Centres have procedures in place ensuring that records are systematically destroyed and only with appropriate authorization reducing the chance of reckless, selective or personally motivated destruction of records. They provide confidential and secure records and computer media shredding, pulverizing, and recycling services for records in accordance with your organization's records retention and destruction policy. They ensure your organization's records will not be destroyed prematurely or retained longer than needed and proper destruction procedures ensure compliance with state and federal privacy statutes.

**Vital Records Protection:** If a fire or disaster strikes, your company documents must be protected. Duplicating your company's paper vital records and storing them at the Records Centres provides insurance if a catastrophe occurs. Vital records essential to your organization's existence are protected, eliminating the costly time and effort required to reconstruct mission critical information in the event of disaster.

**Online Backups:** Secure online over the Internet backups allow you to stop using tapes and automatically get your organization's data offsite every night.

**ECM System / Digital Archives:** Some Records Centres offer online content management systems that can manage your entire enterprises records or they can create digital archives for just a particular group of records. You will not need to invest in the hardware and software and your records will be available to you all the time from anywhere you are located.

**Security:** Commercial Records Centres understand how important and confidential your information is and provide safe and environmentally controlled security for your records. They have established procedures in place to maintain intellectual and physical control of your records at all times. They ensure your organizations records remain safe through confidential handling, secure storage, and controlled monitoring and access.

**Protection Against Disaster:** Records Centres are designed to provide ultimate protection for your records against fires, earthquakes and floods.

**Accessibility:** Records are organized and identified providing accurate and efficient retrieval.

**Facilities:** Commercial records centres provide a level of protection not often found in other storage facilities. Most facilities are designed and dedicated to records management. Thus, fire prevention, climate controls and security are of utmost concern. Their understanding of federal records retention guidelines typically allows for and provides a greater level of protection.

**Service Capabilities:** Most commercial records centres offer much more than simply storage. Most offsite records centres, particularly those, as members of PRISM International, offer a full suite of records management services, including storage, pickup and retrieval, scanning, records destruction, media storage and media destruction.

**File Management:** Something most organizations struggle with is maintaining the integrity of its archived records. A common example is when an employee goes to the archives searching for a file. Once they find the file, it is anyone's guess as to what they do with that file. When using the services of a commercial records centre, you gain the benefit of its barcode tracking system. Most records centres engage in the process of bar-coding all files upon retrieval, allowing for the complete tracking of all files within archived containers for error free identification. The added benefit is that archives can be tracked down to the file level, helping to maintain compliance and reduce the risk of misplaced files.

**Web Based Interface:** In support of the file tracking tools used by commercial records centres, many will provide clients with fast, flexible and real-time access to all their business information, right when they need it, a mouse click away! Using an internet based interface which allows you to not only view reports based on stored records, but also see activity including the ability to view all archived containers, including their activity levels at the file folder level and retention periods, amongst other benefits.

**Improved Productivity:** utilizing a commercial records centres many tools, allows for your records manager to streamline the legwork required to maintain a current level of activity within your archives. From web based order entry to managing retention schedules and custom reporting, your team benefits from the state of the art tools provided by an offsite vendor.

**Labour Efficiency:** Expand your staff without adding salaries, benefits, or continuing education to your budget. Your internal staff concentrates on improving your core business, while we provide the professional information management services you require.

### **The Challenges Faced by Commercial Records Centres**

Commercial Records Centres are faced with daunting challenges in their service operations. These include managing records in different formats, for example, MS word, PDF, CAD, hard copies, films, challenges in managing e-mail as records, some organizational and personnel problems, technology, cost, lack of awareness, growing size of the archival collection and the level of risk. Other challenges also include website records management, business process reengineering, end-user training, pilots and phased implementation, integrating ERM with other IT systems, and updating conventional records management. Patterson G and Sprehe T. J. (2002) and Pali (2009)

### **Marketing of Commercial Records Centres**

According to the American Marketing Association as quoted by Kaane (2006: 1), marketing is a societal and managerial process by which individuals and groups obtain what they need and want through creating, offering and exchanging products and services of value with others. Kotler and Armstrong (2006: 6) refer to marketing as the process by which companies create value for customers and build strong customer relationship in order to capture value from customers in return. Organizations should, therefore, create or produce products or services that are of value to the customers.

Terry and Hill (2004: 23) defined marketing as a business philosophy that regards customer satisfaction as the key to successful trading and advocates for the use of practices that help to identify and respond to customer needs

effectively. Marketing thus ensures that organizations work towards delivering what the customers are demanding. In other words, good marketing advocates for an 'identify and satisfy' rather than a 'make and sell' philosophy.

Marketing can be separated into two broad categories; product marketing and service marketing. According to Armstrong and Kotler (2007: 199) a product is anything that can be offered to the market for attention, acquisition, use or consumption that might satisfy a want or need, and this includes both services and physical products. Armstrong and Kotler (2007: 199) further defined a service as any form of product that consists of activities, benefits or satisfactions offered for sale that are essentially intangible and do not result in the ownership of anything. In light of these definitions, it is clear that the marketing of records and archives management falls under services marketing.

### Services Marketing

(Hoffman and Bateson 2001: 27) wrote,

In the beginning, the work towards accumulating services marketing knowledge was slow... One of the reasons was that many marketing educators felt that marketing of services was not significantly different from the marketing of goods.... However, since those early days, a great deal has been written regarding specific differences between goods and services and their corresponding market implications. The majority of these differences are primarily attributed to four unique characteristics - intangibility, inseparability, heterogeneity, and perishability.

