

Building a service that they want

Australia's AskNow! chat reference service

Where can I get information on the terrorist bombings in London?' This was the recent milestone 100 000th enquiry to the hugely successful AskNow! virtual reference service (<http://www.asknow.gov.au>). The secondary school student who asked this question 'chatted' to a librarian at the State Library of Victoria and was provided with a range of sources to help him with his assignment. Over the past three years operators from the National Library of Australia, all state libraries and a number of public libraries have been busy answering similar enquiries for 50 hours each week.

Monitoring of usage patterns of AskNow! shows that adult clients of conventional library services are increasingly accessing a tool that many have long regarded as the domain of their children. Similarly AskNow! operators have become very savvy in communicating ef-

fectively using the chat room technology and locating the best online resources in reference sessions averaging only seven or eight minutes. The technical issues for the service are well under control, it's now the human and organisational ones that are the focus of the co-operative's attention. Foremost among these is the popularity of the service with students, an issue being addressed by a new-look web interface and a proposed separate streamed service for school students.

Further information

Keys, J and F Wilson (2004) 'AskNow! — evaluating an Australian collaborative chat reference service: a project manager's perspective', *Australian Academic and Research Libraries*, June 2004, 35(2):81–94.

Tillotson, D (2005) 'AskNow! again', *Online Currents*, June 2005, 20(5):8–10. ■

Internet Librarian International 2005

This conference, held 10–11 October in London, featured delegates from 33 countries and 3 presenters from Australia. My own session featured fellow presenters from Norway and Singapore. It was great to meet and rub shoulders with librarians from Denmark, the USA, Canada and the UK. The London weather was even kind, although we only caught brief glimpses of it as we listened to the variety of papers indoors.

The two keynote speakers on Monday and Tuesday provided alternative views on Google. Ronald Milne from Oxford University described their involvement with the Google digitisation project. On the other hand, Stephen Arnold gave some warnings on recent developments in the 'Googleplex'. Their high rate of acquiring new patents, for example.

Personally, I also enjoyed papers on the use of wikis, digital reference service development in Norway and collaboration and consortia involvement in e-book purchasing.

Internet Librarian International is an annual event and I would urge my fellow Australian librarians to consider attending as a delegate or submitting a proposal for a paper for 2006 or a future conference. (<http://www.internet-librarian.com>).

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