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Digital Reference Services

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The *Virtual* Reference Desk



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Digital Reference

Virtual Reference, E-Mail Reference, Real-Time Reference, Electronic Reference, Chat Reference, Networked Reference...

- A network of expertise, intermediation and resources placed at the disposal of someone seeking answers in an online environment
- Reference Librarians Trying to get into the Internet Game



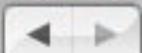
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However, Beware the Flying Car





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The Dangers of Predicting the Future of Library Service

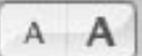
CURB SERVICE

10,000 *Current* BOOKS

CHICAGO PUBLIC LIBRARY
RANDOLPH ST. CORRIDOR

Convenient
FREE
Time Saving

eDesk



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Argument 1: This is not a Digital Age





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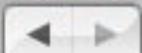
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Assuming the role of an iconoclast, Mr. Mann said that "I want to protest the assumption that this is a digital age." He cited statistics of the ever-increasing figures for book production in the United States. "And the only free access to these books is still via libraries," he said. "The bulk of reference service cannot be done in a digital environment."

"Copyright is not the problem. Piracy is the problem," he continued. "The digital age faith that copyright will be worked out and everything will be on-line is fallacious. Copyright problems cannot possibly be solved in cyberspace."

He pointed out that site licenses, whereby a library purchases access to information on the Internet, "are not part of cyberspace because this information is not accessible by anyone anywhere. You must be in a particular place" to access the resource. "This is the antithesis of a virtual library," he said.

"Real libraries," however, "can offer any material without cost. The real solution [to the copyright problem] already exists. It is found in the widespread libraries – not on the Internet."



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Answer: Realities of a Digital World

- Information is Increasingly Digital
- Technology (Hardware) is Increasingly Digital
- Technology is Increasingly Interconnected

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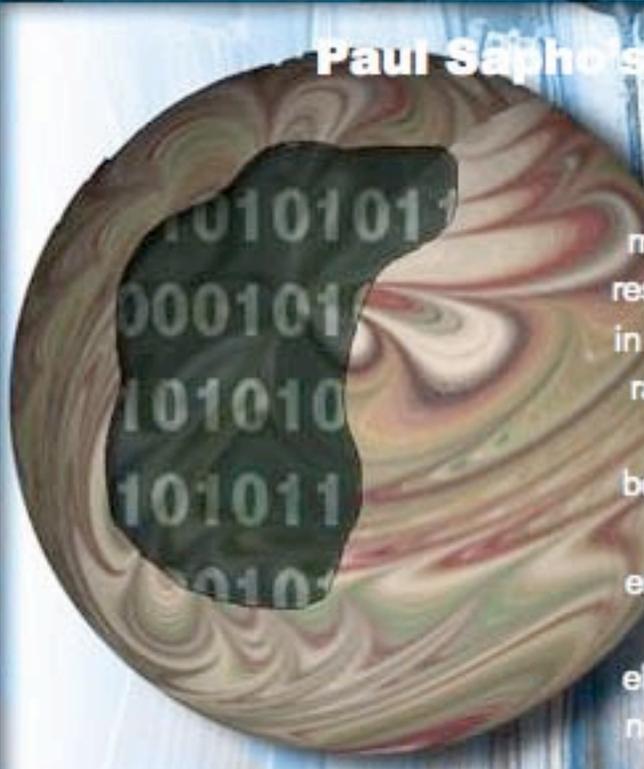


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Paul Sapho's Sphere



The relationship between burgeoning paper and even more rapid electronic diffusion resembles an expanding sphere, in which volume increases more rapidly than surface area. The information business has become a kind of piñata: a thin paper crust surrounding an enabling electronic core. Paper has become the artifact of electronic media, but we barely notice because the paper crust conceals the core.



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Answer: Janes and McClure

- "Taking all of the data into account, it appears that for these questions and for these subjects [those used in the study], the use of freely available, Web-based resources are roughly equivalent to the use of other resources."
- Janes, J. and McClure, C. Source: Public Libraries v. 38 no1 (Jan./Feb. 1999) p. 30-3 Libraries: 854



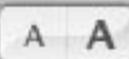
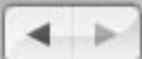
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Note: The Lessons of Napster

- The Music Industry has been Shaken by Music Sharing Services like Napster, Morpheus, KaZaA, and Gnutella
- It's the Information not the Container
 - Bits versus Atoms
- Technology Creates Convenience, and Convenience will Often win over Ideals



**Argument 2: Even if We Live
in a Digital Age, Users can't
Access It**

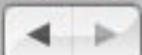
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Answer: Access is Increasing

- 51% of all U.S. homes have a computer
- 41.5% of all U.S. homes have Internet access[1]
- Two million new users connect to the Internet every month[2]
- 90% of children between the ages of 5 and 17 (or 48 million) now use computers
- 75% of 14–17 year olds and 65% of 10–13 year olds use the Internet
- "With more than half of all Americans using computers and the Internet, we are truly a nation online. At work, schools, and libraries, as well as at home, the Internet is being used by a greater number of Americans." - U.S. Department of Commerce

[1] <http://www.digitaldiversity.org/connections/index.cfm?ref=F166>

[2] <http://www.fda.gov/oc/infocent/etm/EGS3344.htm>



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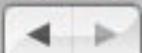
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How about Pennsylvania

