Offsite reference services at the State Library

Presentation to CRIG

August 2004

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Today’s presentation

Three aspects of Library’s service to offsite clients

• Email reference service
• RefSupport for public libraries
• AskNow! chat reference
Email reference service

- Began in 1999
- Single email address: info@slv.vic.gov.au
- Web form on SLV website
Email reference service

Ask-A-Librarian

Email reference service

When contacting us by email please include:

- **Your phone number** - for a speedy response, or if we need more detail to answer your inquiry
- **Your postal address** - we may need to post information to you
- **The purpose of your inquiry** - e.g. journal article, your thesis, your own research
- **What you have looked at already** - e.g. books, journals etc.

All text boxes marked with a * must be completed.

* First name: 

* Surname: 

Email reference service

- All web feedback and tech. problems forms all feed into info@slv.vic.gov.au
- Mailbox checked 2 or 3 times per day by rostered librarians
- Ready ref inquiries acquitted at that point
Email reference service

- Specialist/extended inquiries routed to subject specialists or appropriate collections staff
- Inquiries automatically sent to inquiry registration and tracking database
Email reference service

- 10 working day turnaround
- 2 hours maximum research per enquiry
- Referral to Express Information if required
Email reference service

- 2,600 inquiries by email in 2003-2004
- 25% acquitted immediately
- 75% deferred
- Compared with 33,436 telephone inquiries
RefSupport

• Extended reference inquiry service for Victorian public libraries
• Replaced the VISION service from July 2003
• Follow-up inquiries that are beyond the referring library’s resources
RefSupport

- Inquiries received via Web form or fax
- 5 working day turnaround
- 2 hours maximum research per inquiry
- 2/3 inquiries spent up to 1 hour
RefSupport

• Up to 20 pages of information provided
• Diverse range of topics
• Popular topics 2003-2004:
  35% Australiana
  29% humanities
  14% science/technology
What is AskNow!?

- AskNow! is a collaborative chat reference service
- Participating libraries – State, National & Territory libraries
- In Victoria – SLV & public library partners
AskNow!

• SLV partners

Yarra Melbourne Regional Library
Yarra Plenty Regional Library
Monash Public Library Service
AskNow!

Features

• Uses web contact software
• Online chat conversation
• Ability to “push” web pages
• Co-browsing
• Transcript of session sent automatically to client’s email at end session
AskNow!

- Initiative of Council of Australian State Libraries
- Pilot service “live” August 2002
- Recently approved business plan to June 2006
Ask-A-Librarian

Information and research service options

Now!

Talk to a librarian
Try our live, online information service - Answers from librarians Australia wide 9am to 7pm Monday to Friday.

Email your questions
Ask a reference or research question using our Webform.

Phone your questions
Call us for quick advice on 9664 7002 during Library opening hours.

Write your questions
Address your questions to: Information Services Division, State Library of Victoria, 328 Swanston Street, Melbourne, 3000.
AskNow!

http://www.asknow.gov.au
A pilot project of the national, state and territory libraries of Australia.

Welcome to AskNow! Enter the following and click on Connect.

- Name (compulsory)
- Email Address
- Postcode
- Question (compulsory)

Don't try to print, bookmark or refresh your screen during the session or your connection will be lost. Click on the Exit button when you've finished your session.

About AskNow!
Contact Us
Privacy

an online interactive library visit
an online interactive library visit
AskNow!

- Weekdays 9am to 7pm AEST by 3 “virtual” librarians
- 35,390 inquiries in 2003-2004
- Over 4,000 quns p. mth in peak (approx. 200 per day)
- Estimated SLV and public library partners contribution 5,900
• SLV+ contribution 24 hours per wk
• Ready reference (46%)
• Complex reference (41%)
• 58% responses provided answers from Internet
Online exit survey

- 7 in 10 clients rate service as excellent or very good
- 9 in 10 clients indicate would use service again
Client profile

• Most users likely to be:
  under 24 (49%)
  from NSW (36%) or Vic (22%)
  from Sydney & Melbourne, followed by regional NSW
AskNow!

• 70% from metropolitan areas

• 30% from regional areas
AskNow!

Observations/challenges

- Confusion over shared nature of service
- Defining the real need – reference interview
- Consistency / standards
AskNow!

Observations/challenges cont.

- Lack of chat etiquette in some cases
- Students heavy users of the service
- Managing expectations
Observations/challenges cont.

• Software / Web technology sometimes lets us down
Feedback

• This is a great tool, especially if you live in regional areas (16-24)
• The person who helped me (X) was very polite and helped a lot. I think she should get a pay rise or a bigger computer or something (16-24)
Feedback

• I GOT NO ANSWERS (U16)