

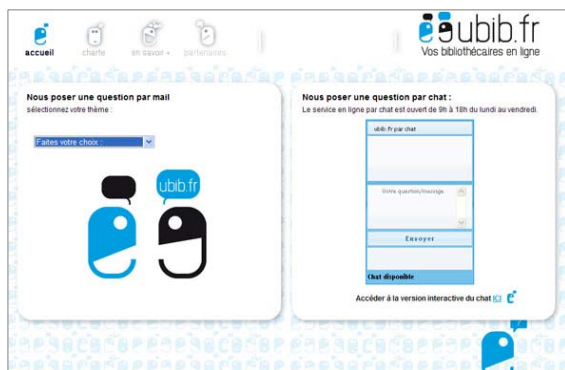
QuestionPoint powers France's fastest growing virtual reference service

10 university libraries collaborate to provide France's first free academic online reference service

Situation

In 2006, the idea of an online information service was initiated through the Network of Universities of the Western Atlantic (RUOA) by the Service Commun de Documentation (SCD), University of Angers. The idea was that a number of local universities join together to offer an online information service to their students, teachers, researchers and faculty-staff. Individually, none of these libraries possessed the human and financial resources necessary to launch such a service, but as a regional network each participating library could contribute proportionally.

Resource constraints also meant the participating libraries had to look for an off-the-shelf software solution to facilitate the service. They didn't have the time or knowledge to develop a bespoke system within the planned time schedule.



Solution

OCLC's QuestionPoint virtual reference software was already being successfully used by the Bibliothèque nationale de France and the networks of the Bibliothèque publique d'information. Should the libraries of RUOA seek to collaborate in the future with these reference networks then it made sense for them to share the same software platform.

The comprehensive functionality and flexible nature of QuestionPoint, combined with testimonials from existing users was enough to make it the preferred solution for the university librarians of Angers, Nantes, Le Mans, Rennes 1 & 2, Brest, Lorient-Vannes – the first seven participants in what would come to be known as Ubib.fr.

AT A GLANCE

- Ubib, France
- Currently answers 200 questions per month
- RUOA (Réseau Universitaire Ouest-Atlantique): Universities of Angers, Nantes, Le Mans, Rennes 1 & 2, Brest, Lorient-Vannes, la Rochelle, Limoges and Poitiers.
- <http://www.ubib.fr/index.php>



Photo: Université Vercors (Le Mans), by Céline Ménéil

Work began to implement the service in 2008 so that the project could hit its target live date and in February 2009 the Ubib.fr service was launched.

“We are very proud of Ubib, the first free online reference service of academic libraries in France and hope to attract many more students to it!”

Cécile Röthlin, conservateur - Université du Maine

Ubib enables academic users in the west of France to contact librarians direct, in real time, from 9 am until 6 pm by chat using instant messaging hotlines. Or, for specific questions on special subjects, six subject clusters are defined where a specialist answers your question. Users can also pose questions by e-mail, 24 hours per day, 7 days a week. Users of Ubib are guaranteed to receive an answer within 48 hours.

Issues addressed by Ubib include everything to operational enquiries, questions on services to requests on literature searches. While mainly used by students, the service is also proving popular with teachers, researchers, faculty and staff of participating universities. Librarians staffing Ubib have established a wiki based repository of information in order that they can respond quickly and reliably to the most common questions.

Free to use and available for a real-time response 45 hours per week, Ubib.fr is the fastest and most open reference service in France.

CASE STUDY: Ubib.fr

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Result

Although the BnF online information service SINDBAD and Biblioses@me of the Bibliothèque publique d'information in Paris are both very successful, the libraries of the RUOA were the first university libraries in France to offer a free online reference service to academic students, teachers, researchers and other staff.

Since its launch in February 2009, Ubib.fr has grown to receive over 200 questions per month via chat and email. In early 2010, based on reception of the service amongst users, the universities of La Rochelle, Limoges and Poitiers made the decision to join the Ubib network. Now, more than 120 staff members at ten university libraries participate in the service, making it France's fastest growing virtual reference service.

This growth is set to increase as awareness and promotion of the Ubib service spreads. Next steps will see member libraries increase uptake of Ubib amongst users by making it more accessible on the web and visible on relevant homepages and library catalogue pages.



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These measures will coincide with other promotional activities planned for the start of the new academic year, new student will increase Ubib's already faithful user base.