MEEBO ME: HOW GOOD ARE WE?

Introduction

Welcome to Binghamton University (BU) Libraries' virtual poster, *MeeboMe: How Good are We?* This poster was created for the "Using Evaluation Data to Change & Improve Virtual Reference" virtual poster session sponsored by the Management of Electronic Resources and Services Committee (MERS), a committee of MARS, for the American Library Association 2008 Annual Conference.

The BU Libraries have a history of evaluating and assessing library services and collections. Internally, departments meet regularly to set goals, establish action plans and review progress, and there is library wide strategic planning. Externally, we have gathered feedback from the campus community through a variety of methods such as the LIBQUAL+ surveys, usability studies and pop-up surveys. Most recently, we used surveys and statistics to acquire feedback on a pilot MeeboMe chat reference service. This evaluative data helped us to decide to continue offering the service and brought attention to areas where the service could be improved.

This virtual poster provides background information on our implementation of MeeboMe and describes our evaluation methods and explains changes we made based on patron and staff feedback..

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Design by you 2006

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About the Libraries

- University population: student FTE 14,000 + 805 (FT/PT) faculty

- Offers Undergraduate through Doctorate degrees

- Has three libraries and an off-site storage facility: Bartle Library (Humanities, Social Sciences); Science Library (Sciences, Psychology, Nursing); and the College of Community and Public Affairs (Human Development, Public Administration and Social Work); and the Library Annex @ Conklin

- Library holdings include 2,352,986 volumes, 1,868,529 microforms, 62,099 electronic and print journals, 940 linear feet of rare and archival collections, and over 245,000 other materials including maps, sound recordings, audiovisual and computer related materials

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Virtual Reference Timeline

Fall 2003 – Launched virtual reference service using QuestionPoint

Fall 2004 – Migrated to Docutek VRLPlus because of technical and usability concerns with QuestionPoint

March 2005 – Formed Digital Reference Committee (DRC) to oversee VR services by:

- monitor all VR services (such as e-mail and chat)
- report back to Reference Services Staff about problems or issues with services
- promotes the services
- develops means of assessing the services

June 2005 – Launched IM service using Trillian: dropped VRLPlus service due to technical concerns

February 2007 – Launched MeeboMe pilot service

July 2007 – Established MeeboMe as a permanent VR service.

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About MeeboMe

The Meebo widget is a chat box that is embedded on a webpage through HTML code. This is how it looks when a patron views MeeboMe on a webpage.

Click on the thumbnail to view a larger image.

Ask a Librarian

Do you have a question? Do you need help finding a book, journal article or searching a database? A Librarian can help you with your research needs. Just contact us using one of our reference services. See what hours we are available.

Instant Message Us

Science, Engineering and Health questions: send a message to **BUscilib**. All other questions: send a message to **BUmainlib**

Email Us

Replies received usually within 24 hours, except holidays and weekends.
Email username: refquest
Format: *username*@binghamton.edu

Call Us

Bartle Library Reference Desk
(607) 777- 2345
Science Library Information Services Desk
(607) 777- 2166
UDC Library Services Desk
(607) 777-9225

Meebo Us
Type your question into the text box and hit enter. Please note: It may take us a few moments to respond to your question so please don't navigate away from this page.

Ask Us
Binghamton University Libraries is online

Type **here** and hit enter to send a private message.
edit nickname: Erin.

