

Defining Key Concepts: Products vs. Services

Products and services are two closely aligned concepts, and, in fact, most products have an element of service in them. For example, a car buyer now buys a comprehensive bundle of service benefits, in addition to the tangible components of the car¹. However, there is a distinct difference between them and it is important to establish some working definitions. One way to think of them is from the clients' point of view. When a client asks "what can you make for me?" they are asking about products; when a client asks "what can you do for me?" they are asking about services. While a product is something that can be measured and counted, a service is less concrete and is the result of the application of skills and expertise towards an identified need. A product is something you can point at, whereas a service, as *The Economist* defines it, is any activity "you can't drop on your foot"² although this definition doesn't hold up when the products are digital in form – weightless objects that have no mass or material definition aside from the physical media on which they exist. Nonetheless, even in file-based workflows, there is a distinction between a product being produced and a service provided to fill a need. For the purposes of the Digitization Services Branch Products and Services Project, these are the definitions of each component:

¹Palmer, Adrian. [Principles of Services Marketing](#). McGraw Hill. December 2007. P. 2.. Available online April 8, 2010

²The Economist. [Economics A- Z](#). Available online April 8, 2010

Products

Products are tangible and discernible items that the organization produces, including digital file-based output. Examples of products from the Digitization Services Branch:

- digital files sent to a network storage system (NAS/SAN)
- new prints of motion picture film elements
- prints for exhibit purposes
- reference copies on DVD/CDs for the Reading Rooms or other clients

Services

A service is the production of an essentially intangible benefit, either in its own right or as a significant element of a tangible product, which through some form of exchange, satisfies an identified need. Sometimes services are difficult to identify because they are closely associated with a good; such as the combination of a diagnosis with the administration of a medicine. Examples of services from the Digitization Services Branch:

- consulting with clients on appropriate products for specific purposes
- providing advice on risk assessment and priority setting
- working on standards committees
- conducting training and other educational outreach
- [Why Are Products and Services being Standardized?](#)
- [How Do You Know What Product is Right for Your Project?](#)

Associated Information

- [How this information is organized](#)

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