

AskNow! At a Glance

March 2005

Background

AskNow! is a collaborative service provided by CASL and their partner libraries. It is a virtual reference desk where answers are provided immediately by operators using chat software and searching the Internet and library resources. The Service commenced August 2002 as a pilot and became ongoing in March 2004.

Members

- All state and territory libraries of Australia and the National Library of Australia
- Operators also from National Library of New Zealand and Library Board of Singapore
- 15 public library partners: 5 from NSW, 4 from WA, 3 from Vic and 3 from SA

Software

The service uses the 24/7Reference software which was originally developed for the US cooperative service, MCLS. In August 2004 it was acquired by OCLC and later this year will be integrated with their QuestionPoint.

Hours of operation

The service is available Monday to Friday 9am to 7pm Australian Eastern Standard Time, with 3 operators (seats) answering questions simultaneously. Service members and partners provide an agreed number of hours of service on a weekly roster.

Access

The AskNow link is available through the websites of each of the members and has also been loaded on the websites of some organisations such as schools and tertiary institutions.

Statistics

- Since the service commenced in August 2002 to the end of February 2005 82,060 sessions conducted.
- Between January and December 2004 there were 38,325 sessions.
- There is an average of 2,735 enquiries per month and 626 per week.
- The busiest periods coincide with the school and academic year and especially peak in March, May and September.

Client profile

- Most clients are from the metropolitan areas of the eastern states of Australia
- Under 16 year olds are the largest group, followed by 16-24 years

What clients like about the service

- It is interactive and in real time
- The operators are especially helpful with Internet links and a transcript is automatically sent
- The chat software is easy to use and available to anyone with an Internet connection
- The tone is less formal than with other reference services

CASL Reference Issues Working Group
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