get meebo

When a patron visits the webpage with a Meebo widget they appear on the reference desk computer's buddy list. If a patron initiates a conversation by typing in the widget, a chat box opens on the reference desk computer and the patron and reference staff can continue their conversation.
Click on the thumbnail to view a larger image.
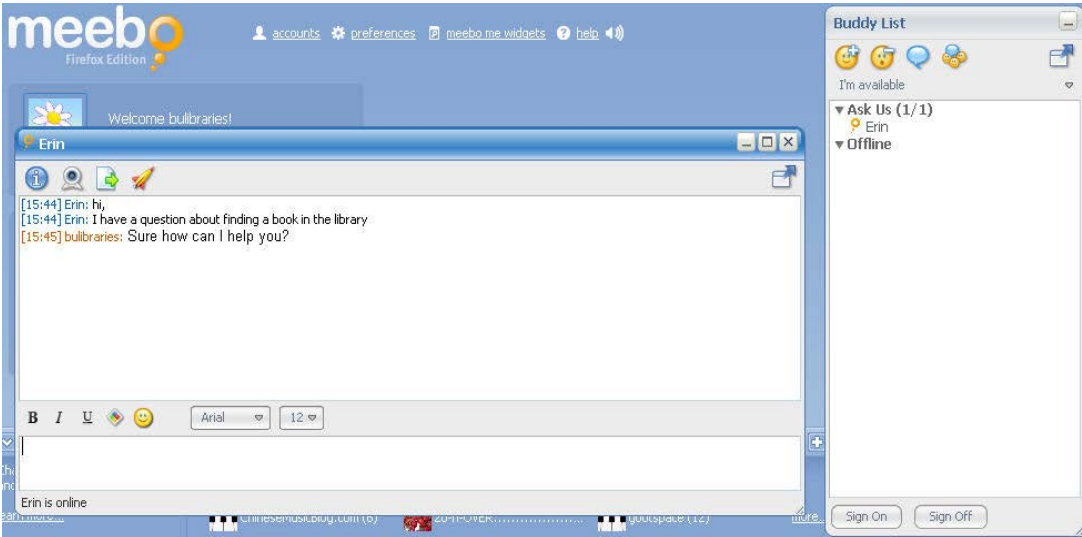
MeeboMe Advantages:

- The widget could be embedded anywhere on the library website (e.g. subject guides, help pages).
- The service is anonymous. Users do not require an Instant Messaging account.

MeeboMe Challenges:

- Widget conversations do not generate transcripts for quality control and evaluation.
- New chat messages are difficult to notice.
- The patron and the reference staff both have to keep the Meebo webpage open at all times. If either accidentally closes the webpage the service disconnects.

Go to page five: Gathering Data

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Gathering Data

Why we gathered evaluative data on the MeeboMe pilot:

- We wanted to make sure that reference staff members were comfortable and interested in maintaining the service. We were cognizant that staff was feeling busy at the reference desk, and we didn't want to add on an additional service at the desk without discussion.

- We wanted to make sure that patrons were familiar with the Meebo widget and would be interested in using the service.

- We wanted to have statistics to back up our decision to continue or discontinue the service.

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Patron Feedback

Shortly after the launch of the pilot service, a survey was hosted on the Ask a Librarian webpage. Approval from the university's Human Subjects Research Board was obtained before the survey was posted.

The survey asked four questions and included space for comments. In total, 16 individuals responded to the survey. Given the low response rate, the survey was not statistically reliable and an analysis of the data was anecdotal at best.

The first two questions on the survey asked patrons to identify their status (e.g. undergraduate, graduate, etc) and indicate whether they had used the Meebo service before. The next questions asked respondents to evaluate the quality of the service and their willingness to use the service again. Ten out of the sixteen respondents reported that the service was helpful and that they would use the service again.

The other questions asked respondents comment on the quality of the service. Examples of feedback include:

"I was in class working on a citation project, I used Meebo and got my answer instantly."

"I've been waiting for a response to my initial question for over 5 minutes now. It appears that the meebome widget is far too easy to overlook when someone connects and asks you a question.

Although six respondents found the service unhelpful they all indicated that they would be willing to try service again. From this small survey we concluded that patrons were interested in having the Meebo service continue.

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Staff Feedback

Several months after launching the MeeboMe pilot service, we created a survey for reference staff. The purpose of this survey was to determine staff's comfort level with MeeboMe and their interest in maintaining the MeeboMe service. We decided to create a survey to solicit feedback so that staff who felt uncomfortable speaking up at meetings would be able to share their opinions.

