

Virtual Reference Adventure: Choose Your Own Experience

Here's a "what if" scenario to think about as you develop policies and procedures for your chat reference service.

WHAT IF your only customer behavior guidelines are written for in-library use?

Your public library serves a large urban area. Students frequently use the chat reference service. In these chat interactions with students, staff members are complaining about abusive language, repeated nonsense questions, and related problem behaviors. The in-library behavior guidelines fail to address ways in which these issues can be handled effectively. Staff also needs guidance for other online issues such as anonymous users, multiple e-mail identities, and "disappearing patrons."

How can you get advice from other libraries that face similar behavior problems?

What process will you use to develop new policies and procedures?

Do you need legal advice? What resources do you have?

Here are some resources that may help you:

Hansen, Linda, "Putting It In Writing: Potential Use and Abuse of Virtual Reference Services," 2004. Available at <http://www.vrd2004.org/proceedings/presentation.cfm?PID=302>

Samuel, Monica, "When Kids Enter the Queue: Working with Unexpected Users on University Virtual Reference Sites," 2004. Available at <http://www.vrd2004.org/proceedings/presentation.cfm?PID=351>

"24/7 Collaborative Reference Policies and Procedures," OCLC QuestionPoint. See section 4.5 Types of Patrons at http://www.questionpoint.org/ordering/cooperative_guidelines_247rev3.htm