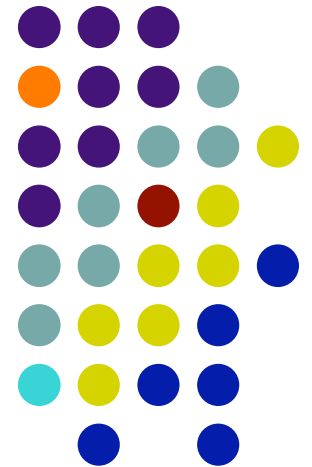


Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

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McMaster University

February 4, 2006
OLA Super Conference



Agenda



- What is IM?
- How does it work?
- Why IM?
- How we did it & what it's been like
- Highs, lows
- Lessons learned
- The road to success

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

IM: what is it?



- a real time conversation
- synchronous
- “email on steroids”

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?



IM: how does it work?

- Services:
 - MSN Messenger
 - AOL Instant Messenger (AIM)
 - Yahoo! Messenger
 - ICQ
 - Google Talk
 - Skype
- none of them can “talk” to each other!

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IM: how does it work?



- MSN & Yahoo! Messenger will soon be compatible
- maybe AOL and Google Talk too...

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

IM: how does it work?



- Multi-network software
 - one interface for multiple networks
 - Trillian (Windows)
 - GAIM (Windows)
 - Adium (Mac)
 - meebo.com (Web)

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IM: how does it work?

