

Let's Chat: Using Data to Champion Virtual Reference Services

2008 Virtual Poster Session. American Library Association Annual Conference 2008. Evaluation of Virtual Reference Services (MERS).

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Abstract Part 1

This poster session chronicles the collection and presentation of virtual reference statistics to persuade administrators and librarians at the University of Southern California (USC) to support chat reference.

USC is part of the OCLC QuestionPoint academic chat collaborative. However, some librarians and administrators felt that the service was not used often and that the quality of service was poor.

Abstract Part 2

The coordinators put together the following data and presented it to librarians and administrators:

- QuestionPoint chat and email statistics over the past 2 years, including trend lines
- Data on chat patron satisfaction surveys
- List of the peak times that USC patrons were using the chat service
- Data illustrating that USC patrons asked more questions than the average institution in the collaborative
- Data on chat shifts that needed more librarians

Abstract Part 3

As a result, the coordinators were able to get the support necessary to

- increase USC's chat hours in the collaborative
- gear chat hours more strategically towards USC's peak user hours
- plan for the piloting of a new IM (instant messaging) chat service

Overview of USC and Chat

- USC contributes to the QuestionPoint OCLC Academic Reference Cooperative by answering questions from both local and non-USC patrons.
- In Fall 2007, USC served 7 hours per week in the cooperative, answering questions from both USC and non-USC patrons:
 - Tuesdays 1-5pm
 - Thursdays 2-5pm
- In return, USC received 24/7 coverage for their patrons during all hours they were not staffing the cooperative.
- Additional coverage to USC-only patrons was given during a pilot project "Subject Chat" (monitoring only the USC queue) 4 hours per week:
 - Mondays, 10-11am
 - Tuesdays, 11-noon
 - Wednesdays, 10-11am
 - Thursdays, 10-11am

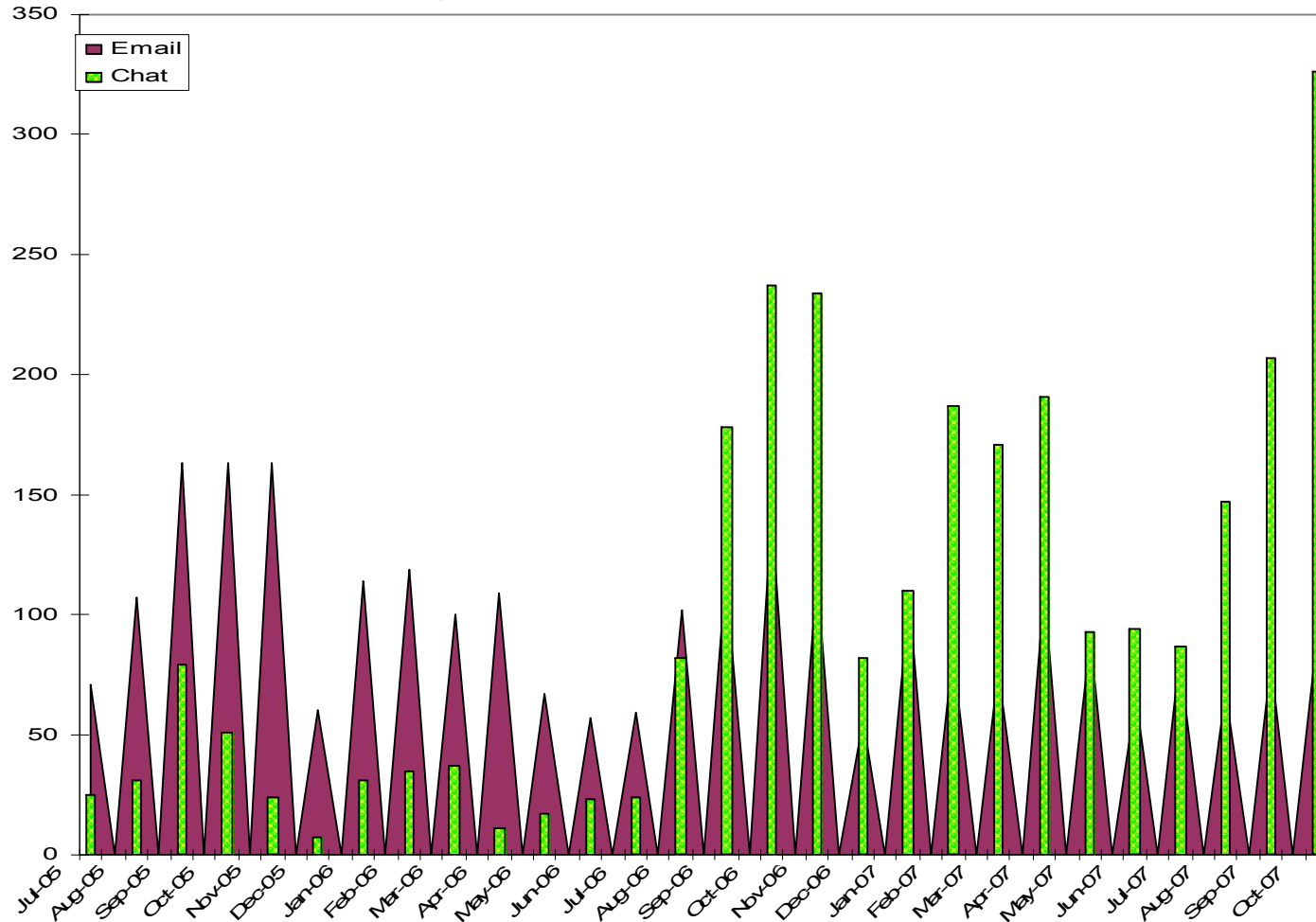
Reference Coordinators Face Chat Challenges

