Digital Reference Services

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Digital Reference: An Overview 1

Bill Katz

Real time digital reference services are now a standard part of reference work in medium to large sized libraries as well as numerous smaller libraries. Aside from the basic questions of whether or not this new computer service will flourish, are the day-to-day activities which make it possible. The contributors to this gathering of opinion and pragmatic activity offer numerous reports and theory about the development and growth of the new approach to answering reference questions. There is a wide diversity of methods and ideas about how digital reference service should be offered to the public. All taking part in this discussion speak from experience and considerable thought about a revolutionary new idea.

KEYWORDS. Digital reference services, real time reference services, Aska services

POINTS OF VIEW

Virtually Yours: Thoughts on Where We Have Been and Where We Are Going with Virtual Reference Services in Libraries 19

Diane Kresh

The world of the reference librarian is changing. As more and more patrons go to the Internet first to meet their information needs, libraries must be there to help them locate and obtain relevant information. Libraries have been experimenting with virtual reference tools for some time. This paper will provide a brief overview of the development of virtual reference services, examine the need for and provide lessons learned from implementing virtual reference services in a major research library.

KEYWORDS. Virtual reference service, digital reference service, chat service evaluation, standards and best practices, library cooperation and collaboration, change management, library education
The Digital Reference Fallacy

R. David Lankes

This article discusses the fallacy that real-time and asynchronous digital reference software are fundamentally different. Instead the author argues that the only real difference is lag time, and that this difference does not support the separation of digital reference functions. An attempt is made to create a unified model for digital reference and digital reference functions. Lastly, the author presents some practical considerations for libraries seeking to purchase digital reference software.

KEYWORDS. Digital reference, digital reference software

Bad Moon Rising: A Candid Examination of Digital Reference and What It Means to the Profession

Jonathan D. Lauer
Steve McKinzie

The profound impact of digital reference claimed by its proponents is overstated. Librarians tend to overvalue technology, assume its intrinsic value in improving library operations and services, and undervalue the human factor of librarian expertise and professional competence. Overstating the impact of trends within librarianship is a cyclically recurring phenomenon and the hype surrounding digital reference is a current example. In most libraries, the adoption of digital reference is not likely to be cost effective nor its utility an improvement on structures already in place and functioning well. Librarians have difficult decisions to make regarding the allocation of resources. The superiority of traditional reference approaches should not be gainsaid by misdirected emphasis on digital reference.

KEYWORDS. Digital reference, traditional reference services, professionalism

OPERATION PRINCIPLES AND AIDS

Mediated Online Searching and Digital Reference

Amanda Spink

Digital reference is an important research area with the potential to enhance information delivery to library patrons. The process of digital reference involves the challenges and problems of an interactive computer-mediated reference interview. Related studies of mediated online searching have identified the major tasks during a mediated online search. The search intermediary’s tasks included gathering information on the information need, previous searches on the topic by the information seeker, search terms and strategies, database selection, search procedures, system’s outputs and relevance of retrieved items, and the number of topics to be searched. The information seeker’s tasks include providing information to the search intermediary on their topic, discussing their previous information seeking and evaluating the online search output. Models of digital reference interviews need to include more complex information seeking behaviors, such as successive searching and multitasking. Further research is needed to extend our understanding of digital reference processes.

KEYWORDS. Digital reference, tasks, online searching, information seeking, search intermediaries
Stocking the Virtual Ready Reference Collection

Danianne Mizzy
Elizabeth Tillapaugh Mahoney

Libraries have begun to add chat reference as a method to deliver reference service to remote user populations. To deliver quality service in a timely fashion, libraries need to construct a Virtual Ready Reference Collection (VRRC) of elite ready reference Web sites most often used during the chat reference interaction. This article explores the collection development steps needed to create a VRRC that is most beneficial on the local level. The value in creating this collection lies not just in the end product, but also in the process, which serves as a valuable training exercise. Selecting and maintaining the virtual ready reference collection will enhance the chat reference librarians’ ability to deliver service in the chat reference environment.

KEYWORDS. Electronic reference services, chat reference, digital reference, virtual reference, ready reference collections, training, collection development

A Checklist for Starting and Operating a Digital Reference Desk

Ann Marie Breznay
Leslie M. Haas

This article explores digital reference and offers practical advice to those interested in implementing a digital reference desk in their library. Digital/chat/online reference services are defined and practical guidelines on staffing, selecting and troubleshooting hardware and software, training, and marketing are offered for those establishing such a service.