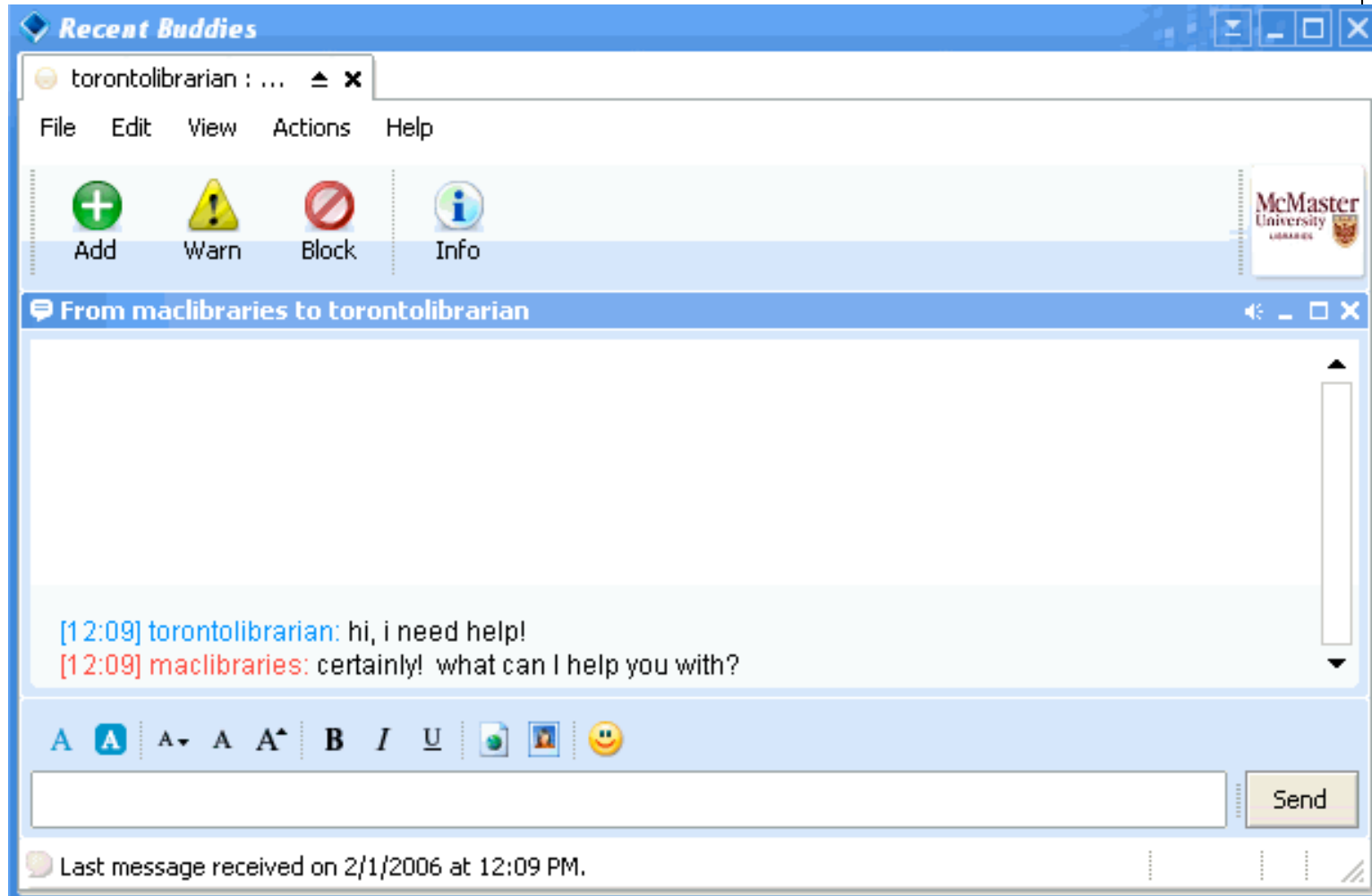


- add a user to your “buddy” list
- click the user you want to chat with
- chat!

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IM: how does it work?



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Why IM?



- Broad environmental scan:
 - navel-gazing amongst the VR early-adopters
 - *Coffman & Arret, Searcher* Vol. 12, #7 & 8 (2004)
 - 75% of online teens use IM
 - *Teens & Technology* (July 2005)
 - 86% of Canadian students use IM
 - *Young Canadians in a Wired World* (2002-5)

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Why IM?



- Local environmental scan:
 - our students don't all come in to the library
 - use of IM in libraries on the rise
 - shut it down or learn from it...?

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- Prelim user survey:
 - 2 weeks
 - polled everyone who came to the Reference Desk
 - 154 people polled

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- Prelim user survey:
 - do you use IM?
 - if yes, which service are you on?

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



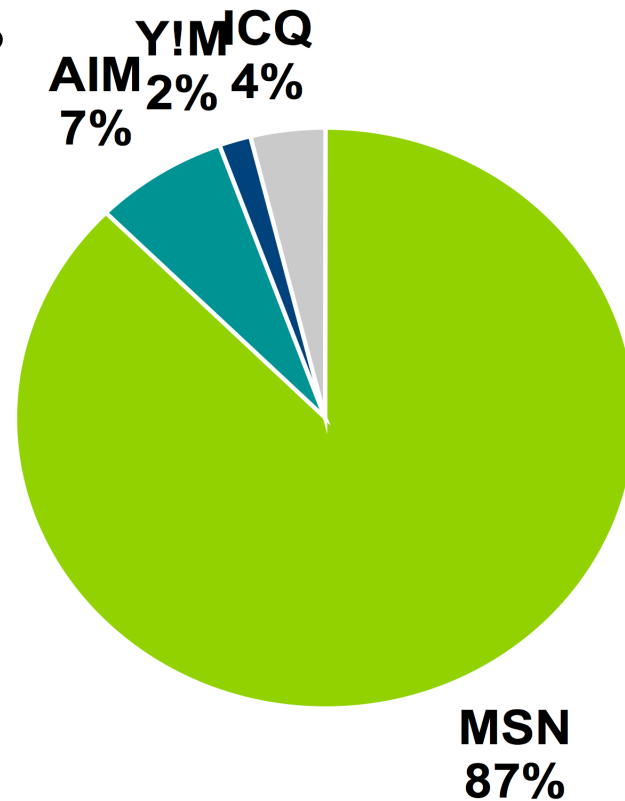
- Prelim user survey:
 - 83% used IM
 - ...72% of them use MSN

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- Prelim user survey
 - what service do you use?



Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

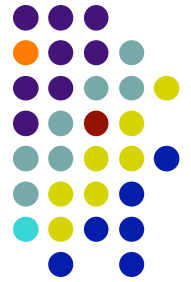
How did we start an IM service?



- How to start an IM service? With a pilot, of course!
 - when do we run the pilot?
 - what hours do we offer IM?
 - who is going to staff it?
 - what are our technology needs?
 - what are the security concerns?

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- When do we run the pilot?
 - off-peak
 - evaluation: feasibility rather than stats
 - June – August 2005

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- What hours do we offer the service?
 - learn from early adopters
 - pick a time slot!
 - when do we have staff?
 - M – F: 11 am – 3 pm

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- Who will staff it?
 - new technology for most
 - ask for volunteers
 - Reference staff volunteers

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- What are our technology needs?
 - staff side:
 - need to chat on multiple networks
 - needs to be cheap or free
 - needs to be on multiple computers
 - needs to be able to log conversations

= Trillian or GAIM

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- What are our technology needs?
 - In the library:
 - download all clients?
 - does IM pose a security risk?