- Some older librarians uncomfortable with chat
- Perception by some of the library faculty that chat was
 1. a waste of time and not the most efficient way to reach our patrons
 2. unpopular with our users
 3. handled poorly by non-USC librarians (poor quality)
- Busy schedules: finding time to staff chat in addition to the time necessary to staff all twelve of our reference service points
- Occasional technical problems

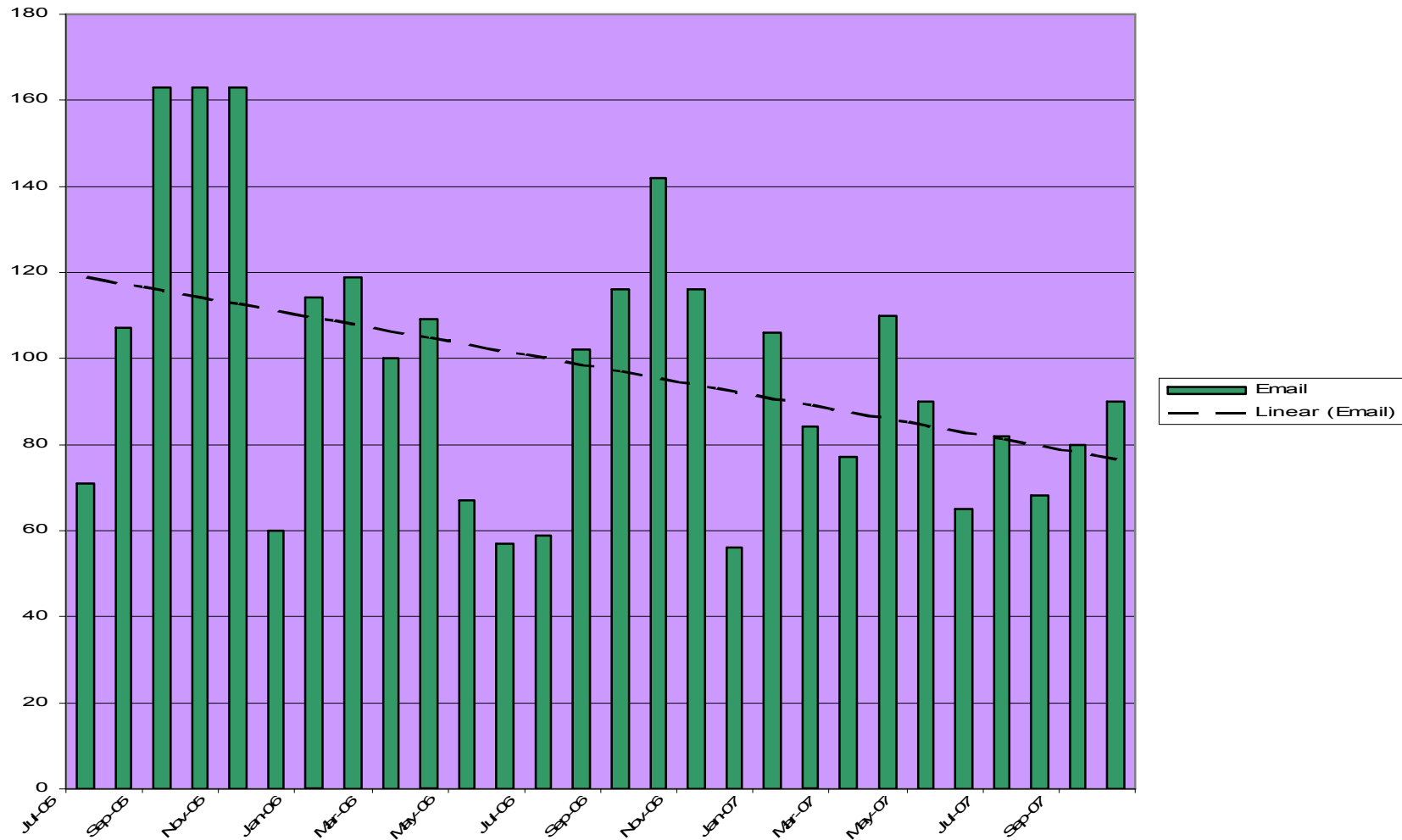
General Trends in USC Reference: Statistics, FY 2005-FY 2007

Fiscal Year	Total Transactions	Basic			Advanced			QuestionPoint
		In Person	Phone	Email	In Person	Phone	Email	Chat
2005	49024	26670	5432	3288	8453	2230	2514	437
2006	54443	27715	6017	2998	9977	3381	3660	695
2007	51530	23603	5194	2416	8505	3406	5447	2959

