

Paris's Bibliothèque Publique d'Information (BPI) Helps Nationalize Multilingual Virtual Reference

How Paris's most prestigious library grows a national multilingual virtual reference service

Situation

It started with a conversation with the Berlin Central and Regional Library, known as the ZLB. An agreement was made with the Bibliothèque Publique d'Information (BPI) to use QuestionPoint as the basis for cooperative virtual reference, with each library placing question forms on its Web site in the language of the other library. Offering this type of reference service is innovative to both libraries and users. It was well-received by both libraries users.

While reference services are not common throughout Southern Europe, there was a growing interest from reference librarians who had heard of the success of the Berlin Library system.

When they compared QuestionPoint to existing local reference systems that had been in place in large libraries, QuestionPoint was selected as the best-in-class solution. Philippe Martin, Regional Account Manager for Southern Europe said, "A major advantage of QuestionPoint is that it is open to the rest of the world and cooperative. For larger libraries, this expands their ability to provide reference services and, for smaller libraries who work cooperatively it is ideal to be able to rely on the assistance of larger libraries."

Solution

Users were considering the multilingual virtual reference service as a second step after they exhausted their own search options and did not find answers to their questions. The number and complexity of questions that were being received by the library were growing. The libraries knew they were ready for multilingual virtual reference. Both

AT A GLANCE

Bibliothèque Publique d'Information (BPI) — The Library of Public Information

- SINDBAD is the French version of QuestionPoint
- Bibliosés@me is the French version of a 24/7 Reference cooperative
- <http://www.bpi.fr>
- Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) — The French National Library
- <http://www.bnf.fr>

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the Bibliothèque nationale de France (BnF) and the Bibliothèque Publique d'Information (BPI) decided to replace their existing reference service with QuestionPoint. Successfully implementing the virtual reference service required plenty of communication between both libraries. The Bibliothèque nationale de France (BPI) implemented the French version of QuestionPoint reference service called SINDBAD (Service d'INformation Des Bibliothécaires A Distance). From their Web site, a user may ask a question in French or English by subject category. The BnF service is structured much like the Library of Congress in that the departments of the library are organized into an internal reference network. Users choose from a number of forms representing a subject area and these are routed to the appropriate reference librarian. SINDBAD provides

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document references including books, journals, music CDs, and films on all subjects and factual information such as biographical elements, facts, figures and dates.

Results

Questions about books and collections are now primarily directed to the libraries through QuestionPoint. Virtual reference changed the way users perceive their groups' libraries. Users have responded to the virtual reference service very positively and the number of questions continues to increase. Questions about books and collections are now primarily directed to QuestionPoint. The role for virtual reference for BPI is that it has become the national reference service with most of the libraries being connected in one way or another.

At The Library of Public Information (BPI) they also decided to begin developing a French reference cooperative. Currently, the cooperative consists of two libraries in France and the service is called *Bibliosés@me*. Since many libraries share resources, once the library teams were well-trained with QuestionPoint as a reference tool they could assist each other in providing users the answers they could not find in their own searches.

The BPI is actively seeking additional partner libraries to expand the service. It is BPI's hope that QuestionPoint becomes the national reference service and that more libraries will be connected this way.

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