### Service Characteristics

Some writers substitute heterogeneity for inconsistency and perishability for inventorability, and refer to the service characteristics as the 4 Is of service marketing. These characteristics were described by Armstrong and Kotler (2007: 224) as follows;

**Intangibility**—services cannot be seen, tasted, felt, heard, or smelled before purchase. This means that consumers or users of services can hardly have a clue of how or what a service will be like before they actually purchase it.

**Inseparability**—services cannot be separated from their providers. The employee who provides a service becomes part of that service.

**Inconsistence/ heterogeneity/ variability**— service quality varies with the individual involved and the mood of the individual on different days or at different times.

**Inventorability/ perishability**—services cannot be stored for later sale or use.

From the foregoing discussion it can be observed that the marketing of services poses a different dimension from the traditional product marketing. These service attributes affect the marketers of records management services, posing them with an extra challenge beyond what product marketers face. Armstrong and Kotler (2007: 226) noted that there are actually three types of marketing that are involved with service marketing. These were outlined in the form of a model.

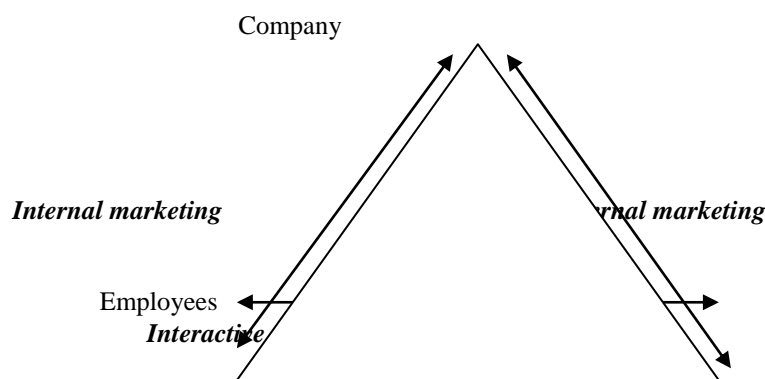


Fig 1. Extracted from Armstrong and Kotler (2007: 226)

**Internal marketing** - means that the service firm must effectively train and motivate its customer-contact employees and supporting service people to work as a team to provide customer satisfaction. In other words, the service organization should make sure that its employees are well qualified for the job and they are well motivated to do the job to the best of their capabilities.

**Interactive marketing** – refers to the marketing that a service employee does to the client. Interactive marketing is largely dependent on the effectiveness of internal marketing, because it is only when employees are excellent and satisfied with their jobs that they can portray a good image of the company.

**External marketing** – refers to the traditional marketing that an organization does to the external world.

The model by Armstrong and Kotler clearly indicate that, unlike in product marketing, with services, the marketing effort is multifaceted and multidimensional. A critical component of services marketing is that of internal marketing whereby the company has to ensure that employees are well trained and motivated to deliver and to be good ambassadors of the company during their interactions with clients. This means that marketing in service industries is not all about advertising and promotion but also about ensuring that the actual people who deliver the services are effective.

### Marketing of Records and Archives Management Services

In view of information services marketing, Parameswari and Joseph (2002) defined marketing as those activities that connect an information centre to those parts of its outside world that use, buy, sell or influence the outputs it produces, benefits and services it offers. Rama-Rao and Jain (2001: 4) argued that, marketing is a process that can help managers of information centres in achieving their objectives of improving access to their clientele, increasing the satisfaction of their clients and reaching financial sufficiency. They further noted that the role of service marketing is not only to find customers for the available information sources but also to form partnerships with the users who become the central part of the total service efforts.

In Zimbabwe records management services can be classified in the class which Amstrong and Kotler (2007: 202) referred to as 'unsought' products or services. These are defined as products or services that the customer either does not know about or knows about but does not normally think of buying. Examples of such are life insurance, preplanned funeral services, and blood donations. Most new innovations are unsought until the customer becomes aware of them through advertising.

Mnjama (2005) indicated that, the private sector is yet to fully participate in the collection and preservation of records and archives. The fact that the private sector is taking too long to appreciate the importance of their documentary heritage poses a challenge to the marketing of records management services by CRCs. (McGovern 2000) also indicated that, "one of the problems with records management in most businesses is that it takes such a low priority and isn't important until there is a problem." Brad Abbot, a records manager with Umgeni Water in South Africa has observed that, within the private sector there is a marked lack of awareness of records management and of electronic records management in general, Abbot (2001). These quotations typically reflect the Zimbabwean scenario where the idea of fostering proper records management in some private sector organizations has a low uptake and there is a lot that still needs to be done in terms of marketing and promotion of this service.

On the contrary, (Hyman 2004), writing from the western perspective stated that,

The ever-increasing power of computers and printers creates a perpetually escalating amount of physical and electronic documents that must be managed and stored. Recent trends in litigation have emphasized to corporate America the importance of professional records management.

Meyers (2009) also supports the view by stating that, Corporate accountability has become key, so companies of all sizes are adopting strategies for managing documents, web content, and digital assets. It is now more important than ever those companies establish plans for their vital records and business continuity in the event of such scenarios. The majority of these plans require that records be maintained off-site within a specified distance.