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- What are the security concerns?
 - worms and viruses
 - unencrypted transmission
 - weak authentication
 - “spim”

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- Solutions to security concerns...
 - fact: IM is not as secure as email
 - virus protection
 - 3rd party apps are less vulnerable to viruses/worms
 - education, awareness, common sense ([*good site*](#))

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- Solutions to security concerns...
 - buddy list? as a service provider, you don't need one
 - password complexity should be common sense too
 - disclaimers: make sure your patrons know about the risks with IM ([good example](#))

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

How did we start an IM service?



- Staff training
 - get all IM staff volunteers into a training room
 - [overview](#) of the technology & the service
 - handouts: [how to set up an IM account](#) & how to install, set up & configure Trillian
 - chat!

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

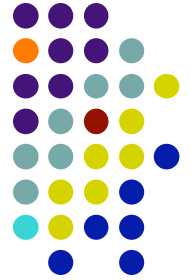
How did we start an IM service?



- Staff materials
 - [IM tips](#)
 - [canned messages](#)

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

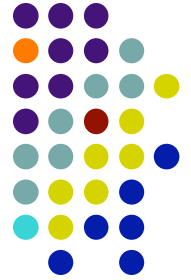
What has it been like?



- slow start
- steady increase in use
- not overwhelming

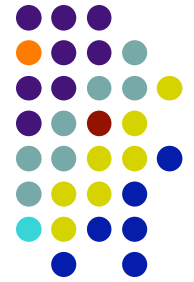
Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

What has it been like?



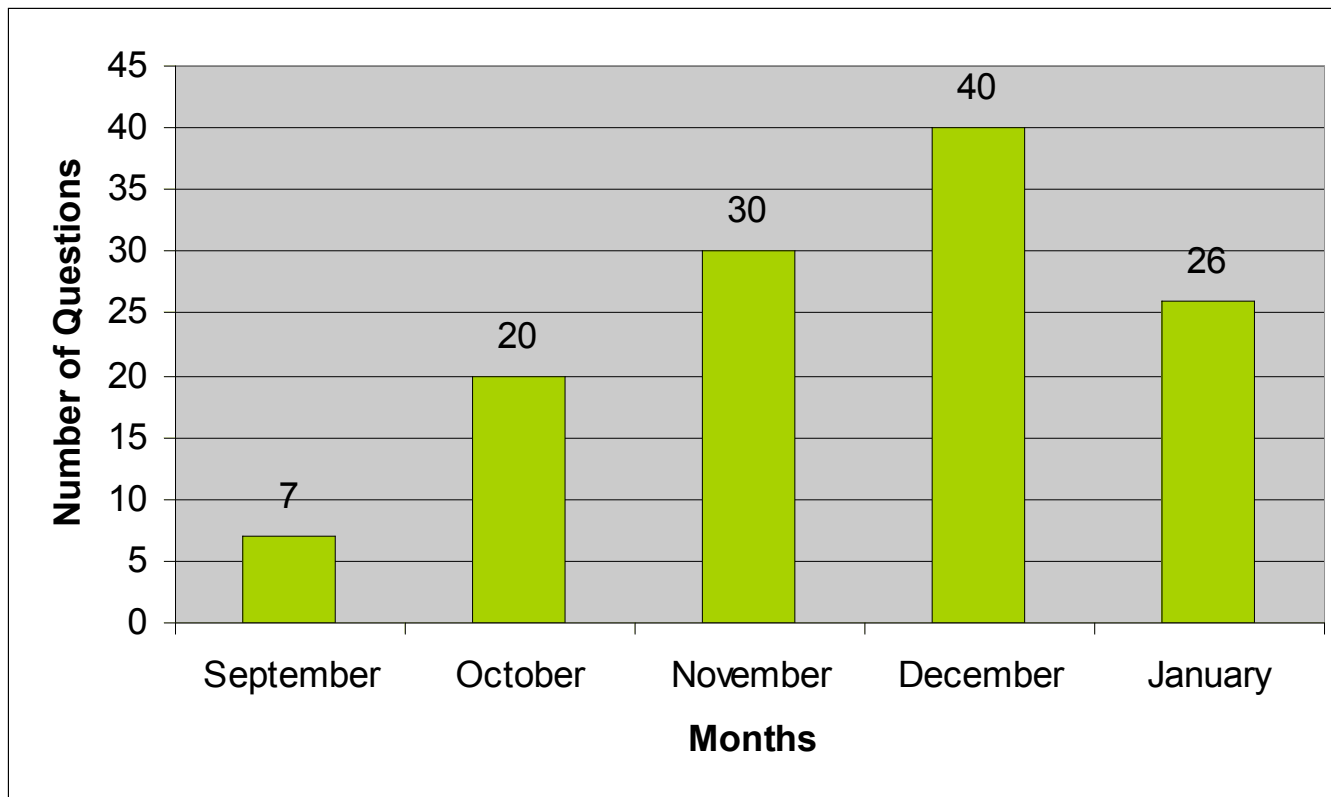
- IM on the desk or not?
 - personal preference
 - signage
 - don't be afraid of success!

