Virtual Dave Lankes

Presentation

http://www.DavidLankes.org

TITLE: Costs and Benefits of Virtual Reference: Is it Worth It?
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Costs and Benefits of Virtual Reference: Is it Worth It?

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Yes
• Costs and Benefits are Ultimately About “Value”
  – Relative
  – An Agreement, not an Absolute
    • Those Who Give
    • Those Who Mediate
    • Those Who Use

• Costs are More Than Money
  – Money
  – Staff
  – In-Kind
  – Reputation
  – Etc.
• Myth 1: Names

• Myth 2: Features
  – All Virtual Reference Must Include Chat and Co-Browsing

• Myth 3: Costs
  – Virtual Reference Costs A Lot

• Myth 4: Digital Difference
  – Virtual Reference Costs More Than Traditional Reference

• Myth 5: Obligation
  – I HAVE to Do Virtual Reference
Myth 1: Names

• Language, Particularly in a New Area, is in Transition (and some Jostling for Position)
  • Why Dave Prefers Digital to Virtual

• “The use of human intermediation to answer questions in a digital environment” - The Digital Reference Research Agenda

• An Agenda to Reinvent, and Reintroduce Reference to our Communities
## Myth 2: Features

- All Virtual Reference Must Include Chat, Co-Browsing, Knowledgebase, Inference Engines, Infinite Improbability Drive…

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>E-Mail</th>
<th>Chat/IM</th>
<th>Help Desk</th>
<th>Special</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example</strong></td>
<td>Eudora, Outlook, Mail, etc.</td>
<td>AIM, ICQ, Yahoo!, MSN, Jabber</td>
<td>24/7, Tutor/ LSSI, QuestionPoint</td>
<td>VoIP, Screen Control, QuestionPoint</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Pros</strong></td>
<td>Threading, Time to Work, Answer Deferment, Low Entry, Wide Availability</td>
<td>Real-Time, Wide Availability, File Transfer</td>
<td>Co-Browsing, Real-Time, CRM, Searchable Knowledge base</td>
<td>Video, Audio, Run Custom Apps</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cons</strong></td>
<td>Asynchronous, Leaky Inbox</td>
<td>Queuing, Interoperability</td>
<td>Interoperability, Firewalls</td>
<td>Platform Dependent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Range of Functions</td>
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### Myth 3: Costs

- **Per Seat Licensing versus Package Licensing versus Site License**
- **Reselling Other Products**

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<tr>
<th>Cost Range</th>
<th>E-Mail</th>
<th>Chat/IM</th>
<th>Help Desk</th>
<th>Special</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>FREE &lt;-&gt; $10,000</td>
<td>FREE</td>
<td>~$6,000 per seat per year</td>
<td>FREE &lt;-&gt; $1,000</td>
<td></td>
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Another Option: Create Your Own

- The Library Field is Not Always Well-Served by Vendors from Other Communities
  - OPACs and Databases
  - Digital Reference and Help Desks
- Cutting Edge Open Standards
  - Dublin Core, NISO AZ, OAI
- The Bar for Development is Lowered
  - Open Source Alternatives
  - Powerful Scripting Services
Costs on a Curve

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<th>Development</th>
<th>Early Adoption</th>
<th>Adoption</th>
<th>Laggards</th>
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<td>XML, RDF</td>
<td>Metadata, Portal, Digital Reference</td>
<td>Web Servers, OPACS</td>
<td>WYSE Terminals, Text-Based OPACS</td>
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Myth 4: Digital Difference

- Virtual Reference Costs More Than Traditional Reference…
- …and how much does traditional reference costs exactly?!
- No Common Criteria Leads to Divergent Estimates
  - $.50 to $50
- Why?
  - Stuff + People/Questions = Cost
  - What to Include in Equation
  - Getting Valid and Reliable Data
Dig_Ref
Gives Us Hope

• “Mинable” Objective Record
  – Questions and Answers
  – Time
  – Resources/Collections Used
  – Other Resources

• Automation and Tools for Better Reporting
  – Web Forms, Metadata, etc.

• Bibliomining
  – Moving Away from the Aggregated to the Aggregate (From Sums to Patterns)
The Benefit Side of Cost/Benefit

• External
  – Serving a More “Wired” Constituency
  – Serving a More Influential Community
  – Divorcing Service from Time and Space
  – Reintroduce Reference

• Internal
  – Train Staff (even Remediate)
  – Challenge Staff
  – Cooperate

• A Quality Service in a Good Enough World
  – In Your Face Librarianship
Myth 5: Obligation

- I \textit{HAVE} to Do Virtual Reference
- Only If Your Community Needs It, and
- Only If You Do It Well
- The True Obligation: Fulfilling the Promise of Reference
Questions?

Slides at:
www.DavidLankes.org