Digital Reference Service using E-Resources: a Study at St. Xavier's College Central Library, Kolkata.

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Reference service is always a vital component in library service; it provides personalized assistance to the users to access up-to-date information. Due to the emerging trend of virtual library and influence of web technology, the concept of traditional reference service has switched over into digital reference service (DRS) using e-reference resources. This paper highlights some of the basic aspects of digital reference services, how the reference librarian of St Xavier's College provides digital reference service and finally user's satisfaction using digital reference services.
Keywords: E-Reference Resources, Digital Reference Service (DRS), E-Resources

1. Introduction

Digital Reference Services (DRS) are simply defined as real-time personal assistance to users via web technology. Its main objective is to provide pin-pointed, exhaustive, expeditious service to users whenever they have a query. This paper describes the concept of digital reference service using e-resources, with a focus on the various methods of digital reference services provided at St. Xavier's College Central Library.

2. E-Resources:

E-resources may be classified into two broad categories:

Online e-resources: It defines an electronic resource which can be accessed remotely i.e. downloadable via internet. (E-Journal, E-book, On-line Databases, Websites)

Offline e-resources: It defines an electronic resource which can be accessible or downloadable off line and need not require any internet connection. (CD ROM, Diskettes, Other portable computer databases)

3. Electronic Resources Vs Traditional Printed Resources:

There are so many differences between electronic resources and traditional printed resources. They are given below:

Electronic Resources	Traditional Printed Resources
Various search options i.e. simple, advanced search are available.	Direct searching is not possible.
On line or virtual reference.	Reference is possible only on shelf search.
Available in all 24x365 days	Available only at library opening hour.
Multi user environment.	Single user i.e. one user at a time.
User can access their requirement from	User access directly from the library only.

anywhere.	
Indexing and abstracting service through direct link with full text	No direct link with full text.
Reproduction is printing method.	Reproduction is photocopying method.
Particular article content may be downloadable via internet	Particular article may be accessible from the hard copy.
Sometimes e-journals are not containing information like reviews, editorial, advertisements.	Print journals consist of information such as reviews, editorials, letters, advertisements etc.
Searching of articles is done by virtual mode.	Searching of articles is only physical.
In circulation, document delivery, interlibrary loan are not required.	In circulation, document delivery or inter library loan required.
Information retrieval is time saving. It depends on network availability.	Physical retrieval is time consuming
Prompt delivery with low cost.	Delivery is delayed due to distance from one place to another place.
Some equipment i.e. tab, computer are essential for useing the e-resources.	No equipment's are needed to use the printed resources.

4. Digital Reference Service:

The term 'digital reference service' is commonly used interchangeably with the term 'virtual reference services'. The two terms are used in libraries to refer to the question and answer services provided by libraries. For the purposes of this study, only the term 'digital reference services' is used.

4.1 Need of Digital Reference Service:
- ➢ To convert potential users to habitual users.
- ➢ To help the user in online remote access and to save the time of users.
- ➢ To improve stronger relationships among the users and librarian
- ➢ To improve reference service quality and delivery of library e-resources for the users including research scholars.

5. Digital Reference Services at St. Xavier's College Central Library:

Reference Service at the college is based on the digital resource collections of the college library. It includes e-books, e-journals, databases etc. Library web pages usually provide access to the digital services.

1. **Library Feedback Form**: The central library provides feedback form in the library website. The library users could give feedback or ask questions about the library and its services by filling in a web form. Users should provide their names and e-mail addresses if they wish to receive an answer from the library.

2. **Web OPAC Service**: Central Library has online public access catalogues (OPACs) to make users aware of the collections. An OPAC can be used by user of the library to search the catalogue in order to see if the library holds a particular work on a particular subject and location of the work.

3. **Dedicated Web Sites:** The library has dedicated web services throughout 24x365 days with the help of in house e-resources and subscribed e-resources, electronic books and journals according to subjects which are reserved for specific category of user.

4**. FAQs Page:** FAQs in library page can reduce the amount of repetitive or straight forward operational questions.

5. **Interactive Services**: Central Library offered interactive services to its users using web2 technology. The services include information about document check out status, overdue status, fines status, online renewal provision, new arrival, on line books reservation, purchase suggestion, inter-library loan request etc.

6. **Remotely Available Resources**: The library webpage provides links to subscribed resources, websites such as INFLIBNET-NLIST, NSDL, Prowess database, DELNET etc. Some of the services are restricted within campus e.g. Prowess IQ (Database hosted by CMIE). College library web page contains visitors' count. Librarian can easily know day wise visitors by comparing closing number with opening number.

7. **E-mail Services**: User sends an e-mail with a query to the reference librarian. The librarian may reply by e-mail, phone, fax, letter, etc.

8. **Library Blogs:** Users, who like to write something about library services, will follow library blogs whenever they want.

9 **Single Window Discovery Service:** Discovery tools act as a single point search interface for all the resources (subscribed, open access and in-house printed material) that the library wants to presents to its user community, which is more effective and useful. Digital reference service of the college is enriched through this service.

6. Future of Digital Reference Services:

Looking at the trends and user demand, it is quite possible to say that future is bright for digital reference services. In the future,

- ➢ Users will be more dependent on the online sources and services.
- ➢ They can access their required information anytime anywhere.
- ➢ At the same time the cost involved will be affordable for the users.
- ➢ Due to demand for accurate and specific information, expert reference librarians will be needed.
- ➢ Since no library can provide reference service through its own collection there will be a need to Collaborative Digital Reference Service (CDRS)
- ➢ The future of reference service will be based on digital collections and communication links over internet.

7. Major Constraints:

There are various major problems and critical issues involved in digital reference service. Based on experience some of the major issues are identified as under:

- ➢ Lack of trained library staffs and IT professionals.
- ➢ Lack of adequate training facilities.
- ➢ Lack of interest among staffs and users.
- ➢ Lack of well defined e-resource collection development policy.

- As face to face interaction is not possible, reference librarian is not able to get any clarification about his doubts while serving the user community.
- Speed of receiving and answering questions depends on the e-mail traffic and communications link over the internet.
- It is difficult for reference librarian to judge the urgency of information.
- Some times librarian's inabilities to attend to the query immediately because of other workload.

8. Conclusion:

Due to demand of accurate and specific information in the near future expert reference librarians will be needed. Since no library can provide reference service through its own collection there will be a need to have collaborative ventures for reference service. Digital reference service has introduced new opportunity as well as challenges for librarian or information professionals to provide better and contemporary reference service to keep the users abreast with the latest academic and research development in their concern areas.

9. Acknowledgement:

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