

Digital Reference Services in Modern Library and Information Centers



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ABSTRACT

Digital reference is a new trend of traditional reference service. This paper highlights how the new face of service is evolving as a natural solution to keep pace with the multifaceted technological environment. It discusses about the basic concepts and essential elements of reference service and gives in detail the advantages, limitations and the technology base about the various established and emerging forms of digital reference. This article focuses on the increasing public demand for digital reference services

Keywords: *Digital reference, Reference Service, E-Resources*

Introduction - Digital refers to any resource, which is in digitized form i.e. which can be read and scanned by means of electronic media. Collection development or selection of digital resources is the process of meeting the information needs of the people in a timely and economical manner using information resources locally held, as well as from other organization. To serve the users library performs many functions. One of the very important functions of a library on which all other functions depend is the collection development. The quality in collection is the more important than the quantity therefore it needs careful planning and systematic approaches.

Types of Digital Reference Services

Web Based

This document helps the librarian locate exactly what the patron is asking for. Creation of webforms requires design consideration. Because webforms substitute for the reference interview, receiving as much information as possible from the patron is a key function.

Aspects commonly found in web based Digital Reference Services:

- A return email address to send the answer to the question
- The question being asked

- The type of question
- What sources have been consulted by the patron
- A date by which the information is needed

Chat through instant messaging

Utilizing instant messaging for reference services allows a patron to contact the library from any location via the internet. This service is like the traditional reference interview because it is a live interaction between the patron and the librarian. On the other side the reference interview is different because the conversation does not float away but instead is in print on the screen for the librarian to review if needed to better understand the patron. instant messaging reference services may be for the use of in-house patrons as well as patrons unable to go to the library.

Strategies for Preservation

The personnel who are going to be involved in the process of digitization, they need to understand some of the important strategies to be followed, for which they must obtain lot many skills and technologies to preserve the information in a systematic manner. Digital data not achieved a long enough natural lifetime for us

to wait for better Medias to come along. Even today we have not achieved stability in data storage technology. Efforts should be made for the survival of digital data for longer duration right from its birth. There are many data preservation methods are adopted for the preservation of digital resources, some of the important methods such as:-

i. Technology Preservation: Technology preservation is not a practical approach in for data preservation as its financially unfeasible to go for regular cycle of media refreshing i.e. maintenance of hardware and software platforms that support digital resources.

ii. Migration and Reformatting: Migration is an approach that involves periodically moving files from one file encoding format to another that is usable in a more modern computing environment.

iii. Emulation: Emulation is the process of recreation of the H/W and S/W environment required to access a resource. Its approach is more focussed on the application w/s rather on the files containing information. It would be theoretically possible to emulate either the hardware (H/W) or software (S/W).

iv. Data Archaeology: Data archaeology involves recovery of data on, using better techniques available in future depending upon the value of data. This becomes necessary rescue a digital resources that has not been migrated but contains total information or to which some unforeseen disaster has occurred.

v. Security: Data security in digital form is the most pressing challenge of digital libraries. Piracy databases, virus infection parallel satellite networking stress is some of the problems for which solutions is needed.

Advantages and Disadvantages:

Analog is a different way of than digital, and each has its intrinsic virtues and limitations. Digital will not and cannot replace analog. To convert everything to digital form would be wrong-headed, even if we could do it. The real challenge is how

to make those analog materials more accessible using the powerful tool of digital technology, not only through conversion, but also through digital finding aids and linked databases of search tools. Digital technology can, indeed, prove to be a valuable instrument to enhance learning and extend the reach of information resources to those who seek them, wherever they are, but only if we develop it as an addition to an already well-stocked tool kit, rather than a replacement for all of those tools.

i. Lack of resources: Majority of the libraries has insufficient fund for its development, so there is a lack of information resources and also human resources to manage the library. Due to the lack of human resources users does not get their needed Information rightly and timely.

ii. Lack of expertise: As there is frequent technology change there is lack of experts to handle and operate the latest technology both in India and abroad.

