

vRef Services at the University of Winnipeg

Practical Lessons and Suggestions for Digital Reference Evaluation

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Overview

- 5,000, primarily undergraduate U
- Service running for almost 2 years
- HumanClick 1st, recently moved to LSSI
- Service provided by regular staff, with exception of evening/weekend service
- Started as proactive response to user “migration” to home/office environment

Service Description

- Available 8:30am – 11:00 pm, Mon-Fri and 11:00am – 6:00pm Sat&Sun
- Button on all web pages and DBs
- All users served – no time limit
- Daytime staffed by regular “reference”, evening/weekend by contract staff

Usage Stats – HC 2002

Stat	Jan (4 weeks of classes)	Feb (3 weeks of classes)	Mar (4 week of classes)
Total	177	149	243
Avg/Total	14 min 40 hrs	14 min 35 hrs	14 min 59 hrs

Usage Stats (LSSI 2002)

Stat	Sep (3 weeks of classes)	Oct (4 weeks of classes)	Nov (1 week of classes)
Total	89	160	35
Min/Max	2:30 1:00:00	1:00 1:45:00	6:30 36:00
Avg/Total	49 min 66 hrs	21 min 50 hrs	35 min 13 hrs

Evaluation 1

- Use a variety of tools for feedback
 - User surveys (more reliable with LSSI)
 - Usage reports
 - Qualitative user feedback
 - Review of transcripts with f2f analysis with staff (Information Literacy Intern)
- Statistics are useful, but have to remember that service is relatively new

Evaluation 2

- More important “evaluative” tools
 - More and more users working outside Library, so is not an option NOT to provide service
 - In last 2 years resources available from home have increased 4x for journals and 10x for databases
 - Services MUST follow resources

Evaluation 3

- Be clear on purpose for evaluation
- In our case decision was made to maintain a strong service after 1-2 months
- Ongoing evaluation is how to improve the service
- Comparison of vRef and pRef must be done very carefully & not as competitors

Lessons Learned & Advice

- Promote service & have as many hours as pRef service, put button EVERYWHERE
- Co-browsing more complex and useful ☹
- Work with staff who WANT to do it, and/or able to work in that environment
- Strong InfoLit program (& others reasons) has increased pDesk stats by 50% over 3 years – resource issues increasingly critical

Changes/Future

- Merging computer help desk and vRef services (phone and chat)
- Possible revision of staffing model
- Sharing resources in COPPUL consortium
- Sharing resources across the globe
- Expand to other student service areas, like registration, advising, etc.