### **Marketing Strategies**

A well designed marketing strategy is key to the success of any business venture. Fisk, Grove and John (2000) defined marketing strategy as a plan that adjusts the controllable marketing factors to cope with the uncontrollable environmental forces. In other words, a marketing strategy acknowledges the uncontrollable nature of the external environment and tries to work around the organisation's own internal resources to come up with the best way to adapt. This requires an intensive effort as Bryan (2009) commented that, like in any other service, developing and implementing a marketing and sales program for records management takes active effort.

### **Market Research**

Yoon and Jain (2010) defined market research as the systematic and objective search for and analysis of relevant information to finding the solution of any problem in the field of marketing. A typical example of a marketing problem is the need to identify client needs and wants, and it is for this reason that marketing research is usually employed. The Records Management Society (2008) noted that, one of the main tasks of records managers is to determine what a given set of customers' needs, wants and values are and to dictate records management projects towards delivering the solution. CRCs like Archive-It Services therefore can only be useful to the society if they are able to precisely identify and come up with effective solutions to the records management problems being faced by organisations. This is only possible through aggressive market research; therefore market research stands to be a major marketing tool.

### **Marketing Mix**

Kotler and Armstrong (2006: 200) defined a marketing mix as a set of controllable marketing variables that a firm blends to produce the response it wants from the market. Rowley (2001) defined it as a way of profiling the offerings that an organization seeks to make to its chosen customer groups. The marketing mix is especially known in the context of the traditional 4Ps, that is, product, place, price and promotion. However, other critics have attacked this, especially with regards to service marketing. A more service and customer oriented marketing mix known as the 4Cs was crafted, substituting product for customer needs, place for convenience, price for cost to satisfy and promotion for communication. Other scholars added people, processes and physical evidence to the traditional 4Ps and came up with the 7Ps marketing mix. The marketing mix, according to McCarthy is used by managers to generate the optimal response in the target market by blending the variables in an optimal way.

### **Segmentation**

The concept of segmentation is based on the knowledge that, not every organization is an appropriate customer for every records management service. Segmentation is the process of dividing the whole market into homogeneous segments. The division may be done on the basis of various factors as may be deemed relevant within a given context or situation. Kotler and Armstrong (2006: 126) noted geographic, demographic and psycho-graphic variations as some of

the mostly used variables for market segmentation. In CRC business, segmentation may be on the basis of company size, type of business or trade and type of records produced, that is, paper or electronic.

### **Service Quality**

Service quality is regarded as just but, the best form of silent marketing whose impact and results are so quick to manifest. One of the ways in which a good service delivery manifests is an increase in referrals. Heric (2010) acknowledges the role played by service delivery in stimulating referrals, although he argues that it is not enough to just perform and never promote. (Hyman 2004) commented, “The one common factor associated with all successful records centers is their dedication to customer service. Centers willing to cater to the specific needs of their customers have a greater level of customer satisfaction and higher gross margins.” Service delivery especially in CRCs can be improved by the incorporation of modern technologies to improve convenience through virtual services. Abramson (2010) penned that, Virtual Records Centres (VRC) enable clients to quickly search inventory, request on-demand virtual file delivery, manage retention policies, run real-time reports, schedule pickups and deliveries, order supplies, and much more through a completely customized online experience.

### **Branding**

The Records Management Society (2008) defined a brand as a name, term, sign, symbol, design, person or values associated with a particular product or service in order to identify it and differentiate it from other products or services. Organisations use brands as unique identifiers of their products and services and its effectiveness is usually enhanced by outstanding offerings. The Records Management Society went on to comment that, “records managers should want to gain attention and improve brand awareness by communicating a series of messages to enhance the likeability of their products and services.”

### **Research Methodology**

Dissertation Services U.K (2010) stated that the methodology aims at describing, with explanation, what have been researched, through whatsoever means or ways, in context to the dissertation question or issue. The explanation displays the validity and reliability of the research, thus enhancing the credibility and acceptability of the findings. Haralambos (2000: 165) postulates that, “any academic subject requires a methodology to reach its conclusions. It must always have ways of providing and analysing data so that theories can be tested, accepted or rejected. Without such a systematic way of providing knowledge the findings can be dismissed as guess work or even as common sense made to sound complicated.” The methodology also discusses some of the inherent problems with research and what has been done to at least minimize or even eliminate the problems or their effects.

### **Research Design**

The research design is often referred to as the structure of the research. It is the bond that holds all the elements in a research project together. Trochim (2006: 1) refer to the research design as “the glue that holds the research project together.” Generally, a research design acts as a guide for data collection and interpretation and provides rules that enable the conceptualisation of the problem under study. The design is used to structure the research, to show how all major parts of the project, for instance, the samples or groups, measures, treatments and methods of assignment work together to try and address the central research questions. A good research design therefore presents a logical basis for decisions and a framework for the researcher’s plan of action. Unknown (2010) defines a research design as “a plan for collecting and utilizing data so that desired information can be obtained with sufficient precision or so that a hypothesis can be tested properly.”

In this research, a qualitative approach was adopted and the research was conducted as a case study; a method which is widely used in social sciences like archival science. The International Research Development Centre (IDRC) (2010) refer to qualitative research as one that aims at “the identification and exploration of a number of often mutually related variables that give insight in human behaviour (motivations, opinions, attitudes), in the nature and causes of certain problems and in the consequences of the problems for those affected.” IDRC went on to say that, why, what and how are the major questions in researches of a qualitative nature. Colorado State University substantiated the claim by stating that, “typically qualitative data involves words”, whereas quantitative data involves numbers.

