



The Digital Reference Services

KEYWORDS

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Reference services providing the right information to the right user at the right time in right place, in the era of information explosion and rapid development in information technology, right information is getting tailor-made information available anywhere in the world. The information could be available in any format like print or digital, and also textual to multimedia format. Right user is not from workplace, home, remote location or a desktop in a library. Library also may be sitting anywhere in the world and answering the reference query.

Many libraries today provide reference services electronically over internet through their websites, Digital reference service, electronic reference services, online reference services, web based reference, live reference service, virtual reference service, are some of the names used to provide reference service electronically. All these different names can be synonymously used with digital reference services. Digital reference services may be provided through email, web forms or live interaction between the user and reference librarian.

Digital reference services is interpreted as

- Research the users where they are by having presence on social networking services like Facebook or Second Life.
- A reference query is sent by user to the reference librarian using video conferencing.
- A reference query that is sent to the library over internet using email or web forms provided on library web. Web forms are attached to the email address of the library and users fill reference query I web form. User using instant messaging or virtual reference software and live interaction.

Lankes defines 'Digital reference refers to a network of expertise, intermediation and resources put at the disposal of a person seeking answers in an online environment'

Need for Digital Reference Services.

Digital reference services are needed today for many reasons. The number of users visiting physical library location has declined significantly, and the number of people accessing library websites and using the internet to find information has grown enormously. Personal contacts with users have diminished since the library began providing web based access to the library catalogue and other collection, the trend of using library resources outside the physical confines of the library is not likely to end in an online and virtual learning environment, to provide support for users who find online tools and resources unfamiliar, difficult to learn or insufficient to their information needs, useful when users can not visit the library due to library's limited hours, parking difficulties, waiting at reference etc. If libraries do not provide digital reference services, users may turn to commercial information services providers. Technological developments have affected not only the format and sources of the information libraries use to provide reference services but also how and where libraries provide reference service. Libraries and their resources have partially moved to the virtual world of the

Internet.

Forms of Digital Reference Transaction

Digital Reference Services.

| | |
|----------------|---|
| Asynchronous | Synchronous |
| Email | Simple chat |
| Web Form | Instant Messaging as a chat variant |
| Chatterbot/FAQ | Extended chat |
| | Voice over internet protocol video conferencing |

• Email Reference

Reference via email is technically easy to implement cheap and improves the accessibility and scope of library reference services.

• Reference Via Web Form

Web forms are made available on the home page of the library and user can directly fill the web and send the query to the reference department. Answers are provided by email, phone or post. In web forms, users are required to provide personal details plus the type of information required.

• Chatterbots

Chatterbots are created by computer software which analyzes the questions submitted by users for the keywords contained using linguistics programming and mechanism. These keywords are linked to particular answers in the knowledge base which are then offered to the users.

• Simple Chat Reference

Communication via chat enables the user and the reference librarian to exchange written messages in quick succession. The communicating parties are online at the same time and can therefore react immediately to any messages received. A separate window or field is used for writing and sending off messages. Chat reference thus allows the reference interview to take place without any time delays in a virtual environment.

Extended Chat Reference

Any communication via chat which can be combined with additional features such as page publishing, escorting and co-browsing, through the use of specific software is often part of more extensive digital reference software. Page publishing allows the librarian to send internet pages from the library browser to the user's browser.

• Reference via Video

Use of video conferencing digital reference are not very encouraging this is due to the additional requirement of hardware and software packages in comparison to VoIP as both parties need to own webcams.

• VoIP (Audio chat or Internet phoning)

Voice over Internet Protocol is a technology that enables the simultaneous transfer of voice and other data via the standard internet protocol. In addition to standard hardware equipment both

parties need to have speakers and microphones installed on Pcs.

• **Virtual Reference Services through Social Networking**

Social networking tools like Facebook, Myspace, Orkut and whatsup And second life is very popular among young readers and it is observed that they spend lots of time on this application to keep in contact with friends.

Any library can provide digital reference services. Free as well as paid digital reference software is available, proper planning and staff training is required to provide these services. Periodic evaluation of these services and feedback from the users should be conducted to update these services.

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