

New Jersey libraries take virtual reference services statewide day and night

Virtual reference service helps market libraries, expand their visibility



Situation

QandANJ is a statewide Web-based service where customers connect online with a librarian in a one-to-one real-time chat for help with any topic or information request. Using the live chat technology from QuestionPoint, a customer interacts with the librarian who sends website links, articles from specialized databases, multimedia files, and other specific sources directly to the customer's computer. All the customer needs to use QandANJ is an Internet browser and a New Jersey library card number.

In October 2001, QandANJ launched the first statewide virtual reference service. Their mission is straightforward: Got a question? Get a live answer. "The service didn't move to 24/7 immediately. The staff chose quality over fast growth, and wanted to make sure that all systems were a go before building a large customer base," explained Beth Cackowski, Project Coordinator. As more libraries were recruited to join the project, service expanded to 24 hours a day, 7 days a week.

Solution

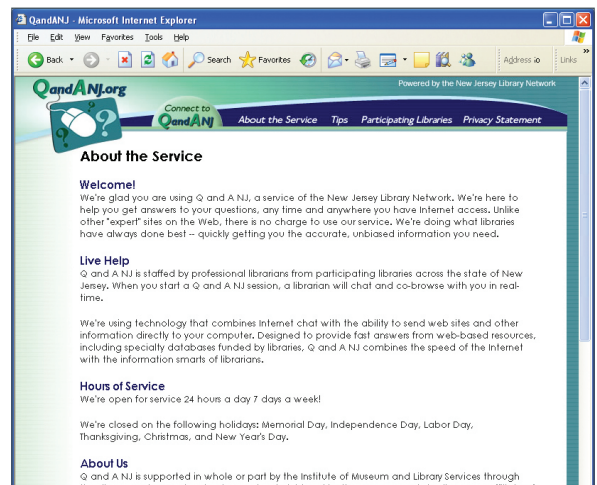
In 2006, QandANJ, already a large volume, mature virtual reference service, chose to move to QuestionPoint. They selected QuestionPoint 24/7 because it fit well with their 24-hour reference business model. Implementation was accomplished quickly and seamlessly to avoid interruption to their customers.

QandANJ is a network of 43 volunteer staffing libraries, including public libraries, academic libraries, and the State Library. Being part of the reference cooperative has ensured that QandANJ remains a 24/7 service for the residents and students of New Jersey. That's a key factor for the success of the service.

AT A GLANCE

www.QandANJ.org

- 300+ participating librarians statewide
- 40+ public and academic libraries and the State library staff the service
- 50,000+ inquiries to QandANJ received annually



"We receive enthusiastic comments from our customers every day!"

Results

New Jersey library customers have been thrilled with this service. QandANJ attracts people of all age groups. During the school year, approximately 50% of QandANJ users are students. Many live in communities directly served by the staffing libraries, but the service is open to all residents of New Jersey regardless of whether their local library staffs the service. Between 2003 and 2005, the number of chat

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sessions with librarians averaged nearly 55,000 annually. That translates to almost 5,000 customer inquiries per month. Librarians who staff the service receive training that prepares them to provide effective service in the QuestionPoint chat environment. Librarians can access past session transcripts and review a history of their reference interactions to help in answering questions. The availability of valuable usage statistics and reports allows QandANJ to evaluate and improve the service as needed. With the success of the statewide QandANJ virtual reference cooperative, it's easy to understand why QandANJ has attracted so many of the best New Jersey librarians to staff the service.



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For more information about QuestionPoint, visit www.oclc.org/questionpoint/, call 1-800-848-5878, ext. 6251 or send e-mail to libservices@oclc.org.