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

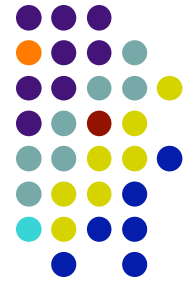


What has it been like?

- How many conversations?

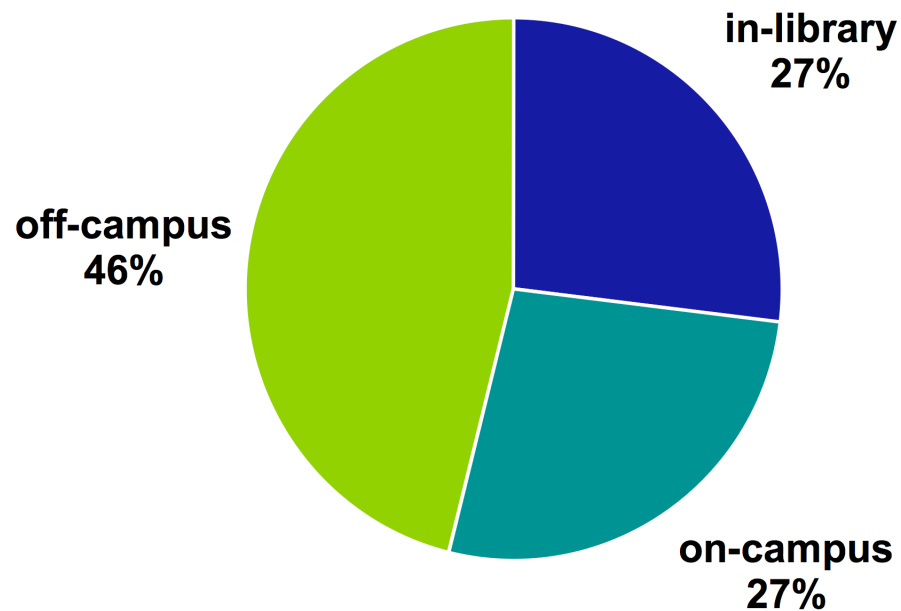


Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?



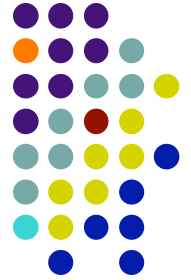
What has it been like?

- where are the questions coming from?
(pilot data)



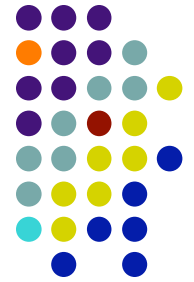
Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

What has it been like?



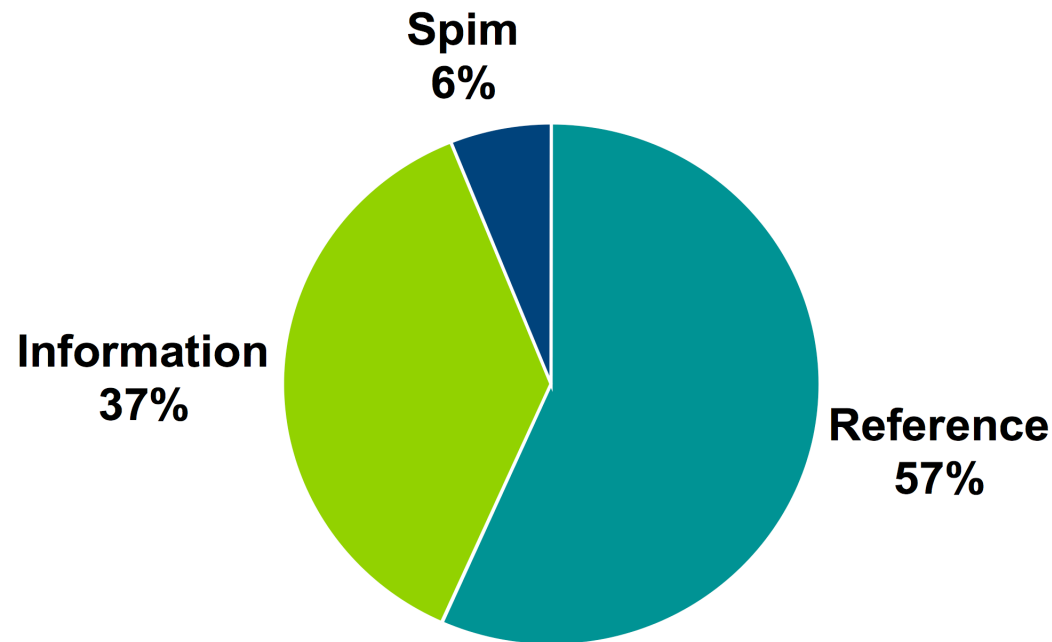
- types of questions:
 - Reference: searching, etc.
 - Information: campus services, hours. etc.

