Virtual Reference Adventure: Choose Your Own Experience

EXPLORE A CHAT REFERENCE OPTION—INSTANT MESSAGING

Do you want to offer reference help when and where your students are doing their homework? Some libraries, already offering chat reference through software like QuestionPoint or Tutor.com, are adding instant messaging as another option.

We already know that instant messaging (IM) is extremely popular with the 18-27 year-old age group known as Gen Y. According to a report compiled by the Pew Internet and American Life Project, 46% of the IM users in this age group report that they use IM more frequently than e-mail.

Adding IM reference service as an option helps libraries to connect with Gen Y users. IM features such as the "Buddy List" encourage repeat sessions because users can save the library's IM screen name as one of their Buddies. The Buddy List is an easy way for users to be reminded when the service is available because its icon appears only when the service is on.

Read about the use of IM in libraries:

Sarah Houghton, "Virtual Reference @ Your Library," *AASL Knowledge Quest*, January/February 2005.

Jean Ferguson and Pam Sessions, "r u there? Adding Instant Messaging to an Established Virtual Reference Service," 2005 VRD Conference presentation.

Caleb Tucker-Raymond, "Web-based Chat vs. Instant Messaging, " L-Net staff blog, 6/23/05.

Brian Smith, "IM Ref in the Fast Lane: What We've Learned," ILA Conference presentation.

Explore how these libraries are encouraging their patrons to used IM:

Marin County Library

St. Joseph County Public Library

Hackley Public Library

Duke University Libraries

University of North Carolina Libraries

Temple University

University of Nevada La Vegas