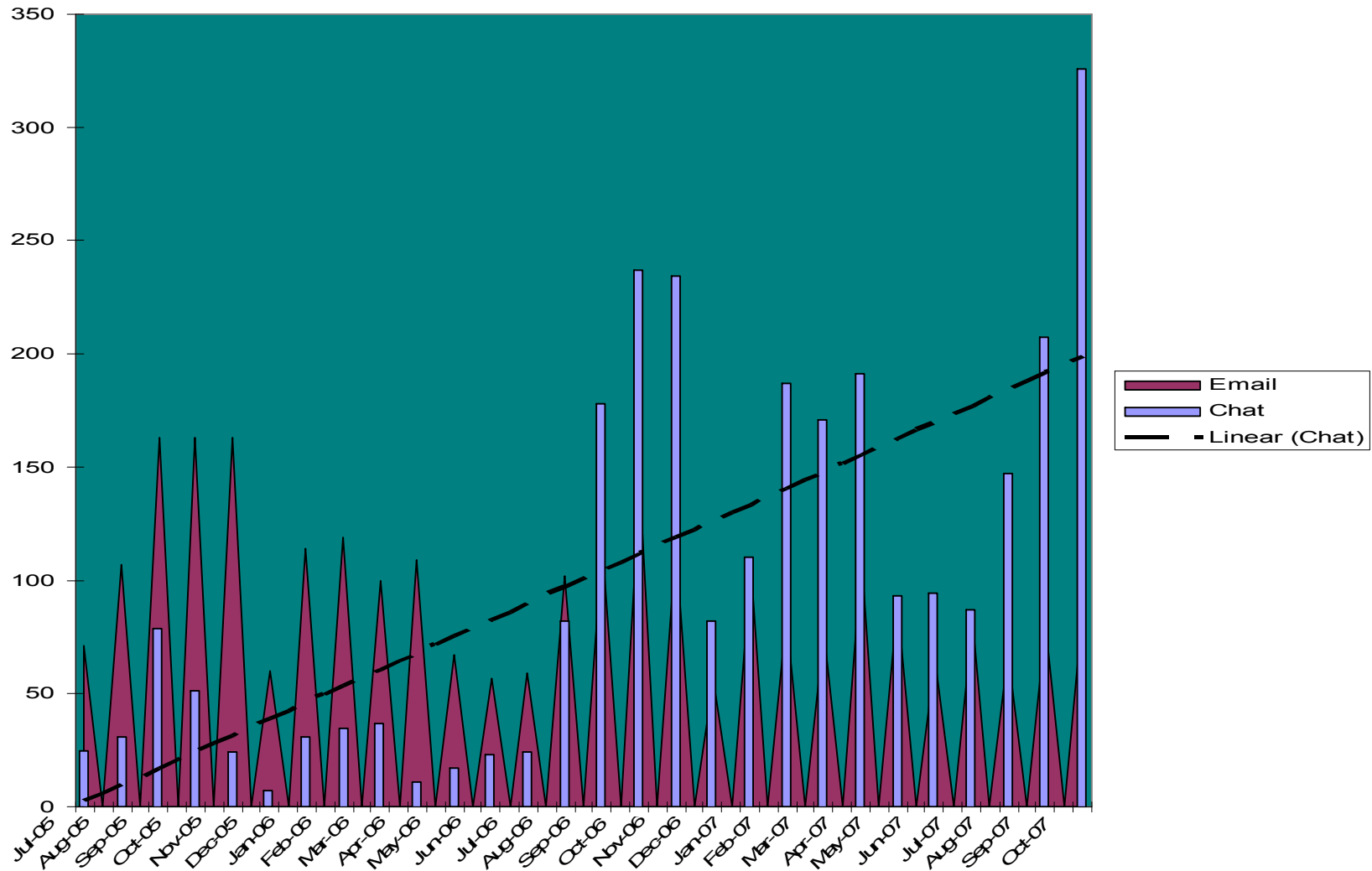
Email Decreasing, Chat Increasing July 2005-October 2007