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

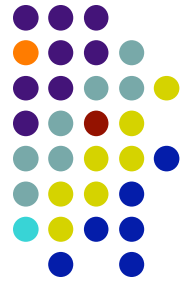


What has it been like?

- types of questions



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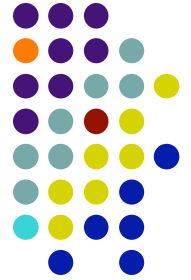


What has it been like?

- Yes, I said “spim”!
 - “I M a Turkish man 😊”
 - “Can I tell you a joke?”
 - “wanna hear the quote of the day?”
 - “hey why is the sky blue?”
- a case of mistaken identity
 - “OMG that *guy* is sitting next to me! 😊”
 - “omg I think julie is stuck with christine!”
 - “is that you man?”

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

What has it been like?



- Long buddy list = status!
 - September: 8
 - October: 40
 - November: 55
 - December: 75
 - January: 120

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

What has it been like? (a quick reference question!)



- [11:51] **student@hotmail.com**: hi, can i ask you a qucik question about apa stlye guide
- [11:51] **McMaster University Library**: sure, what do you need to know?
- [11:52] **student@hotmail.com**: i would liek to know how to source a website, just the first page....all that the apa gives you is sources that are articles. i would just like to source the webpage
- [11:52] **McMaster University Library**: ok, give me a sec to look it up
- [11:52] **McMaster University Library**: we have an apa guide on our website, i'll grab the address for you
- [11:52] **student@hotmail.com**: thank you very much
- [11:53] **McMaster University Library**: go to <http://library.mcmaster.ca/guides/apa.htm>
- [11:53] **McMaster University Library**: if you scroll down to the section called "STAND-ALONE DOCUMENT FROM THE INTERNET", that gives you an example
- [11:54] **student@hotmail.com**: ok tahnk you very much
- [11:54] **McMaster University Library**: anytime! :)
- [11:54] **student@hotmail.com**: thanks for your help , bye now
- [11:54] **McMaster University Library**: have a good day
- = 3 minutes!**

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

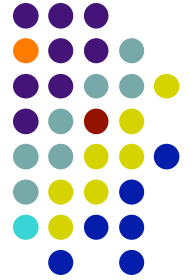
Highs, Lows



- Highs
 - a brand new service point
 - in-library, on-campus, off-campus
 - users we've never heard from before
 - user-centred: meeting users on their turf!

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

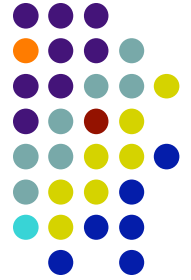
Highs, Lows



- Lows
 - the “shift change”
 - new technology for most staff
 - can you type as fast as you think?

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

Lessons Learned



- a reference question over IM takes ~3 times longer than F2F!
 - longest conversation logged: 51 minutes!
 - most “long” conversations: 10 minutes

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

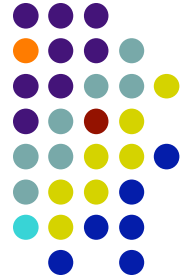
Lessons Learned



- the “IM mindset”
 - 32% of IM users say they do something else on their computers *virtually every time* they are using IM”
(How Americans Use Instant Messaging)
 - instant...ish!

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

Lessons Learned



- IM lingo:
 - good to know the basics (brb, imo, etc.)
 - they won't talk to you the way they talk to their other buddies!

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

Lessons Learned



- don't call it "IM"!

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

The road to success

(some right-brain stuff...)



- advertising & promotion
- good staff training & ongoing communication
- good, easily-reachable staff materials
- reach out to groups who already use it and those who can benefit from it
- how about information literacy?
- librarians with IM “office hours”?
- buy-in

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

Questions?



This presentation lives at:

<http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/talk/ola2006/IM.pdf>

Get in touch:

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MSN/email: amanda@etches-johnson.com

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

And, if we have time...



What are other libraries doing with IM?

- check out the [Library Success Wiki](#)

Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?