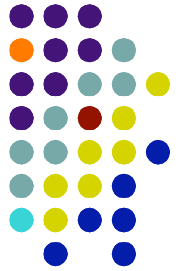


Instant Messaging: the New Virtual Reference?

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IM is...

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

IM services:

- MSN Messenger, AOL Instant Messenger (AIM), Yahoo! Messenger, ICQ, Google Talk, Skype, etc.

Multi-network software:

- Trillian, GAIM, meebo.com (web-based)

Why IM?

- 86% of Canadian students use IM (*Young Canadians in a Wired World*)
- 75% of online teens use IM (*Teens & Technology*)
- our students/patrons don't all come into the library
- take a look around...they're already using it on your library computers!
- shut it down or learn from it?

How did we do it @ McMaster?

- user survey: for 2 weeks, asked everyone who came to the Reference Desk (do you use IM and if yes, which service?). 154 polled: 83% used IM, 72% of which used MSN.
- pilot: June-August 2005, M-F 11am – 3pm, staffed by volunteers
- staff software: Trillian (multi-network & free)
- user software in the library: web-based versions of all clients
- staff training & materials: get all volunteers into a training room; overview of the technology & service; how to set up an IM account; how to set up & configure the software; IM tips; canned messages; get them chatting!

Security concerns – how to minimize risk:

- fact: IM is not as secure as email
- worms, viruses – virus protection; 3rd party apps are less vulnerable
- unencrypted transmission – education, awareness, common sense
- weak authentication – password complexity should be common sense too

What was it like?

- slow start, steady increase in use, not overwhelming
- IM on the desk? Based on personal preference, use signage, don't be afraid of success!
- types of questions so far: 57% reference, 37% information, 6% spam
- keep an eye on how many users have added you to their “buddy” lists!

Highs, Lows:

- new service point; serving users we've never served before; user-centre: meeting users on their turf!
- the “shift change”; new technology for most staff; typing speed;

Lessons learned:

- the “IM mindset”: they're multitasking!
- IM lingo: relax, they won't talk to you the way they talk to their other buddies!
- a reference question takes about 3 times longer on IM compared to face to face!
- don't call it “IM”! (“MSN” and “chat” are more widely used by Canadian millennials!)



The road to success:

- getting buy-in from all levels (staff, admin, etc.)
- advertising & promotion: in library, on campus, in campus/community papers, business cards, etc.
- good staff training & ongoing communication; good, easily-reachable staff materials
- reach out to existing users & those who can benefit from it (distance ed.?)
- IM for information literacy?
- librarians with IM “office hours”?

Select Bibliography

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Bonus! Presentation Materials & Other Helpful Sites:

- this presentation is online at <http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/talk/ola2006/IM.pdf>
- this handout is online at <http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/talk/ola2006/handout.pdf>
- staff training materials: overview of IM (http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/talk/ola2006/intro2im_training.ppt) & how to set up an IM account (<http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/talk/ola2006/imaccount.pdf>)
- other staff materials: IM Tips (http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/talk/ola2006/staffmaterials_imtips.pdf), canned messages (http://www.blogwithoutalibrary.net/talk/ola2006/staffmaterials_canned.pdf)
- great training materials at Michael Stephen's site: <http://www.tametheweb.com/downloads.html>
- good example of a page on IM security: <http://www.cites.uiuc.edu/security/imvirus.html>
- good site for IM security awareness: http://imlogic.com/im_threat_center/index.asp
- libraries that IM, Library Success Wiki: http://www.libsuccess.org/index.php?title=Online_Reference#Libraries_Using_IM_Reference