- Pennsylvania 53.3% — 56.7%

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Answer: Technology is increasingly digital

- Phone
 - [Digital Cell Phones](#)
- Camera
 - [Video and Still...what's the difference?](#)
- Television
 - TiVo, [ReplayTV](#)
- Stereo
 - iPod
- Books
 - eBooks



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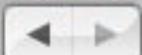
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**Argument 3: Even if They are
Online, They're not Coming to my
Digital Reference Service**

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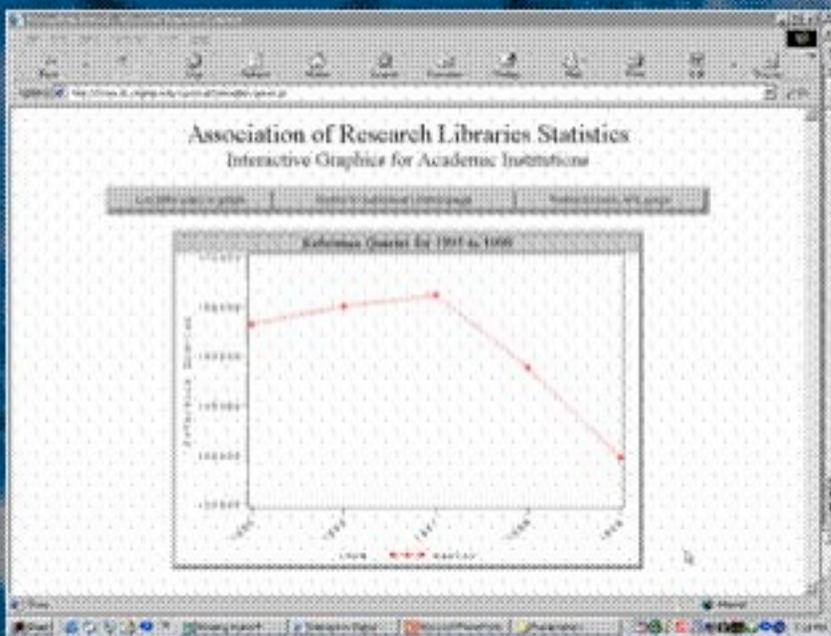


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Answer: Is it Just Digital Reference?





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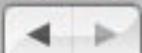
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Answer: Maybe They're going Elsewhere

- AskERIC: 300-400 per week
- IPL: 200-300 per week
- Cleveland Public Library 100-200 per week
- Common Practices:
 - Designed for the Internet and their Communities
 - Publicized
 - Established Business Models

Argument 4: Isn't it Just Reference After All?

- Isn't Digital Reference Just Reference?
- Two Fundamental Differences
 - Disconnect of User and Physical Space
 - Library as Remote from Users not vice versa
 - Digital Reference Creates Artifacts of a knowledge acquisition Process
 - Reference data as "garbage" data in a face to face transaction versus:
 - Transcripts
 - E-Mails
 - Web-logs



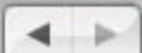
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Answers: Why Digital Reference

- We Live in a Digital World
- Our Patrons are Accessing this Digital World in Greater Numbers
- This Online Community is Increasingly Expecting to do Everything Online
- This Community can Either find Us, or Some other Service
- There are Non-Defensive Reasons as Well...



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How to do Digital Reference

- Local
- Consortia
- State
- National
- International

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Local

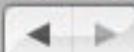
- Digital Reference within a given Library
- Issues:
 - Software Selection: E-Mail, Chat (IM), Web Help (LSSI, 24/7), Screen Share, Homegrown
 - Staffing: At the Desk? All Staff?
 - Assessment: Assessing Quality in Digital Reference
<http://quartz.syr.edu/quality>
 - Identity (who is this patron...do we want to know)

Consortia

- Economics
 - Cost per Question, Ownership/Reuse of Q&A's
- Policy and Documentation
- Resource Sharing
- Addressing the "Greedy Librarian" Problem
- Cross-Training
- Software Selection

State

- Integration Across Library Type
 - Education Issues
- Resource Sharing
- Matching “Business Models”
- Standards
 - Quality
 - Technical: Profiles, Question Interchange, Knowledgebase
- Authority and Enforcement



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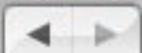
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National

- Copyright
- Diversity of Answer Sources
 - Libraries, Government, Industry, Education, other
- Definition and Promotion of "Local Service"
- Examples: VRD, Virtual Reference Canada

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International

- Language
- Differences in Law
- National Interests
 - Questions from Cuba
- Oversight
- Example: CDRS

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The Value Proposition

- Local – Better service to the community
- Consortia – Cost savings
- State – Access to diversity of expertise/collections
- National – Time sharing
- International – Diversity of language

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So, What Now?

- Get to Know the Digital Reference Community
 - Dig_Ref, VRD Conference
 - Avoid the 1,000 Flowers Model
 - Digital Reference has moved from Innovation to Early Adoption, and is moving to general adoption
- Get Involved
 - Standards Development (Quality and Technical)
 - Digital Reference Research Agenda
- Invent the Future and be Prepared for Change!



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Questions?

<http://www.askeric.org/~rdlankes>

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