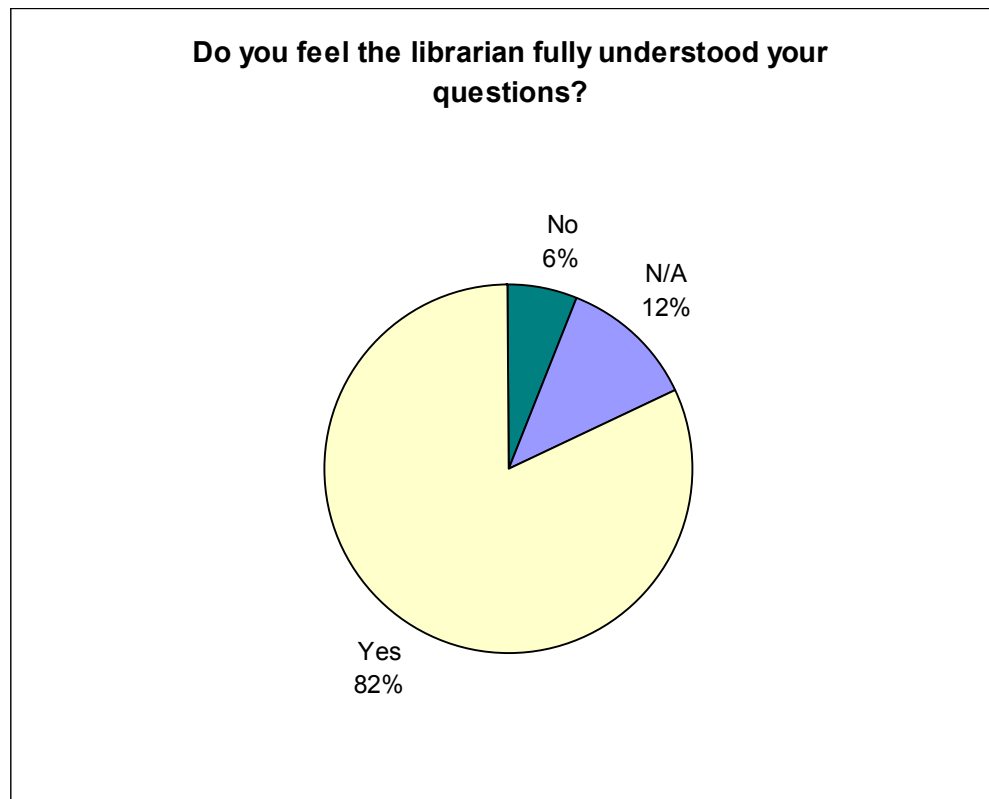
Email Trend Line, July 2005-Oct. 2007



Chat Trend Line, July 2005-Oct. 2007



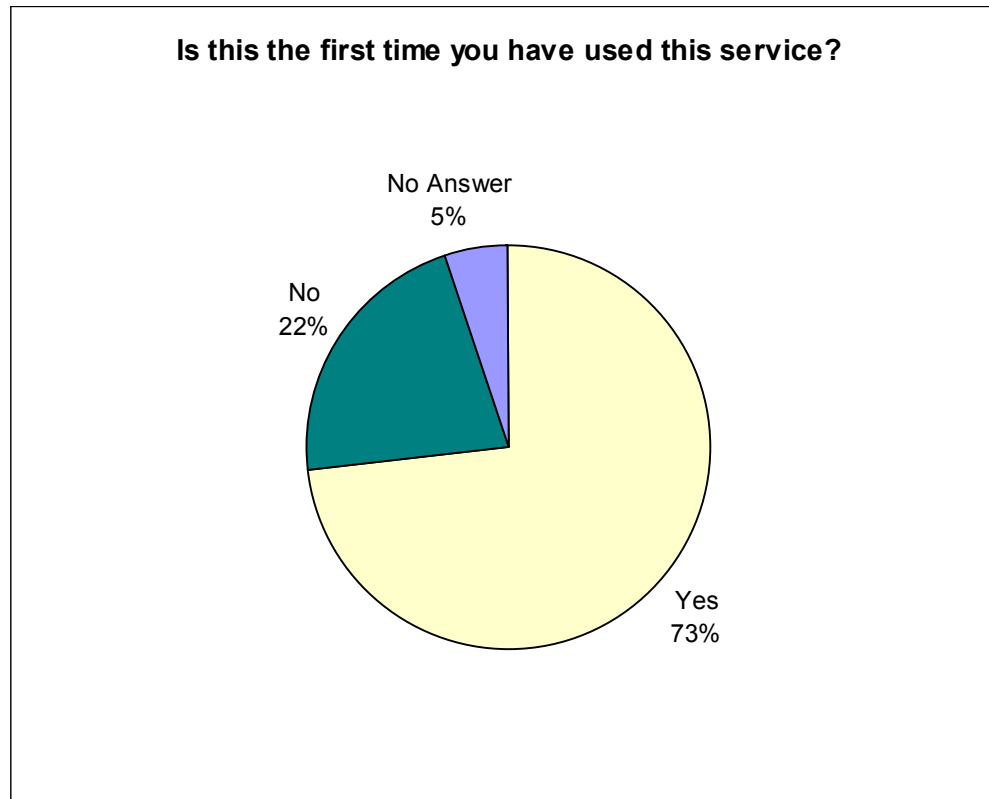
Results: Chat User Satisfaction Surveys, July 2005-Oct. 2007 (based on 242 responses)