iii. Lack of manpower training: Librarians have not attained suitable recognition in any organization in which these exist due to lack of proper care by the authorities. With the passage of time the knowledge of library staff is to be refreshed for accepting challenges of electronic information environment and without upgrading their skills the library professionals become unsuitable for adopting new technology like digital technology in libraries. Therefore the concepts of inform resource management in DL without proper refreshing the skills of library personnel appear impossible.

iv. Information explosion on the internet: As the digital library are working through internet and other network, therefore there facing a large amount of useless information in the networked environment which leads to wastage of valuable time of information society, that is also against the 4th law of library science.

v. Technology change: in these days information technology skills and applications are changing and developing fast. To survive digital

libraries need the latest technology. Hence, more and more investment is necessary for digital library to update their technology.

vi. Political and social constraints:

Many libraries have many components of digital library such as locally developed database acquired foreign/Indian database with librarians equipping them solves to meet the requirements, but these libraries will not quickly be able to offer fully electronic library science because of political and social hurdles.

Evaluating Reference Service

Evaluation of reference services literally means to establish the value of the services offered. One can sometimes establish value in quantitative terms; for example, business information may place a dollar value on the information they provide. In general however, evaluation of reference and information services relates to the quality of service, even when librarians or users cannot easily measure quality in quantitative or monetary terms.

Improving the quality of service (as opposed to the narrower idea of enhancing the value of service) is the objective of the evaluation of reference services. Before examining these techniques in detail, it should be emphasized that quality of services is an everyday, commonsense idea. It is not too difficult to decide if one has received good services, whether it is in a retail establishment, a restaurant, or a library.

Users soon form opinions that some librarians give better service than others that some sources are more reliable than others. Evaluation of reference services can make use of this critical judgment on the part of users to improve the quality of services

What can be evaluated?

In many reference and information departments, there may already exist programs to evaluate some of the inputs (the components go into providing reference service). In particular, the departments may have established mechanisms for evaluating the text resources (the reference materials) in terms of their quality and cov-

erage, and the human resources (the reference staff) in terms their performance in providing reference services. This evaluation of references constitutes the first level of evaluation.

Making use of high quality resources does not necessarily guarantee that high quality services will be provided. A variety of libraries has tested a number of mechanisms to measure directly the quality of services (the outputs). Typically these measure focus on the reference transaction, in which questions are answered or instruction and assistance are provided. Evaluation of reference transactions constitutes the second level of evaluation.

Finally, there is third level of evaluation. Even if the services using high quality resources (the first level) and doing a good job of dealing with individual transactions (the second level), it may not be meeting needs of its user community in an effective and efficient manner. Again mechanism exists that enable a library to access extent to which it is meeting the information needs of its community: in other words, outcome of the service.

Evaluation of Reference Staff:

Any library with thoroughly developed personnel function will already have in place one of a number of techniques for conducting annual or periodic evaluations of its employees. Although variety of personnel evaluation techniques exist and can be found in any of the standard textbooks on library personnel administration, evaluation of reference personnel poses special problems and challenges. Personnel evaluation normally takes into account two different criteria: the characteristics of the employee (in terms of qualifications of the position) and the employee's performance of the job itself.

Evaluation of Reference Service

The evaluation of reference moves beyond individual reference transactions and attempts to evaluate the extents to which reference services are meeting their overall objectives. For this type of evaluation to be possible, a statement of goals and objectives of the reference depart-

ment must exist. A typical statement might include such functions as meeting the information needs of the user community and teaching the user community about the library and its services. The task of this third level of evaluation is to ascertain the extent to which the reference service is meeting its goals and objectives.

Conclusion

Digital technology changes the way we work. Librarians were early adopters of digital technology. Electronic data processing suited the kind of large scale, standardized data processing libraries needed. The MARC format was developed by the library bases. Congress in the 1960s Massive printed bibliographies was replaced by

data bases. Vendors like university Microfilms, international, institute for scientific information and dialog transformed the process of professional information retrieval.

Through the 80s and 90s library catalogues were gradually converted to databases ~ or automated, as we used to say. This made lending operations much more efficient. But the big change in reference work comes from digital communications: with e-mail and the Web. A library that accepts questions and provides answers by e-mail has already taken its first step on the Moon. Digital transactions can easily be stored and retrieved, monitored and reused. The reference process is no longer inherently private.

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