Impact of the Internet on reference services in higher education libraries in SA

by Fatima Darries

Cape Technikon, December 2002
Research questions

• Student access, use and training
• Reference librarians’s use
  – Integrated as a tool
• Reference librarian training and knowledge
  – To give instruction
Methodology

- Questionnaire for quantitative data
- Interviews for qualitative data
Questionnaire

- Pilot October 2001 in Western Cape
- Identified appropriate respondents in the 36 institutions
- 92 individuals including directors, deputy directors, reference librarians co-ordinators and team leaders
- November 2001
- 2 weeks
- Reminder and another 2 weeks
- 25 responded representing 20 institutions
Questionnaire

- E-mail with
- Attachment
  - MS Word
  - .txt
- Web at www.capewebdesign.co.za/library
  - MS Word
  - .txt
Interviews

- Target population – Faculty Librarians
- Pilot June + July 2001 in Western Cape
- Interviews August and September 2001
- 3 UWC
- 5 Cape Technikon
- 1hr to 1hr 30 minutes
Questionnaire

- Library Characteristics
- User Internet use and training
- Reference librarians’ Internet use
- Library Web site
- Online subscription databases
- Open-ended question at the end of each section
**User Access**

- End-user access – all but one
- Period 3.5 years (+/-1998)
- Majority provided free access to staff and students
- Just over half provided access from all user terminals in the library
  - Compared to one third in 1994 Tenopir & Neufang study
User Access

- Ave of 29 user terminals
- Ave of 17.5 Internet terminals
- Ave student population of 12,211
  - One user terminal for every 421 students
  - One Internet terminal for every 698
    - (exclude access outside of the library)
- Not reflect difference between HDI and HAI
  - 4 at UWC and 19 of 39 at Cape Technikon
User instruction

• On-site
  – All but 3 provide instruction
  – Not as part of library instruction

• Remote
  – Less than half (40%) do not provide instruction
  – Via E-mail

• Trend to one-to-one at point of use

• Consider ave 1 565 students for every one reference librarian
User Internet Use

• Academic rather than recreational
  – Academic use included database access, search engine searches, specific URL’s and image searches
  – Non-academic use included job advertisements, current affairs, entertainment and e-mail

• Search behaviour have changed
  – Doing searches themselves
  – Web first
  – Preferred full text databases
User Internet Use

• Attitudes toward research process changed
• User expectations have increased
  – ‘Users expected to be able to answer every question, and do every research project online, ... users expect full-text and are surprised if a source is not full text’ (Tenopir & Ennis, 1998)
Reference interaction

- Length of interactions increased, the number have not.
  - Increased no. of databases available
  - Sophisticated search function of databases
  - Selecting best resource more complex
  - Queries involve answering questions and instruction on access and use
Librarian Access

- All had access
- Ave 5 yr access
  - Pakistan University Libraries have had access since 1995 but only half of the universities provided librarians with access (Saeed et al, 2000)
Database Access

Online services and format

- **Telnet**
- **CDROM**
- **Web**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Databases</th>
<th>Telnet</th>
<th>CDROM</th>
<th>Web</th>
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<tr>
<td>Silverplatter</td>
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<tr>
<td>Medline</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Number of respondents

- **Total**
  - Telnet: 144
  - CDROM: 44
  - Web: 11

- **Other: Science direct**
  - Telnet: 1
  - CDROM: 1
  - Web: 1
Librarian Access

• 76.9% had Web OPAC
  – Compared 10% of the University libraries in Pakistan in Saeed et al study in 2000.
• Majority of online databases were Web-based
• Preferred mode of access was Web
• CD-ROM access less
Librarian Use

- Web OPAC ave of 15.6 per day
- Online databases ave of 13 per day
- Open Web ave of 10.3 per day
  - Compare to 6.74 per day in Malaysia
    (Abdoulaye & Majid, 2000)
  - On-site ready reference, e-mail and search engine use
Librarian Use

• Low usage for electronic queries (queries received via e-mail)
  • Ave 2.25 queries a day

• User assistance
  • 13 per day OPAC and online databases respectively
  • 7.8 per day open Web
  – Internet is another tool that users need assistance with
Librarian Use

• Mediated rather than end-user searching
  – 1994 to 2000 ARL studies show opposite trend
  – Insufficient facilities therefore offer via librarians
  – Cost of access because notable exceptions were EbscoHost, Swetsnet, Emerald and Gale

• Library Web Site
  – Only 25% involved in Library Web design
  – Only 29% had individual pages and spent an average of 6 hours per month updating and maintaining
Librarian Training

• Combination of methods with
• 84.6% attended formal workshops
• 73.1% surfing
• No in-house staff training, outside body e.g. CALICO, SABINET
• Formal workshops viewed as introductory
• Self learning, by reading and in answering queries, was valued more
Librarian Attitude

• All interviewees had a positive attitude
  • Valued immediacy and ease of access
  • Vastness of information – expand library collection
  • Speed of retrieval
  • Availability of full text
  • 24/7 availability
  • Local and International communication

• Tool that helps librarians do their jobs
• Increased job satisfaction
Librarian Attitude

- Frustration
  - Poor bandwidth
  - Lack of sophistication of search engine functionality
  - Lack of information literacy amongst users
  - Information overload
  - Short life span of Internet sites

- Internet has revitalised reference librarianship
Conclusions

- Libraries do not have sufficient user terminals for the optimum use of the Internet
- User instruction inadequate
- Reference process took longer
- Internet is another tool that users need assistance with
Conclusions

- Few librarians were involved in the Library Web Site and had individual pages.
- Internet both a job satisfaction and frustration.
- While librarians have integrated the Internet as a tool, they have not gone beyond that.
Recommendations

• National strategy for SA for higher education
  – Skills of graduates

• National target for number of Internet access points to number of students
  – E.g. Ireland target is 1:3, but currently have 1:33 - 2001

• All computer should provide Internet access 24/7
  – E.g. In 1999 the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology transferred all campus computer laboratories from ITS to the Library and converted them into a Learning Resource Centres. This includes instruction on information literacy and basic computer literacy
Recommendations

• Electronic reference services
  • A.k.a. ‘digital reference, online reference, ask-a service’
  • Mechanism by which people can submit their questions and have them answered by a library staff member through some electronic means (e-mail, chat, Web forms etc.) (Janes, Carter & Memmot, 1999: 146)

• Benefits: Remote users, 24/7, compete with ask-a service, participate in global reference network of CDRS (Collaborative Digital Reference Services) of Library of Congress
Recommendations

• Already providing e-mail but developed as a core service
  • Advertise and promote
  • Budget
  • Staffing
  • Service policy: who, to what extent, how fast
  • Infra-structure supported on campus
  • Evaluation
Recommendations

• Internet instruction
  – Less point of use instruction and more special classes and integrate with library instruction

• Online instruction
  – Online tutorials, e-mailed lessons and live instructions classes using chat technology – the virtual classroom.
  – For Internet as well as OPAC and other online database instruction
Thank you!