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Providers' Assessment of Library Chat Services

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Background

Instant messaging is often preferred to emails and phone calls. In 2017, Calder Library implemented a chat service.

Objective

This poster analyzes the impact of the Library’s chat service by focusing on provider perspective and usage data.

Methods

A short survey was developed to determine librarians’ impressions of the chat service. Additionally, data on numbers and peak chat times, response time, length of conversation, and type of questions were analyzed.

Survey Results

Survey responses indicated that all librarians found the portal easy to navigate and the time/effort spent responding met their expectations. Two benefits of the service were (1) patrons received immediate responses and, (2) librarians could create canned responses and greetings. Librarians least liked the time it took to compose responses that required searches prior to answering. They worried that patrons would tire of waiting and leave the session without an answer.

Chat Box

Survey of Calder Library patrons found that 90% preferred the chat service over phone calls or emails.

Analytics

Over a year, the chat service was used 143 times, with an average response time of 1m:17s and an average conversation length of 7m:45s.

The busiest day of the week was Wednesday, which had 25% of all activity. Furthermore, the number of chat sessions held on Wednesday was 76% higher than the number of chat sessions held on the least active day of the week—Friday.

By grouping chat hours into four equal sessions throughout the day (9:00-11:00am, 11:01am-1:00pm, 1:01-3:00pm, 3:01-5:00pm), the 9:00am-11:00am session was most active (30%) and the 11:01am-1:00pm session was least active (22%).

Sessions were also assigned two categories, directional or reference; 66% of the questions asked were reference.

Conclusion

A year post-implementation, the chat service is functioning well and liked by the librarians. Librarians suggested several ways to improve the service, including assigning two librarians simultaneously and implementing a ‘proactive chat’ popup.