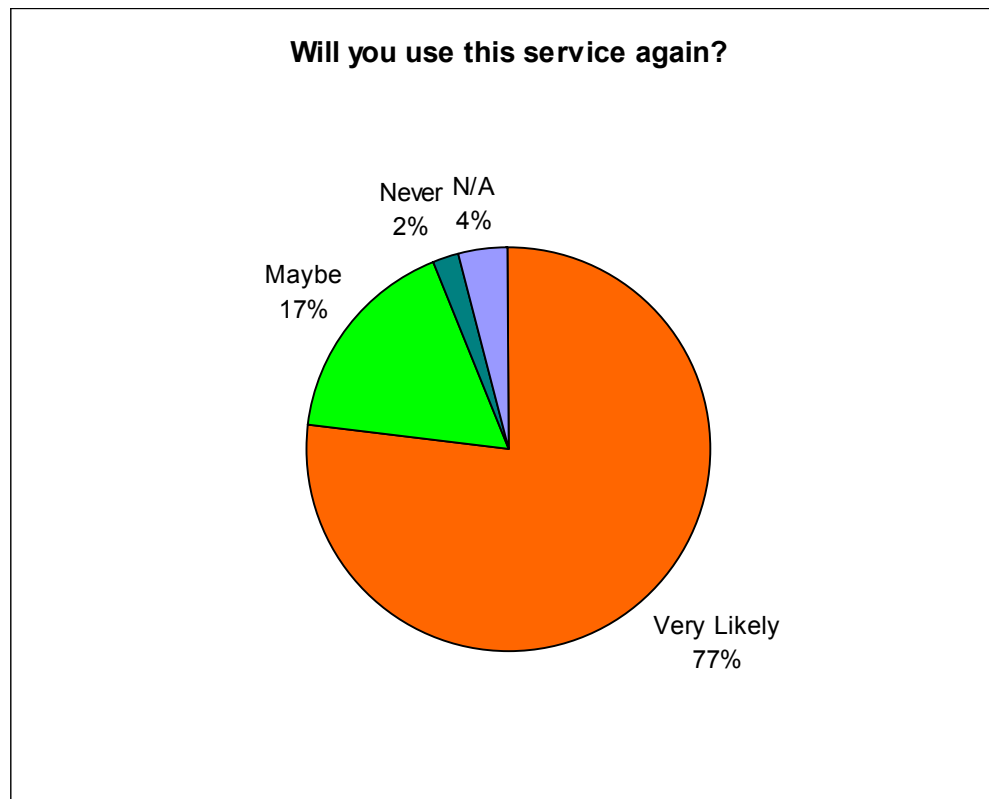
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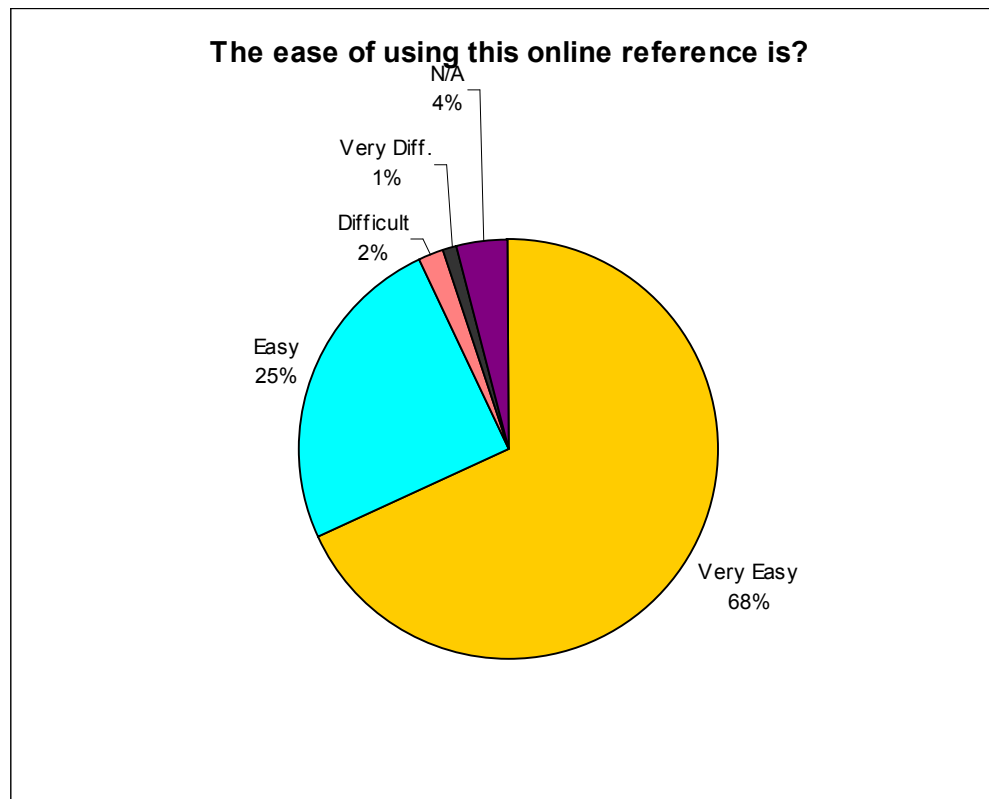
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Comments:

