Introduction to Pathfinders

Pathfinders, the handouts Libraries create and distribute to facilitate students' independent use of Library services, are called by many names:
- Handouts, guides, information packages, instructional packages, etc.

The Expertise That Students Can Develop Using Pathfinders

1. General Research or Reference Skills
2. Online Catalogue Skills
3. Database- or Software-Specific Search Skills
4. Discipline- or Course-Specific Research Skills
5. Assignment-Specific Skills
6. Internet Skills

Design Elements To Consider

- **Tables, Lists, Bullets, etc.**
  Easiest thing to read is something that is in a list because it is often concise and logically organized. Plus, it's also easier to remember!

- **White Space**
  This is the most under-rated, yet most essential, part of the entire handout. It's better to leave out than to overwhelm!

- **Fonts, Bolding, or Italics**
  Identifying the relative importance of words becomes easier when formatting is used. Consistency is the key!

- **Graphics, Underlining, or Outlining**
  By using graphical elements, the reader is able to identify breaks in the information and follow the flow easier. Keep it simple for photocopying!

- **Colour**
  Something so simple makes a huge difference to the reader yet so many people don't use it. Why?
Advantages and Disadvantages of Pathfinders:
Are they really the greatest marketing tool ever or a waste of time?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pros</th>
<th>Cons</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A quick answer to questions...</td>
<td>...but never a complete answer</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Available online, anywhere, at any time...</td>
<td>...as long as the student has a computer and/or Internet access</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Part of an initial step towards library research...</td>
<td>...as long as the student has an idea of what to look for</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great tool to help new staff orient to the library...</td>
<td>...as long as the handouts are current</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Great way to market the library...</td>
<td>...as long as it’s done well!</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Tracking Usage of Pathfinders**

- Rate of reprinting (especially certain times of the year)
- Number of times web-link is accessed
- Questions from students about the pathfinders themselves
- Rate by which sheets are updated

**Results of Survey on Yukon College Handouts**

- Handouts were most likely obtained from the Website and Spin Rack, then from a Librarian.
- 100% people liked colour in their handouts.
- Mixed results on opinions of layout but all liked having some formatting.
- The APA referencing guide is the most popular handout.
- Almost all didn’t like it if the handout was too “busy.”
- Many liked one page, hole-punched papers to go right into their binders.

**Recommended Reading**