KEYWORDS. Online reference, chat reference, digital reference, practical tips, guidelines

CHAT SERVICES

Hurry Up and Wait: Observations and Tips About the Practice of Chat Reference

David S. Carter

This article offers practical suggestions for doing chat reference, including setting up, using language, interviewing techniques, and composing responses. It contains comparisons to in-person, phone, and email reference techniques.


Communication Strategies for Instant Messaging and Chat Reference Services

Jody Condit Fagan
Christina M. Desai

Instant messaging (IM) reference is gaining in popularity but still faces resistance. Some librarians agree with some researchers in the field of computer-mediated
communications (CMC) that it can never approach the complexity of face-to-face communication, and is therefore an unsuitable medium for reference. Librarians in face-to-face reference use nonverbal communication skills such as a welcoming expression and an interested tone of voice to encourage patrons to approach the desk and discuss their topic; they also interpret the nonverbal cues of patrons. This analysis of online reference conversations shows how online skills can substitute for many of these nonverbal cues. Some skills are unique to computer-mediated communication while others involve written language skills to encourage exploration of the topic, increase clarity, demonstrate approachability and empathy, and instruct. The study illustrates communication problems and solutions using actual conversations, giving particular attention to the reference interview.

KEYWORDS. Reference services, instant messaging reference, chat, live online reference, computer-mediated communication, reference interview

Real-Time Chat Reference and the Importance of Text-Chat
Steven Ovadia

One of real-time chat reference's strengths is the options it gives the librarian in terms of answering questions. Librarians can use text chat, send over a Web page (push pages), or let a patron watch them work over their computers. Options come with a price, though—transaction speed. While most librarians work from a speedy connection, patrons chatting with them are probably using slower dial-up connections. Chat software features are expanding quicker than most patrons can handle, so now it's time to focus on how to best serve the most patrons, instead of inadvertently catering to a select group of technologically savvy patrons with fast computers. Text chat is an excellent way to make sure the most patrons get the best results from real-time reference chats.

KEYWORDS. Real-time chat, reference service trends, public librarianship, virtual reference

INTRODUCTION TO PART II

Opportunities for Real-Time Digital Reference Service
Matthew R. Marsteller
Jackie Schmitt-Marsteller

This article explores the opportunities that real-time digital reference service can offer to a variety of library settings from the independent public library to the large multi-campus university or the multi-national corporation. There are many occasions when a real-time digital reference service will be the optimal solution for a portion of a library's reference service. The authors' goal is to offer their original ideas, and examples from the literature, that will stimulate thought about real-time digital reference services that could be offered by your libraries. The numerous ideas and examples should provide the reader with workable methods for extending the reach of reference service to under-served populations.

KEYWORDS. Real-time, synchronous, digital, virtual, chat, electronic, live, reference, kiosks, public libraries, academic libraries, special libraries, school libraries, information, referral
Usage and User Analysis of a Real-Time Digital Reference Service

Kelly M. Broughton

This paper presents the results of a use analysis and the results of a user survey of Bowling Green State University Libraries' "Chat with a Librarian" service for the academic year 2001-2002. When appropriate, the results are compared with the results of other libraries' services. Information examined includes when and from where users ask questions via the services, how users find out about the service, and what types of questions the users ask, the status and affiliation of the users, and user satisfaction with the service. Most of this information can be compared to findings from at least one other academic library's study of a somewhat similar service. With a few exceptions, the findings are similar from service to service.

KEYWORDS. Digital reference service, user satisfaction, use statistics, academic libraries

Going Where the Students Are: Live/Web Reference at Cal Poly Pomona

Kathleen Dunn
Ann Morgan

Increased student use of the Internet and declining reference desk statistics are factors encouraging academic reference librarians to look for new ways to reach patrons. Web-based customer contact center software gives librarians the tools to provide interactive, 24/7 reference service to Internet users. This article describes how the library at California State Polytechnic University, Pomona developed its live/web reference service. We discuss the factors that encouraged us to launch the service, the challenges that we encountered along the way, and examples of our experiences to date.

KEYWORDS. Reference service, academic libraries, library consortiums, live reference, electronic reference, digital reference, 24/7 Reference, marketing, California State Polytechnic University, Pomona

Virtual Reference at Duke: An Informal History

Phil Blank

This article examines the history (2000-2003) of the virtual reference program at Duke University and covers the efforts involved at determining need, evaluating and selecting software, implementing policies and experimenting with the applications. Attention is paid to librarians' perception of virtual reference service as compared to other services. Future trends and consortium possibilities, both academic and across North Carolina, are also considered.