### **The Case Study**

A case study research methodology is basically an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon within its real life context. Hamel (2003: 34) defines a case study research methodology as, “a research performed in detail on a single case rather than on a sample of the whole population.” Colorado State University (2010) supports the same view by stating that a case study refers to the collection and presentation of detailed information about a particular participant or small group, frequently including the accounts of subjects themselves. Case study is a form of qualitative descriptive research which looks intensely at an individual or small participant pool, drawing conclusions only about that participant or group and only in that specific context. With this method of research, focus is on exploration and description, rather than on discovery of a universal and generalisable truth or cause-effect relationships.

This method was chosen for the major reason that marketing is a very common field which is found in almost every trade, but the research sought to be more precise and concentrate on the marketing of a special type of service, that is, records management services, particularly by Commercial Records Centres (CRCs). In other words, marketing as a general topic has a lot of literature but the researcher wanted to have a deep understanding of the records management aspect, an endeavour which according to scholars, is best met by a case study research. Proponents of the case study

research argue that it has more to do with depth of findings rather than breadth. To get a detailed insight, the researcher saw it important to look at a single case, that is, Archive-It Services although there are a number of other players in the field.

### **Advantages of the Case Study**

Case studies, by their nature, offers a unique opportunity for in-depth study of a unit from different perspectives, thus it enables deep probing, which is essential for research work. Given the fact that case studies concentrate on a single case, it means that there are better chances of carrying out an exhaustive research, which can generally provide acceptable results even though they will be based on a single case. Maree (2008: 76) commented that the literature produced by case studies “provide ample evidence for the acceptance of a single case as the object of study.” It is this desire for a deep understanding of the field of marketing of records management services that the case study method was adopted.

### **Disadvantages of Case Studies**

Although case studies are useful research tools as was outlined above, some scholars believe that there is too much association between the researcher and the population in case studies. This high level of interaction is believed to negatively impact on objectivity. In other words, the argument is that, the higher the rapport, the more subjective the interactions as well as the findings become.

### **Population**

Population simply refers to the individuals, groups or entities that are of interest to the researcher. Mugo (2010) posited that “a population is a group of individual persons, objects, or items from which samples are taken for measurement for example a population of presidents or professors, books or students.” In other words, population refers to the entire group of objects that the researcher intends to study and about which results will be generalized. For this research, the population comprised of the staff, management and ownership of Archive-It Services, which makes a total of 28 people, and the client organizations that are a total of 40 companies. The population for this study included the staff, management and ownership of Archive-It Services and the client organizations. The actual sample from Archive-It Services included the managing director, marketing manager, records supervisor and two marketing officers. From the client organizations, the researcher targeted at the records officers or the administrators responsible for the records within each organization. Data was collected from only one branch of Archive-It Services, that is, the one in Zimbabwe: Harare, although the company has another branch in Malawi where other useful information could be gathered. Although the company has clients all over Zimbabwe, the respondents were picked from Harare where the researcher had access.

### **Sample**

A sample is a portion or fraction of the total population that the researcher chooses to contact and make personal or impersonal interactions with. Webster as quoted by Mugo (2010) defined a sample as “a finite part of a statistical population whose properties are studied to gain information about the whole.” Mugo(2010) further defined sampling as “the act, process, or technique of selecting a suitable sample, or a representative part of a population for the purpose of determining parameters or characteristics of the whole population.” Yoon and Jain (2010) noted that sampling involves three decisions, that is, defining the sampling unit, deciding the sample size, and the sampling procedure for selecting the actual respondents. The idea of sampling comes usually due to the infeasibility and the cost prohibitiveness of gathering information from the total population.

The sample was chosen on the basis of convenience as well as judgment. Convenience sampling can be noted from the fact that, despite the fact that the company in case has another branch in Malawi and also the clients are all over Zimbabwe, respondents were only chosen from Harare, where the researcher could conveniently reach. Judgment sampling was exercised on the selection of the actual respondents, whereby those who best met the requirements in terms of knowledge about the topic under study and the information that was required were chosen. The sample included two marketing officers, the marketing manager, the records supervisor and the managing director as respondents from the organization in case, that is, Archive-It Services. On selection of clients, convenience was applied. The researcher picked on those clients that are located in the city centre of Harare, where fortunately most of the major clients are headquartered, and the ten clients were picked at random. This was done chiefly for easy of distribution and collection of questionnaires.

### **Data Collection**

Data collection refers to the actual process of soliciting for data, using whatever method and tools, and recording the data. This research consulted both primary and secondary sources. These sources are discussed in greater detail in the following paragraphs. Gathering of data was done through the complimentary use of questionnaires and interviews.

### **Questionnaires**

IDRC (2010) defined a questionnaire as “a data collection tool in which written questions are presented that are to be answered by the respondents in written form.” Bogardus quoted in Raj (2000: 77) simply refer to a questionnaire as, “a list of questions sent to a number of persons for them to answer.” Yoon and Jain further describe questionnaires as essentially consisting of a set of questions, the response format, instructions to administer, and aids to help in administering the questionnaire. Clough and Nutbrown (2002: 120) commented that, questionnaires are the mostly adopted and useful instruments for collecting survey information. A total of twelve questionnaires were distributed for



this research study. Ten questionnaires were sent to client organizations and the other two were given to the marketing officers at Archive-It Services.