The survey included four questions and a space for comments. It was distributed to fourteen librarians and staff who worked at the reference desk; eight individuals responded to the survey. The first question asked reference staff if they had missed any questions. According to the results, all staff reported missing questions occasionally to frequently. The second question asked reference staff if they had technical difficulties while using MeeboMe. The results demonstrated that technical difficulties were un common as only one person reported an occasional technical problem. The third question asked staff if they found the MeeboMe service easy to use. Four staff enthusiastically reported that "they loved it" three said they "could live with the service". Only one person reported that they did not like the service. Finally, the last question asked reference staff how they felt about continuing the service. Seven staff reported that they would "be okay" with continuing the service while one person indicated that they did not want the service to continue.

As with the patron survey, comments shed light on reference staffs' experiences with the service. For example, one staff member questioned the quality of the service and asked: "how thin are we going to spread ourselves". Another staff member wrote: "I love that we offer Meebo. I think it is a great way for patrons to ask questions

anonymously. The only real problem was that I missed more questions then I caught."

Go to page eight: Statistics

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Statistics

From July 2007 to March 2008, a total of 597 Meebo instant messages were received at the Libraries' reference desks. Of these, 510 messages were answered, and 87 were missed sessions. There are, on average, 57 answered messages per month, and 7 missed transactions.

There was some limits to our statistical data. Not all missed Meebos were tallied, which may slightly affect the ratio of answered to missed transactions. At first, we may not have correctly counted all missed Meebos and after several months staff realized that some sessions were not missed but in fact the Meebo guest had navigated to the page but had not initiated a transaction. These were considered "phantom Meebos" and were not tallied on the reference statistics.

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Evaluation

Feedback from both surveys and the volume of traffic suggested there was interest from both reference staff and patrons to continue the service. Comments from the surveys, however, revealed that both reference staff and patrons were concerned about the visibility of new messages.

The DRC explored the issue of missed chats and found that new messages were difficult to detect. The only notification given for a new chat was a flashing tab in Firefox. Even when librarians were looking directly at the computer screen, the flashing tab was easy to miss.

The Discovery of a Meebo Firefox extension was the solution the DRC finally implemented to address the problem of missed chats. Once downloaded, the extension provided pop-up alerts for new messages. The DRC also had speakers installed at the reference desk, as staff had been unable to hear new chat notifications. The combination of the pop-up alert with the sound notification made it much easier to detect new chats.

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Future Steps with Meebo and Instant Messaging

Meebo is continuously being modified and new applications created. Since these potential improvements can happen from a variety of sources including the librarian community there are many sites to monitor for new ideas and approaches. Evaluating and selectively incorporating new features is essential for the service to remain fresh for patrons. For example, the DRC continues to monitor the development of Meebo chat rooms and shared browsing. The DRC also evaluates new features that would improve MeeboMe for the reference staff. An example is running Meebo as a desktop application.

More feedback from both patrons and librarians is essential to maintain the quality of the service. Web surveys, focus groups and other open-ended assessment tools will continue to be used to determine user satisfaction with the service. Librarian feedback from informal discussions and surveys will continue to foster staff satisfaction.

Marketing and public relations for MeeboMe continues to remain a priority for the DRC and the Libraries. Campus print and web posters have been discussed as a tool to further promote the service to patrons. Updating the layout and design of the Ask A Librarian page will also help users navigate to MeeboMe sessions more quickly. Additional announcements to students on campus will also increase awareness of the service.

Systematic collection and analysis of Meebo statistics is essential to monitor the usage of the service. With the recent acquisition of a reference statistics software package, we anticipate that statistical collection and analysis will be easier in the future. Additional statistical analysis could include measuring the levels of usage from

Trillian IM messages and Meebo messages to see if any trends are noticeable. Additional statistics include tallying missed Meebo sessions, determining the percentage of messages answered and peak times during the day and week.

Go to page eleven: Credits

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Many pictures displayed in this poster were taken by Matt Kemberling, an intern working at Binghamton University Libraries. http://www.flickr.com/photos/binglib/

Ask a Librarian

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Type **here** and hit enter to send a private message.

edit nickname: Erin

get meebo