KEYWORDS. Virtual reference, LSSI, Duke University, North Carolina, Perkins Library, academic
Evaluating Online Real-Time Reference in an Academic Library: Obstacles and Recommendations

Jana Ronan
Patrick Reakes
Gary Cornwell

Online real-time or "chat" reference, while still in its infancy when compared to traditional reference services is beginning to come of age. The time has come to move beyond the earlier challenges and issues debated at length in the library profession and begin to consider how to evaluate real-time reference. This article will consider obstacles to evaluating chat reference and present practical recommendations. These obstacles are presented in four basic areas including: organizational structure, scarcity of resources, newness of the service, and difficulty developing techniques of assessment or applying existing methodology.

KEYWORDS. Real-time, synchronous, chat, reference, evaluation, obstacles

Our Experience with Two Virtual Reference Services at IUPUI University Library

Polly D. Boruff-Jones

Indiana University Purdue University Indianapolis (IUPUI) University Library first introduced virtual reference in May 2001 after four months of preparation. In the summer of 2002, University Library decided to reconsider the virtual reference software and provider and implemented a new service during the fall 2002 semester. A Reference Team Working Group was formed to review replacement options for the virtual reference software the library had been using for about a year. The decision to find a new virtual reference service was prompted by the connectivity and electronic resource compatibility problems experienced with the first virtual reference software the library chose. This article compares and contrasts the two virtual reference services used at IUPUI University Library and describes the two virtual reference projects. Following the article is a checklist of "Seven Questions to Ask When Choosing a Virtual Reference Service."

KEYWORDS. Reference services, virtual reference, chat reference, academic libraries

KANAnswer: A Collaborative Statewide Virtual Reference Pilot Project

Marcia Stockham
Elizabeth Turtle
Eric Hansen

This paper relates the collaborative planning by a task force of public, academic, and special librarians to develop KANAnswer, a statewide virtual reference pilot project. Major points include selecting software, developing policies and procedures, marketing, procuring partners, staffing and training, coordinating the project, and early impressions of the librarians who staff the service.

KEYWORDS. Collaborative virtual reference, digital reference services, reference services/Kansas, multi-type libraries
Virtual Reference Services: The LSU Libraries Experience

Melanie E. Sims

Traditional reference services are changing in response to the rapid growth of electronic resources available outside of the library. There are an increasing number of libraries that are providing digital reference services to meet the demands and expectations of remote users. This article provides an overview of virtual reference services at Louisiana State University (LSU) Libraries. It also examines the planning, implementation, marketing and user feedback of real time reference service after its first year.

KEYWORDS. Electronic reference services, e-mail reference, chat reference, LSU Libraries, college and university reference services, reference surveys

Ask a Penn State Librarian, Live: Virtual Reference Service at Penn State

Susan A. Ware
Joseph Fennewald
Lesley M. Moyo
Laura K. Probst

After a 22-week pilot study, Penn State launched a university-wide real-time virtual reference service in Fall 2002. The Penn State Virtual Reference Service (VRS) features chat, co-browsing, and authentication into licensed databases. VRS serves students, faculty, and staff at 21 residential and commuter campuses statewide, as well as students enrolled in World Campus distance learning courses. This paper presents an analysis of the users, questions, exit surveys, and a VRS librarian survey.

KEYWORDS. Virtual Reference Service, digital reference, real-time reference, statistics, survey, Penn State, LSSI

Chat Reference: One University's Experience

Kathy A. Campbell
Marie F. Jones
Jerry Shuttle

Chat reference is becoming prevalent in academic libraries across the country. This paper details the experience of East Tennessee State University's Sherrod Library when initiating such a service at their institution during the 2001-2002 academic year, which began as a response to the addition of a new online degree program in the state. Software selection, staff training, management issues, and statistical data are presented. Data analyzed includes use patterns, types of questions, and categories of users. The paper details librarians' reactions to providing reference services in this format, including the problems encountered. It also offers suggestions for a more successful implementation.

KEYWORDS. Digital reference, real-time reference, chat reference, reference statistics, case studies
The Winter Park Public Library began Chat Live/Ask a Librarian (Chat Live), a live online reference service, on February 1, 2002. We first chose LiveAssistance as our library's service provider but later switched to QuestionPoint, sponsored by OCLC. This paper outlines our experiences with both chat services and includes the following: our reasoning behind initiating a chat reference service; the selection process; how we trained and implemented the service into our daily routine; marketing the service to patrons; our day-to-day experiences (including a chat session transcript); the importance of script writing; some brief statistics on usage; and our overall thoughts on the process.