### **Advantages of Questionnaires**

One of the major advantages of questionnaires is that the information gathered is in a relatively standardized form, which makes it easier to interpret, analyse and present. This eventually saved time for the researchers in interpretation, analysis and presentation. Statpac (2009) also indicated that questionnaires are very cost effective when compared to face-to-face interviews, especially for studies involving large sample sizes and large geographic areas. Although the geographic area was not very big, the number of respondents simply made it cost prohibitive and impractical for interviews to be the sole method of data gathering despite their well-known benefits. This is supported by Statpac who further commented that, written questionnaires become even more cost effective as the number of research respondents increases. The other advantage of questionnaires is that of eliminating researcher bias and influence, which is one of the major drawbacks of interviews. Questionnaires gave the respondents time to prepare and give responses to the various questions that were asked.

### **Disadvantages of Questionnaires**

The researchers acknowledged some of the inherent problems associated with the questionnaire. One of the major disadvantages of questionnaires is the likelihood of wrong interpretation by respondents especially with open ended questions where respondents may give responses that are far from what the researchers intended to get. The other problem with the questionnaire is that response rate is usually very low. Furthermore, unlike with face-to-face interviews, where the researcher can be able to pick fact from opinions through monitoring nonverbal cues, with questionnaires the researcher relies only on the responses given on the paper.

### **Interviews**

Interviews are a data collection technique that involves either a face-to-face interaction between the interviewer and the interviewee or it may be over the phone. Groves and Mathiowetz (2000:333) defined an interview as a face-to-face inquiry with individuals in order to gather information on a particular subject or various issues. Coolican (2004 : 153) noted that the interviewing approach has been in use in the social science research for some time and has recently become popular in applied research, particularly by proponents of qualitative research. Interviews can either be structured or unstructured. For this research, structured interviews were employed whereby interview guides were prepared to guide the researcher and ensure that focus is maintained to the aims and questions that the research project sought to answer.

From the organization in case, interviews were held with the marketing manager, records manager and the managing director. These respondents were singled out as the key informants hence the need to conduct interviews with them so that detailed information could be taped. Yoon and Jain (2010) pointed out that interviews are particularly suited for 'key informants' who have an in-depth understanding of the topic under investigation. They went on to state that "such interviews are suited to small studies which are limited by a modest research budget."

### **Advantages of Interviews**

Blurtit (2007) pointed out that, with face-to-face or direct interview, the researcher can adapt the questions as necessary, clarify doubt and ensure that the questions are properly understood by repeating or rephrasing them. The researcher can also pick up non-verbal cues from the respondent. Any discomfort, stress and problems that the respondent may experience can be detected through frowns, nervous taping and other body language, unconsciously exhibited. There is also another advantage of immediate responses with interviews. Interview enabled the researcher to get first-hand information from the 'horse's mouth', eliminating one of the problems with questionnaires, whereby the intended respondent may assign their subordinate to complete it, for instance, the managing director can give the task to the personal assistant. Furthermore, the interviewer is also able to immediately differentiate between fact and fiction supplied by interviewees, their hearsay and impressions, convictions and opinions. For the above mentioned advantages, the researchers saw it critical to engage interviews especially for these key informants.

### **Disadvantages of Interviews**

While interviews are a good data collection tool, there are some problems associated with them. There is a high risk of the respondents diverting the interview. Another drawback is that respondents might feel uneasy about the anonymity of their responses when they interact face to face.

### **Document Analysis**

This provided researchers with secondary sources of data. Hans (2000: 46) states that secondary sources of data are those which provide data that has been transcribed or compiled from original sources and made available to the society by the compiler or interpreter or analyst. For this study, the researcher managed to go through the organisation's brochures, company's profile, the director's annual reports and other records that documented daily transactions such as registers.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

The researchers made a formal application for permission to carry out research at Archive-It Services. With regards to interviews, appointments were made through the phone with the respondents a week prior to the actual process. The researcher prepared a common interview guide for the marketing manager and records manager and a different guide for

the managing director. As a measure to enhance the response rate, questionnaires were delivered and collected personally by the researchers.

### Data Presentation and Analysis Procedures

The first step in data presentation and analysis was data coding to ensure conformity and uniformity of answers. Data was screened and edited to ensure consistence, legibility and completeness. The responses from questionnaires were quantified into percentages and inferences were made to the population. The data was also scaled in relation to the total responses obtained thus leading to the creation of charts and graphs. Generally, tables, pie charts and graphs were used for the presentation of data since them simplest and most understandable techniques in terms of interpretation by readers.

### Results and Discussion

The aim of this section is to provide meaningful summaries through a range of presentation techniques from the collected raw data and as a quantitative study, tables, graphs, matrices and charts were basically the main presentation tools used (Chimbari *et al.*, 2011). The analysis of data was done in light of the objectives of this study. To ensure a comprehensive and understandable analysis, the data was grouped logically to form the themes of discussion. In other words, the responses from questionnaires and interviews were compiled together within logical groups as interview guides were simply an adaptation of the questionnaires and the responses were basically similar, in terms of their meaning to the researchers. Some arithmetic calculations were also rounded off to avoid fractional numbers, which could pose difficulties in the interpretation of the presented information.

