

New Models for Library Service: Predatory Reference

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Predatory Reference

- If you don't like the term, blame me!
- Not meant to be “creepy”
- Think of it like a nature film
 - We consume questions
 - We need to hunt them down!



Why go predatory?

- Because 90% of users identify the library with books and nothing but books. (OCLC “Perceptions of Libraries” report, 2005: http://www.oclc.org/reports/pdfs/Percept_pt3.pdf)
- Because people don't just have questions when they're at the library
- Because people who aren't at the library probably don't think to call us
- Because our users ARE going to places like Yahoo Answers and ChaCha
- Because it'd be nice to show off our “chops” where they're not expected!

Main point:

- Get the patrons when they're NOT:
 - In the building
 - On your website
 - On your Facebook/MySpace page
 - All of these involve the patron “coming to you”

What's your goal?

- Provide reference assistance?
 - Meet lots of people and promote?

 - These aren't mutually exclusive, but you need to make one or the other primary!
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Common Strategies

- Get out of the building
 - Lurk and Leap
 - Weasel your way in
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Get out of the building

- Do reference in odd places!
 - Colleges—think dorms, quads, etc.
 - Public libraries—parks, festivals, etc.
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Librarian House Calls

- Franklin & Marshall Univ.
 - Set up a reference desk in the college dorms.
 - Andy Gulati [andy.gulati@fandm.edu]
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Roaming Librarian:

- Northwestern Univ.
 - Set up at the student center, in the cafeteria, etc.
 - Jeannette Moss [j-moss@northwestern.edu]
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Out on the quad, In the Park

- Penn State Berks campus
- Answer Cart/Library Dude—real hot dog cart
- Billie Walker: bew11@psu.edu



College libraries seem to take the lead

- Captive audience!
 - They've got a defined need for your services
 - What possibilities exist for public libraries?
 - Teen/senior/community centers
 - Nursing homes?
 - Always be aware of territorial issues!
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Still other locations?

- Downtown
 - Your local senior center
 - The bookmobile
 - In front of the grocery store
 - Mall information desk
 - Fairs, festivals, etc.
 - Consider—will you have an audience for your services? (also promote vs. provide)
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Panera/Starbucks/WiFi Hotspots

- Liverpool Public Library (NY)
- <http://tinyurl.com/5lhupo>
- Make sure you've got the manager's permission!
- May be concerned about soliciting



Lurk and Leap

- Usually a more “virtual” model.
- Kind of like eavesdropping and then butting in with an answer! But more polite.

ask.



Slamming the Boards

- Participate in Q&A boards like Yahoo Answers, AskVille, WikiAnswers, etc.
 - LinkedIn Answer board, etc.
 - Make sure you identify yourself as a librarian.
 - Consider adding Q&A apps to your facebook profile.
 - <http://answerboards.wetpaint.com>
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“Slamming” Issues

- Hard to get to the “real” questions.
 - You're usually not working with a local patron.
 - Need to find time!
 - Is voting the best way to determine best answer?
 - Your answer might get modified.
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Look for local papers/websites, etc.

- Comment on local blogs when there's a question of fact, local history, etc.
 - "Ask an Arlington Heights Librarian" board on [Arlington Heights.org](http://ArlingtonHeights.org)
 - These can be low-traffic.
 - Use Google Alerts, etc. to keep yourself in touch with them!
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Get your VR link on non-library sites

- Village site
 - Chamber of Commerce Site
 - [Village Wikipedia Entry](#)
 - [Community Information Directory](#)
 - (OK, so we actually run that site, but most users don't realize that!)
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Weasel Your Way In

- Work the librarian into an organization or situation where you wouldn't normally expect to see one of us!
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“Embedded Librarians”

- Central Arizona University
 - Enroll in Blackboard classes and become the students' “personal librarian”
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Work with local committees/agencies

- Mentioned by Jamie LaRue, Douglas County Libraries (CO)
 - Get a librarian placed on a planning/development committee, etc.
 - Offer to do fact-finding, research, etc.
 - “Community Reference”/iGuide program:
<http://www.louvierslibrary.org/AboutUs/LaRuesViews/2007/062807>
<http://www.louvierslibrary.org/Research/iGuides>
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Join the Chamber of Commerce/PTA/etc.

- Show up at networking events
 - Participate in new-member orientations
 - Volunteer to research/fact-find
 - Offer premium services
 - Barb Vlk (bvlk@ahml.info)
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Lighten another's load

- Univ. of Northern Iowa publishes the North American Review literary journal'
- Editors receive many historical questions via mail, e-mail
- Librarian has offered to provide answers
- Now messages forwarded directly to her
- Jerilyn Marshall (jerilyn.marshall@uni.edu)

Lighten Another's Load



- Daily Herald's BeepCentral: "What's the Fact?"
- The staffer who was assigned to answer questions on the board was calling us anyway
- We asked them to just send us the questions in exchange for an acknowledgement.
- Unfortunately, the site went under!

Lighten Another's Load

- AskColorado / Colorado.gov website VR
 - Unfortunately, the partnership lapsed, but
 - can we look for similar partnerships locally?
 - Johnson, Kris (Johnson_K@cde.state.co.us)
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Clinical Informationist

- Sheila Green, Houston Academy of Medicine
– Texas Medical Center Library
 - Librarian walks the rounds w/doctors.
 - Offer to find articles, follow-up info, etc.
<http://tinyurl.com/6m7v6a>
 - “...any environment where small groups walk around or gather...would be a good environment to offer the service”
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Plan some fun and call it “Reference”

- Jessamyn West
 - <http://www.librarian.net>
 - Planned a few pub trivia nights in 2002
 - Advice
 - Focus on the fun
 - Interesting, odd questions, not just facts
 - Question archive:
 - <http://www.jessamyn.com/journal/02/trivia.html>
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Questions to Ponder

- Will this generate lots of questions?
 - Are we chasing the long tail?
 - Is that OK?
 - Does the additional visibility make it worthwhile even with low stats?
 - Should we pay a librarian to do this?
 - Could other staffers (especially if the balance is promotional)?
 - Are stats the ultimate measure of success?
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•Recent AHML steps

- Presentations at staff meetings, etc.:
 - Wheeling Township staff meeting
 - VAH Health Services Dept.
 - PTA meetings
- Set them up from “cold calls”
 - Target groups that can spread the word to other users, too.
- Establish web page for that meeting that can become an ongoing workspace.
 - <http://www.ahml.info/presentations>

Recent AHML steps (cont'd)

- Meetings are initially promotional
- Hope to turn them into ongoing relationships with those groups.
- Recognizing that marketing and service go hand-in-hand!

I've Talked Enough, Let's Brainstorm!

- Where have you tried predatory reference?
 - Success stories?
 - Disaster stories?
 - Where haven't you, but think you'd like to?
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