KEYWORDS. Interactive chat service, LiveAssistance, live online reference, QuestionPoint/Ask a Librarian

With the rapid advances in information technology, the proliferation of information resources and formats, and the increasing complexities of access and evaluation, libraries recognize the necessity for a dynamic information literacy program that will address the needs of all categories of users. University faculty constitute one group of users to which the systemic college library increasingly endeavors to extend and market its services and programs, including its information literacy training workshops. A consideration of this library/classroom faculty relationship in the context of the adult education literature, as well as successful models that have been employed in this effort, provide insight on ways in which the library can successfully accomplish its information literacy training objectives among this group.

KEYWORDS. Information literacy, information literacy training, information literacy programs, academic libraries, teaching faculty
National Counterterrorism Library: Unique Information Resources at MIPT

Brad Robison
Brian K. Houghton
James O. Ellis III

Offering a wide range of unique and useful tools, the library of the Oklahoma City National Memorial Institute for the Prevention of Terrorism (MIPT) is a national center of excellence for terrorism research. MIPT and its library act as a living memorial to the victims, survivors, rescuers, and family members of the bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995. MIPT conducts research into the social and political causes and effects of terrorism, and its mission is to prevent and deter terrorism in the United States or mitigate its effects.

KEYWORDS. Terrorism, counterterrorism, databases, research, special collections

Models of Computer-Based Outbreak Detection

Michael M. Wagner

Despite intensive development of computer-based surveillance (CBS), there has been little work on models of such systems. This paper describes a computational model of CBS–output, inputs, and algorithms required to create the output from the inputs. Starting from an assumed requirement that an ideal CBS system be capable of mitigating a bioterroristic outbreak of inhalational Anthrax, the author shows that an output of CBS should be a continuously updated probabilistic threat assessment, which is used to trigger response actions at levels of threat determined by cost-benefit analyses. The paper considers the types of algorithmic transformations required to map from a full spectrum of types of input data to the required output. The set of input data is much broader than previously considered. The specific complementary relationship between the computational model and the evolving architectural model of the National Electronic Disease Surveillance System is discussed.

KEYWORDS. Public health, models, decision theory, detection, population surveillance

Teaching Journal and Serials Information to Undergraduates: Challenges, Problems and Recommended Instructional Approaches

Julie M. Chapman
Charlcie K. Pettway
Steven A. Scheuler

Instruction librarians are confronted with the task of successfully conveying the complexity of serial publications to undergraduates who often lack even the most basic library literacy skills and concept of scholarly communication. There are in-
teractive instructional approaches and exercises that can be used to effectively address citation elements, scholarly vs. popular sources, OPAC serial records, online database components, and choosing an appropriate index.

KEYWORDS. Academic libraries, bibliographic instruction, undergraduate, serials, periodicals, research techniques, teaching methods

Helping Hands: Serving and Engaging International Students
May Ying Chau

Research in an unfamiliar library can be intimidating for international students, particularly while they are struggling to overcome language barriers. The Helping Hands Project translated a two-page handout into fourteen different languages to acquaint non-native English speakers with library services in a language they understand. It was a collaborative project between the Oregon State University (OSU) Libraries and the International Cultural Services Program (ICSP). The expected outcome of this project was to lessen language barriers for international students during their initial library visits, and hopefully, to help retain them in the institution. The average enrollment of foreign students at OSU per term, from Fall 2001 to Spring 2002, was 1,162. Usage counts showed that the translated library guides were estimated to serve a population of 819 students from all 14 countries, which was 70% of the total foreign student enrollment at OSU. The total handout distribution count was 306, which was 37% of the targeted population.

KEYWORDS. International students, retention, translation, multilingual library services guide, diverse experiences, language barriers

Library Science, Knowledge Management, Competitive Intelligence: Archive Theory–The Common Link
Philip S. Nitse
Kevin R. Parker

The gathering, organization, and archiving of critical business intelligence is a complex task. Competitive Intelligence systems gather information for use in the decision making process. Knowledge Management Systems are used to organize this knowledge. Library Science provides structure for the storage of published documents, in both printed and electronic formats. This paper proposes that the common link among the three disciplines is Archive Theory, which is the process by which an archive of information is built. This process provides a framework for analysis of what documents or information to retain and what format to use when retaining them. The paper details the linkage and concludes with an example of a working system that ties all parts together.

KEYWORDS. Competitive intelligence, knowledge management, library science, archive theory