### Analysis of Responses

A total of 12 questionnaires were distributed. 10 questionnaires were distributed to client organizations. Out of these ten questionnaires, 9 were returned representing a 90% response rate. The other two questionnaires were given to the two marketing officers of Archive-It Services and both questionnaires were returned, representing a 100% response rate. In other words, out of the total 12 questionnaires that were distributed, 11 were returned, representing a total response rate of 92%. The researcher ascribes the remarkable response rate to proper structuring of the questionnaires as well as closes administration and follows up. The researcher also conducted a total of three interviews. Interviews were conducted at Archive-It Services with the marketing manager, records supervisor and the managing director. The interview guides had a total of five questions each. The respondents provided answers to all the questions, also representing a 100% response rate to the questions that the researcher had set out to have answers to.

### Marketing Strategies

The data collected showed that a number of marketing strategies are employed and these include; market research, segmentation, branding and service quality. Of the listed strategies, the respondents believed that service quality plays the most important role in attracting and retaining clients.

The table below shows the marketing strategies and the values that are ascribed to them by the organization, in terms of the extent to which they were useful in attracting and retaining clients. The values range from 1 to 5, whereby 1 represents the lowest value and 5 represents the highest value.

**Table 1.** Marketing Strategies at Archive-It Services and their Values

Strategy	Service quality	Branding	Market Research	Segmentation
Value	5	3	3	1

The table is simply indicating that service quality was the most valuable and useful strategy in the marketing and selling of records management services as indicated by the value '5' that is placed against it.. Segmentation, on the other hand, is the least valuable strategy as indicated by the value '1' that is placed against it.

### Promotional Activities

A number of promotional or communication strategies were employed. These strategies included; introductory letters, door-to-door selling, brochure distribution, e-mail, telephone selling, corporate responsibility and presentations (through use of the interactive CD). However, these tools were not utilised in equal proportions, some were utilized more often than others obviously with regards to their perceived usefulness. The table below shows the percentages of utilization of each method.

**Table 2.** Promotion Strategies and their Utilisation at Archive-It Services

Promotional Activity	Introductory letters	Door-to- door	Telephone	Brochures	E-mail	Corporate responsibility	Presentations
Percentage utilisation	25%	25%	25%	10%	5%	5%	5%

The table and chart above are showing that door-to-door selling, telephone selling and introductory letters were the dominant promotional methods that were employed at Archive-It Services, taking 75% of the total promotion efforts. These were however, complimented by other methods such as brochure distribution, presentation (interactive CD), e-mail, and corporate social responsibility.

To fully understand how Archive-It Services got in contact with its clients, the researcher also asked the client organizations how they got to know about the organization. The responses received from the nine respondents indicated that referrals, sales representative (door to door selling), direct mail (introductory letters), and telephone are the methods through which these clients got to know about Archive-It Services. As already was indicated by the respondents from Archive-It Services that they have not done any advertisements or placed any billboards, no client indicated these strategies. The table below shows the methods that clients profess have let them know about Archive-It Services.

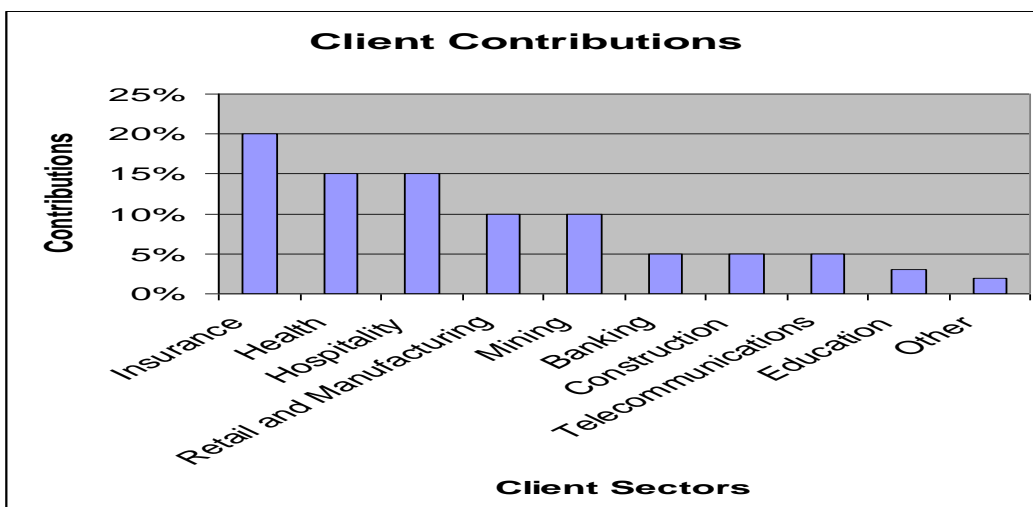
**Table 3.** How Clients Got to Know about Archive-It Services

Method	Referrals	Sales Representative	Direct Mail	Telephone	Advert	Bill Boards
No/ of Clients	2	4	2	1	0	0

If the information in the table is to be generalized and given as percentages, the results mean that about 44% of the clients got to know about Archive-It Services through sales representatives (door to door selling), 22% through referrals, another 22% through direct mail (introductory letters), and the last 12% through telephone.