- Overall, 78% of the free-form, optional comments were positive

Sample Positive Comments:

- “This is the most positive librarian I’ve ever encountered. Thanks for the great customer service”
- “The best service, so stress relieving for students”
- “It’s easy and fun to work with”
- “Wow, that was very easy. I was surprised that the librarian wasn’t from USC, but she still seemed knowledgeable and very helpful. Thank you for such a great service”

Virtual Reference Data Presented to Library Faculty and Administration

Meeting #1: Reference Forum attended by 25 library faculty and staff, and 1 administrator

Discussion topics:

- Pilot projects
- New reference initiatives
- Review policies and procedures (email & chat), especially email referrals and chat follow up questions (email responses)
- Reference statistics: analysis and possible service changes
- ?? Whatever issues you want to talk about!



Virtual Reference Data Presented to Library Faculty and Administration

Meeting #2 Team Leaders & Coordinators (TLC)

- Team Leaders for Science and Engineering, Social Sciences, Arts & Humanities, & Undergraduate
- Coordinators of Reference, Instruction, Collection Development, Outreach, Technical Services, Access Services
- Director for Research & Collections
- 20 minute Reference Presentation covering material similar to Meeting #1
- Eleven attendees were at the meeting



From OCLC QuestionPoint Administrator

- During January – October 2007, USC librarians were only picking up 27.68% of the total number of chat questions that came from USC patrons. This is below average: the Cooperative average was 60%, and the percentage for the Greater Western Library Alliance (Iowa State, U Arkansas, U Hawaii, and USC) was 75.51%. USC is not handling as many questions as are asked by USC patrons
- “USC has a popular chat service and receives far more chat requests than other GWLA libraries. The students are using the service during non-traditional hours (late at night, early in the morning) as well as during the ‘business’ day”
- Suggestions:
 - If USC librarians are unable to pick up non-USC patrons because too many other academic librarians are online, **consider changing your shifts** (we have many shifts that are understaffed) so USC can contribute their fair share
 - If possible, **staff more hours**, especially times when many USC students are using the service

