

SMS a query@your library

Curtin delivers flexible service

The Curtin Library and Information Service is becoming increasingly flexible in the way it provides services to clients. A new service being trialled allows clients to send 'SMS' queries to the library.

The concept of SMS (Short Message Service) reference queries was raised as a possible extension to the library's existing virtual reference service. 'Mobile phones are ubiquitous and accessible, and SMS provides students with a very popular way of communicating,' said John Frylinck, acting university librarian. 'Since the student population at Curtin University of Technology has clearly embraced mobile-phone culture and SMS technology 'SMS a query' offers another way of servicing our large client base.'

In addition, an environmental scan concluded that there is little (if any) evidence that an SMS library reference service exists elsewhere in Australia. A successful trial may lead into a new

method of service delivery for libraries throughout Australia. Student feedback indicates a high satisfaction level with SMS queries with all indicating they would use the service again. 'What a good idea. It's less expensive and time-consuming than going online to search for an answer to a simple query,' said one student. 'Very beneficial to all students and staff. The answer was prompt and the service highly satisfactory. I hope the service will keep going. Viva librarians!' said another.

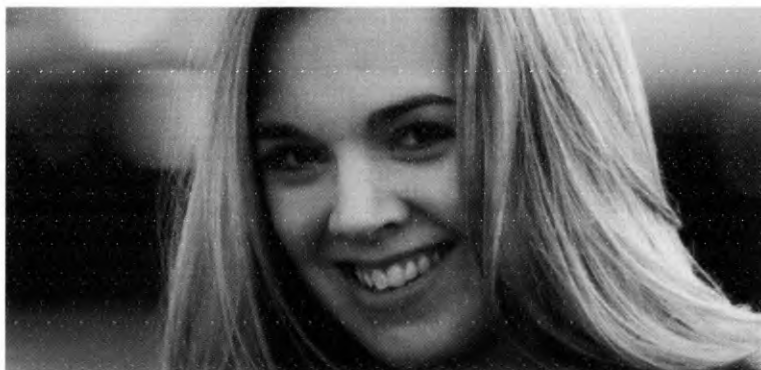
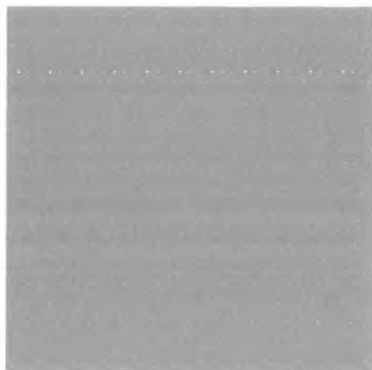
SMS enables those with GSM mobile phones to send text messages of up to 160 characters to other GSM mobile phones. Technology is now also available to receive text-based SMS messages via a computer interface — and this is how library staff receive SMS messages from clients. SMS messages sent to the library arrive in the form of an e-mail, and can be replied to in the same format. E-mail replies sent are then received by the client in the form of an SMS message.

There are several benefits of providing an SMS service this way. Some of these include:

- as reference desk staff are familiar with using e-mail, minimal training is required.
- receiving SMS messages via an e-mail account provides options for tracking incoming and outgoing messages.
- as SMS is asynchronous, queries can be dealt with at the convenience of reference desk staff, and, as a result, the SMS service can be staffed using existing reference resources.

So now staff and students can contact the library any time, from any location, and ask any library related question — and the library will aim to respond to their SMS query within an hour (whilst the library is open).

More details about this trial can be found on the Curtin Library website: <http://library.curtin.edu.au/contact/sms.html>. ■



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