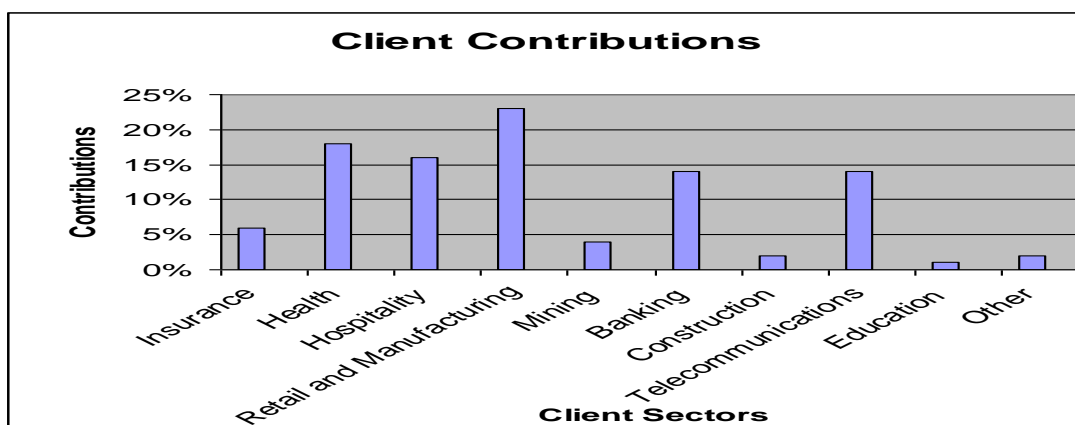
**Client Sectors**

The data collected indicated that the company’s clients are mainly from sectors such as health, insurance, banking, hospitality, retail and manufacturing (R&M), construction, telecommunications, mining (cement and lime), and education. The table below indicates the percentage contribution of these groups of clients to the records centre. The percentage contribution was arrived at by dividing the number of clients from each sector by the total number of clients that the organization has then multiplied the answer by 100. This produced the percentage contribution in terms of the number of clients that were driven from each sector, but not necessarily the contribution in terms of holdings (number of boxes).



**Fig 4.** Client Sectors and their Contributions

With regards to contribution in terms of the number of boxes within the company’s holdings, some interesting variations were noted from the information gathered. Some sectors which have few individual companies as clients for Archive-It Services seem to have the most remarkable contributions with regards to the number of boxes or the amount of records that they have deposited with the records centre. The table below shows the contribution of each sector in terms of the amount of records deposited. The percentage contribution was arrived at by dividing the number of boxes from each sector by the total number of boxes in the repository multiplied by 100.



**Fig 5.** Client Sectors and their Contributions to Holdings

The information above indicates that there are variations on the contributions of the various sectors of clients. The first graph indicates that in terms of number of clients, the insurance sector has the highest contribution followed by health, hospitality, mining, retail and manufacturing, banking, telecommunications, construction, and finally education. However, when it comes to the actual contribution to the holdings of the records centre, some interesting variations were noted. The major contributor in this regard is the retail and manufacturing industry, followed by health, hospitality, banking, telecommunications, insurance, mining, construction, and lastly, education.

The variations in contributions may mean that some sectors, for instance, the insurance sector, appreciate the need for proper management of their documentation but they do not produce a lot of documents. This is indicated by the fact that there are a lot of clients from this sector but they do not make a corresponding contribution when it comes to the amount of records that they have deposited with the records centre. On the other hand, sectors such as retail and manufacturing produce a lot of documentation but they do not really value their documents as indicated by the fact that Archive-It Services has very few clients from this sector, but those few are dominating the collection.

The other possibility is that maybe most of the other players in such sectors as retail and manufacturing, banking and telecommunications have their own records centres and archives to cater for their semi-current and non-current records because the amount of documentation that they produce can warrant that. In light of this, it can also be suggested that sectors such as insurance actually consider Commercial Records Centres (CRCs) as a cost effective measure because the amount of documentation that they produce do not warrant them to set up structures of their own.

### **Potential Clients**

The responses received during data collection indicated that the organization strongly feel that they should get records from all the major companies, organizations and institutions in Zimbabwe that produce vast documentation. The marketing team felt that all the companies that are listed on the stock exchange are typical examples of their potential clients. However as noted above, their goals may not realize results because these big companies seem to have other options for the management of their records.

### **Information Products and Services**

This research also had the aim of identifying the specific information products and services that are offered by Archive-It Services. The respondents were at liberty to give a detailed outline of what the CRC does and how they do it.

**Document Sorting or Processing** – The processes involved include; filing, classification, indexing, and packing of records into storage boxes. This is done either at the client's premises (onsite) or at the records centre (offsite). Although the decision regarding where the processing should take place, is largely influence by the client, the on-site sorting is most preferred. This is because it allows the records clerks to get some help from the actual records creators regarding the classification, description and indexing of their records. Off-site sorting has the disadvantage that some of the search terms that may be used by the records clerks in their index may be different from those that will be used by the owners of records on retrievals.

In some cases, especially when the client organization has a functional registry system, records will be transferred in a good order, properly classified, indexed and packed. The duty of the records clerks in this case will only be to verify the contents in the boxes against the transmittal list that will be provided, assign new box numbers that suit their system and allocate space or shelves to the consignment.

**Document Storage** – after the sorting process, what follows is to shelve the boxes on the relevant shelves and start to charge the client for storage. According to the respondents, storage is the major source of revenue in the records centre. Charges are based on a cubic foot basis and the total charge for each client will simply be the cost per box multiplied by the number of boxes in the repository.