Top 5 Chat Shifts

- USC students asked the most questions during shifts between 2-8pm on weekdays (between January-October 2007).
- 1. #1: 6-7pm (139 questions)
- 2. #2: 7-8pm (135 questions)
- 3. #3: 2-3pm (121 questions)
- 4. #4: 4-5pm (111 questions)
- 5. #5: 5-6pm (110 questions)

QP Academic Consortium Needs Librarians

Day	1st Timespan Needed	2nd Timespan Needed
Monday	Midnight-7am	5pm-midnight
Tuesday	Midnight-6am	4pm-midnight
Wednesday	Midnight-3am	3pm-midnight
Thursday	Midnight-7am	3pm-midnight
Friday	Midnight-6am	3pm-midnight
Saturday	ALL TIMES	
Sunday	ALL TIMES	

Proposal #1: Increase Chat Hours

- Proposed additional chat hours on QuestionPoint, spring semester, through Subject Chat Pilot Project
 - Mondays, 4-6pm (Psychology, Sociology, Gerontology)
 - Tuesdays, 6-8pm (Anthropology, Communication)
 - Wednesdays, 6-8pm (Science & Engineering)
- Subject-based chat emerged to simultaneously increase local chat coverage within the consortium while offering customized chat service for selected disciplines.
 - Would also be covering the local USC chat queue in QuestionPoint, not just subject-specific questions- for an extra 6 hours of coverage per week.
- Proposed Spring “IM Chat Pilot” Project Hours
 - Librarians cover while they sit at the Reference Desk in the Leavey Undergraduate Library:
 - Monday-Thursdays, 12-5pm (will default to QuestionPoint cooperative chat when librarians are unavailable)

Outcome #1: Spring 2008 Chat Coverage Increased

- i. Library faculty were influenced by our chat statistics.
- ii. We had many more volunteers than anticipated to do subject chat as well as support for the IM pilot project.
- iii. We increased monitoring of the USC-only queue in QuestionPoint by an additional 14 hours by offering subject-based chat in 13 different disciplines.
 - These librarians also take any general questions from the USC queue, thus taking the burden off the cooperative somewhat.
- iv. Number of hours we added are during times that QP needed additional librarians, and/or during times our students asked the most questions.

New Subject Chat Schedule

■ American Studies & Ethnicity	Mondays	3-5pm
■ Anthropology	Tuesdays	6-8pm
■ Business	Wednesdays	2-4pm
■ Communication	Tuesdays	6-8pm
■ Gerontology	Mondays	4-6pm
■ English/Literature	Wednesdays	7-8pm
	Fridays	7-8pm
■ Linguistics	Mondays	10-noon
■ Philosophy	Mondays	10-noon
■ Psychology	Mondays	5-6pm
■ Religion	Mondays	10-noon
■ Science & Engineering	Mondays	7-9pm
	Wednesdays	6-8pm
■ Sociology	Mondays	4-5pm
■ U.S. & Canadian History	Mondays	3-5pm

Outcome #2: IM Pilot Project Launched

- Created IM accounts on multiple chat interfaces
- Set up chat widgets on various web pages (Leavey Library page, Ask-A-Librarian page, e-resources page)
- Monitored with one system, Pidgin, that records the transcripts
- Piloted with Leavey librarians and staff who are already serving scheduled shifts at the Leavey Undergraduate Reference desk
- When no IM is available, the link leads patrons to the QuestionPoint cooperative 24/7 chat service
- Expanded service hours from original proposal to include both staff and librarians, Mon.-Thurs. 10am-5pm and Fri. 10am-2pm.



Future Goals: Continuing to Enhance Virtual Reference Services

- Continue monitoring virtual reference statistics
 - trends
 - statistics for IM and subject chat pilot projects
 - cooperative statistics
 - user satisfaction surveys

- Do our own transcript analysis of the content of all IM and cooperative QuestionPoint chat transactions for quality control

- Develop further virtual reference training for library faculty and staff as a result of analysis

Contact the Authors for More Information

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