

In an always-on, networked world, is your enquiry service always open?



Sixty-five percent of UK households now have access to the Internet, and looking for information is the most common activity for internet users. Increasingly, people expect immediate access to information. To match these changing lifestyles, libraries must deliver services where citizens are—on the Web. Enquire is a virtual reference service, staffed by participating libraries, providing trustworthy, real-time, one-to-one assistance from professional librarians in the UK and US, available whenever your citizens need help: 24 hours a day, every day.

Do you want to offer a 24/7 enquiry service?

Enquire is an example of libraries working together to help users at their point of need. One of three People's Network services originally commissioned by the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA), Enquire delivers live assistance to information seekers via Internet chat. Run by libraries in partnership with OCLC, the service gives public library users access to a cooperative network of librarians who answer questions at any time of the day or night. Currently, anyone can use the Enquire service by accessing www.peoplesnetwork.gov.uk.

More than 60 libraries across the UK are already participating in Enquire. Each authority provides staffing at a level, time and frequency that is achievable for them. Yet together, in collaboration with international partner libraries from the OCLC QuestionPoint 24/7 Reference Cooperative, they bring sufficient staff to handle peak levels of demand around the clock.

A Web-based reference service allows libraries to go where users are, whether on the library website or in popular sites like Yahoo! Answers. In 2008, Enquire became a Knowledge Partner of Yahoo! Answers (UK & Ireland), directly engaging with users in this Web community who appreciate the high-quality answers they receive from librarians.

An inclusive service, reaching all members of your community

Both national and local government agendas emphasise community engagement. Through Enquire, libraries are reaching out to all members of their communities, providing an accessible, inclusive service to both regular library users and individuals/communities that are distant or disengaged from library services. Joint service delivery through a nationally commissioned initiative such as Enquire can assist you in reaching all members of your community, including those unable to visit a library.



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“It’s good to be able to ask for what you need and not have to search hours on the Internet for what you think you need.”

—Enquire user

Best value through collaboration

Each year Enquire answers in excess of 25,000 questions, a level of service no individual library could hope to achieve on its own, especially considering current financial pressures within local government.

Considerable efficiencies can be realised through collaboration. Resource and budget efficiencies are achieved through Enquire’s participation in the 24/7 Reference Cooperative. The Cooperative is an international, around-the-clock reference service. This means that your users will benefit from reference assistance 24 hours a day, seven days a week, with no additional investment in staffing or technology required on your part.

As the service is supported by 1,400 libraries worldwide, there is always someone on hand to answer your users’ questions in the hours where your library staff are not available. The resulting economies of scale mean that for an average resource commitment of just one half-day shift every fortnight (equating to 13 days per annum) your users have access to an information professional 365 days a year.

Minimal set-up costs

Participation in the Enquire service is based on a cost-effective annual subscription. Although originally commissioned as part of a national People’s Network Service offering, Enquire is wholly sustained by local authorities as a strategic partnership for the benefit of their users.

“Great service! Particularly good for people living a distance away from their library or who have disabilities which restrict travel...”

—Enquire user

Many public library authorities lack the resources to establish such an added value service independently. However, by working together with other authorities to share knowledge, staff expertise and resources, you can provide a consistent, trusted online service to your citizens far more cost-effectively than you could alone.

There are no hidden costs to using the service. All software and service management fees are included in your annual subscription, along with access to professional back-up staff to take questions when the service is busy.

“Enquire is an excellent way for libraries to offer support and assistance to people who are having trouble sifting through the avalanche of information available on the Web.”

—Kevin Crompton, Chief Executive, Luton Borough Council

Benefits of Enquire at a glance:

- Provides your citizens with a round-the-clock reference service with no need for additional staffing or changes to your libraries opening times
- Meets the information needs of all members of your community
- Delivered locally, managed nationally, staffed globally
- Raises awareness of your library beyond the library walls
- Offers a fast response to users accustomed to the immediacy of Web search engines
- Browser-based software requires minimal technical investment
- Develops your staff’s customer service skills in a digital environment.

For more information about Enquire please contact:

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