**Retrieval** - Retrievals are done upon request by the client. Usually the client will come to the records centre to collect their files, but they can also make a request over the phone and the file may be delivered. It is important to note that retrieval is charged for, and the arrangement to deliver the document to the client will be at an additional cost.

**Records Destruction** – When records have outlived their useful life, clients can also request for their destruction by the records centre and they are charged for that. Records are usually destroyed through the National Waste Collection (NWC).

**Selling Records Management Materials** – As a way of substantiating income, Archive-It Services is also involved in selling of records management materials as another source of revenue. Materials for sale include; storage boxes, lever arch files, binders, content labels and spine labels.

### **Awareness Levels about the CRC's Existence and Importance.**

The responses received indicated that the organization is well known all over Zimbabwe. It is actually argued that those organizations that have not deposited with the records centre are not doing so for other reasons than lack of knowledge about its existence. It was further pointed out that, despite the fact that the company has only one branch in Zimbabwe, that is, in Harare, the company receives deposits from as far as Hwange, Chiredzi, Victoria Falls, and Chipinge.

With regards to the importance of the services offered by the CRC, the respondents were asked to highlight how they judge or value them. The responses received indicated that the bulk of the clients regard the service as only 'necessary' to their business, with others referring to the service as 'important', only one client indicating that the service is 'very important', and no client indicated that the service is 'critical' to their business. The table below shows these responses.

**Table 6. How Clients Value the Services Offered by Archive-It Services**

<b>Importance/Value</b>	<b>Necessary</b>	<b>Important</b>	<b>Very Important</b>	<b>Critical</b>
<b>No. of Clients</b>	5	3	1	0

### **Challenges Faced in Marketing Records Management Services**

The major challenges faced especially in the past five years were mainly influenced by the national economic situation whereby companies and institutions simply had (and some still have) limited financial resources. Given the fact that records management services are a support function and not at the core of organisational business, when it comes to resource allocation, it receives very little priority. The little priority of records in organizations was manifested during the period 2008/2009 when literary all companies were financially struggling and were engaging in cost cutting measures. The records side was one of the areas they would consider and as a result the company suffered a number of withdrawals and destructions by its clients during this period.

A challenge that is specific to the field, as indicated by the respondents, is that the marketing team does not have a background in records management therefore they are not so effective in convincing the clients about the importance of records and records management. Given the fact that records management, let alone commercial records management, is a relatively strange idea to the Zimbabwean community, there is obviously a need for a comprehensive explanation of the service and its benefits before a client can agree to release their records for sorting and storage.

Furthermore, like in any other organization, the marketing team suffers a lot from the organisation's own financial limitations. Funds are not always available to cater for the various marketing activities that may be proposed. For instance, there have been proposals to advertise on television, exhibit at the Zimbabwe International Trade Fair (ZITF), and to launch a website, but all these proposals are shelved because of financial restrictions. Most organisations were also facing liquidity problems and would not respond to the marketing efforts.

### **Conclusions and Recommendations**

The findings may not be generalised because the case study design was used, even though these may have some significant input into the records continuum theory. As noted by Rowley (2002: 16), the most limiting aspect of the application of a case study research, "is to lift the investigation from a descriptive account of 'what happens' to a piece of research that can lay claim to being a worthwhile, if modest addition to knowledge". Case studies as a research method or strategy have traditionally been viewed as lacking rigour and objectivity when compared with other social research methods (Rowley, 2002: 16). Verification and validation of results from case study researches has often been done by comparing with other similar case studies (Rowley, 2002). The study is also limited by the fact of it being a relatively new area in marketing commercial records centres in Zimbabwe and thereby restricting any potential comparisons with other similar studies in the Zimbabwean environment to verify results.

A compendium of the research findings from the preceding section inevitably calls for multiple conclusions. In a nutshell:

- ✓ Overall, the company has managed to reach at least every important corner of Zimbabwe and has managed to secure clients from all these places.
- ✓ Archive-It Services employed a number of strategies for marketing and promotion namely: market research, service quality, branding and segmentation just to name a few. In terms of promotion, door to door selling, telephone selling, brochures, presentations, e-mail, corporate social responsibility and introductory letters are predominantly used. This indicates that marketing is actually an indispensable function at Archive-It Services.
- ✓ Archive-It Services has a clientele base that spans from sectors as health, retail and manufacturing, mining, banking, construction, education, hospitality, telecommunications, and insurance. The insurance sector dominates in terms of the number of clients. However, in terms of the volume of collections, the retail and manufacturing sector dominates.
- ✓ The study also identified some encouraging trends to information professionals that the idea of records management is gradually gaining appreciation from the Zimbabwean corporate community with a seemingly brighter future for the industry.
- ✓ For the improvement of services by the Archive-It services the researchers made a number of recommendations as follows:
- ✓ The marketing team should familiarize themselves with the general idea of records management and its importance, seminars, workshops attending conferences, and through enrolling for short courses in records management at local colleges and universities.
- ✓ The company should introduce advertising as part of its promotion toolkit.
- ✓ Aggressive campaigns are needed for the company to gain its own recognized brand name that should be associated with unmatched service quality and distinctively differentiated from any other related or similar competitor

- ✓ Archive-It Services should continue to highly prioritise marketing on resource allocation as it stands to be the backbone of success given the nature of their business and its stage in development.

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