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Virtual Reference Task Force

Library Help Report/Meeting with Phil Blank, NC Knows

Revised as per Phil Blank's comments/suggestions 10/17/2011; to be posted on Virtual Reference Task Force's wiki.

Referring URL:

http://ncknows.org/practice.html/

IP Address: 74.242.236.35

Some Elements of Service:

> PDFs can be sent to users.

> Librarian to Librarian communication is increased.

> Chats can be transferred at the ends of shifts to either queues or individual librarians.

> This service facilitates collaboration between librarians.

> Many academic libraries collaborate with this service.

> This service permits academic libraries the freedom to perform collaborative reference services as well as monitor their own students since they can join the shift at varying times.

> A key aspect of the software is service rollover. This allows libraries the flexibility to monitor their own patrons if they want and also allows patrons to always get the most appropriate available librarian without having to wade through lots of options. If no librarian is on, the libraries can customize their offline messages (or have the button/widget disappear entirely). In NC, they use an offline email form that automatically sends an email to the patrons' library.

> The widget or link to this service is adaptable to each library's local policies; it can vanish if all librarians are offline, or provide an email form for the user to leave a message.

Some Elements of User Practice:

> LH3 sends URLS which users can click on and then pop-up. LH3 is consistent with IMing protocols, so users understand how it works.

➤ Library Help is popular with users; user statistics are higher with usage of this service, and public and academic libraries have witnessed an increase in user traffic as well. The widgets garner about three times as much traffic as a link. LH3's widget is extremely customizable.

➤ Saturday and Sunday from 12am-8am no service is offered since these times are slow. *NC Knows would consider staffing these times if enough other libraries chipped in to make it worthy of the ROI. The advantage would be to say "24/7".

Some Elements of Software Functions:

➤ As many users/queues can be added as needed, which is crucial to adding circulation and other service points.

➤ User traffic is funneled directly from library websites to LH3 interface.

➤ Chat services can "gateway" or funnel in SMS and other IM traffic into one interface.

➤ Google voice is available, free, but can cause up to 6 minutes delay in service.

➤ Twilio is also available-it is 3 to 5 cents per chat and instantaneous. Two libraries have added Google Voice/Twilio thus far (http://library3lp.com/docs/twilio.html)

➤ The Widget code can be given to client libraries to put it directly on their websites. They can make any changes from the administrative module, so the need for IT involvement is minimal. Once the widget is added to the site, it can be altered directly from the administrative module.

➤ There is a monitory activity function that increases quality control. One can scroll over each chat and see the transcript; one can view the user stats easily by day and month. Comparative analyses of user statistics are easy.

➤ Visualization of data also possible; reports can be generated since stats can be viewed per queue. Metrics and stats can be imported into Excel to generate reports.

➤ There are contingency options with this software-it adapts to offline, local policy, and customizable situations for each library as needed.

➤ LH3 is flexible in terms of standards (http://libraryh3lp.com/docs/mobile.html) so it can interact well with lots of other software and technologies. Some libraries have adapted apps for it. Please contact Pam Sessoms for more information psessoms@gmail.com

Some Advantages:

- Library Help has help documentation and almost any library staff person and/or librarian can be trained to use the software very easily, to reduce the necessity for IT assistance.

- Small organizational culture.

- Low overhead costs (please contact Phil Blank phil@philblank.net for further details). Software costs were dramatically lower than previous software for NC Knows, which allows them to hire their own backup staff and still save money.

- Specific libraries can provide endless service rollover in this cooperative atmosphere. This is most appreciated by sophisticated large academic libraries, whose involvement in the service is crucial to NC, but also can be made quite simple and easy for smaller public libraries.

- Public and academic libraries participate in this service, which facilitates high levels of collaboration.

Some Details of Service:

- LH3 is available 24/7.

- NCKnows is open 24/7 except for Sat/Sun 12am-8am.

- The afterhours service works 9pm-8am, Monday-Friday, and 12pm-12am Saturday and Sunday.

- 8am-9pm libraries staff service.

- Back up service listed and posted on local listservs; recent graduates mostly perform back up staff functions. The back up staff is financially compensated with an hourly wage (North Carolina is non union; please contact Phil Blank for particulars).

- Feedback/assessment tools are in progress for this service; the goal is to build something external and link to it at the end of reference sessions.

NCKnows manager Phil Blank encourages anyone with questions to contact him directly at 919-942-8995 or phil@philblank.net.