Title
Reaching Out Via Chat Qwidget and Text Messaging

Permalink
https://escholarship.org/uc/item/7md9x73x

Author
Coppernoll-Blach, Penny

Publication Date
2009-05-17

Peer reviewed
Reaching Out Via Chat Qwidget and Text Messaging

Penny Coppennoll-Blach, AHIP, Reference Coordinator, Biomedical Library, University of California, San Diego

Introduction

Patron questions have been declining for the past several years at the UCSD Biomedical Library (BML). Reference services were being offered via email, chat, Instant Messaging (IM), in-person and telephone. Our students, faculty, and staff were not always able to easily find our Ask a Librarian pages that describes our services, so a new graphic was added to the UCSD Libraries homepage. Other solutions to increase usage were investigated.

When OCLC QuestionPoint made available their Qwidget (chat widget), we decided to add it to our webpages in August 2008 to see if more questions would be submitted. In September 2008, we also implemented a pilot program for a test messaging option using Meebo and the free AIM Hack. This paper presents the results of adding these two user-friendly and more visible choices for our patrons.

Timeline

- May 2004 - UCSD Biomedical Library signs contract with OCLC QuestionPoint (QP) for email virtual reference services.
- February 2008 - Instant Messaging (IM) via Meebo service is added at the BML Reference Desk.
- November 2008 - UCSD Libraries join UC-Wide Chat service with librarians from 6 other UC campuses: UC Berkeley, UC Irvine, UC Los Angeles, UC Merced, UC Riverside, and UC Santa Barbara.
- August 2008 - The QP Qwidget (chat widget) is added to the UCSD Libraries Ask a Librarian webpage. Several of the UCSD Libraries also added the Qwidget to individual webpages.
- September 2008 - Test messaging service via Meebo and the AIM Hack is added to the BML Ask a Librarian page, as a 6-month pilot project.
- January 2009 - The UC-Wide Chat service joins the QP 24/7 Academic Queue.
- January 2009 - Test messaging via Meebo and the AIM Hack stops working. The pilot project is ended prematurely.

Qwidget Statistics, 8-08-3-09

When chat is open

Type question for direct chat

Click link to go to chat form and QP 24-7

When chat is closed

Text Messaging at BML

Options Considered for Pilot Proposal in 9/08

- AIM Hack - Free SMS provider via Meebo (already being used for IM at BML)
- Altaroma - Start up the international phone call involved
- Meebo/Text a Librarian - Just getting started during proposal writing
- Upgrade Wireless - Required a cell phone device for library

AIM Hack was chosen because it was free and also easy to assimilate into the BML Reference Desk procedures with minimal training.

Text Messaging Marketing

- Business cards with Text Us message and logo
- Test BML tools placed around library in and student lounge
- Scratch a note with Test BML logo at Service Desk
- Email announcements to School of Medicine (SOM) students
- Email announcements to all UCSD Libraries staff

Examples of Questions Received

- What are the library hours during Finals Week?
- How to identify peer-reviewed articles
- Complaint about noise in the study lounge
- When a group study room was due for renewal
- How to use Roger (UCSD online catalog)
- Whether a particular journal was owned by UCSD Libraries

Text Messaging Service Results

Statistics: 10/08 - 1/09

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Time Period</th>
<th>Count</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10/08</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11/08</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12/08</td>
<td>7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TOTAL</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Conclusions

Text messaging at BML was not a success. During the four month pilot, only 12 test messages were received even though the new service was marketed extensively. The pilot was ended prematurely due to SMS problems between the AIM Hack and Meebo.

The Qwidget has been a rewarding success. The percent of chat sessions requested via Qwidget is averaging 69% at UCSD and 63% system-wide. Overall chat requests system-wide are up 475% from March 2008 to March 2009.