Virtual reference service in public libraries

Nina Granlund, 6.10.2010

Libraries.fi
Kirjastot.fi

- First frontpage of public libraries, Syke 1996
- Kirjastot.fi, Bibliotekken.fi, Libraries.fi 1999
- First national virtual reference tests 1998, opening of service Ask a Librarian 1999
Libraries.fi

• national library portal for all Finnish libraries
• produced by the Central Library for Public Libraries in Finland, Helsinki City Library
• financed by the Ministry of Education and Culture
• information about libraries, library work, also search services for customers
Libraries.fi

• new services new sites: children and young people (in testing), sites of literature and reading (coming soon) and a metasearch ("Frank", renewed)
Libraries.fi

- Contents produced by the editors of Libraries.fi and the libraries together.
- Libraries answer in the Ask a Librarian – service.
Ask a Librarian (email)

- Started 1999.
- Answers are given in three languages: Finnish, Swedish and English.
Ask a Librarian

- 65 libraries: 48 public libraries, 17 special libraries and reference service groups
Ask a Librarian

- Question is sent via a web form, the answer is delivered to the email-address given by the customer.
- Public archive in three languages.
Ask a Librarian

• Question
• Semantic librarian
• Questioner gives his municipality of residence in the question form.
• Additional information.
• List of participating libraries from which the questioner can choose the answering library.
Ask a Librarian
Ask a Librarian
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Ask a Librarian

Ask a Librarian

- Answer is given within three working days (Saturday and Sunday excluded).
Ask a Librarian

• 2009: 3700 ”written” answers, 4756 semantic automatic answers
Ask a Librarian

• Question meets expert = the person who feels he can give a good answer, answers (special libraries).
Ask a Librarian

- All participating libraries follow the questions coming in, bigger ones check every day the answering application, smaller ones get automatically an email when a question from their municipality is sent.
- If the questioner has chosen an answering library, the email will be send to this library.
Ask a Librarian

- Every library has one or two persons responsible for the follow-up.
- Two national editors survey the service, contact libraries and answer.
Ask a Librarian

• If there are questions from other than participating municipalities, every one answers.
• The Libraries.fi-editor surveys also all answering and furthermore the contents of the public archive.
Ask a Librarian

• most of the questions are answered the same day (67% past half year).
Ask a Librarian

- Working: fits well in every day work, possibilities to work good.
- Enhances professional skills.
- Semantic answerer in use.
Ask a Librarian

• Communication between librarians participating via a closed email-list.
• Information from the Libraries.fi-edition is sent via the same list.
• Info-area in the answering application.
• Every other year a meeting for participating staff.
Ask a Librarian

• Questions about everything, same questions as in libraries (literature, libraries, material for studies, school work, hobbies etc.)
• 10645 keywords in archive
• 39018 answers, 21768 in public archive
Ask a Librarian (chat)

- National chat reference service (in test use) 18.1.-19.3.
- Northern region libraries chat reference service.
- National service 1.11.->, opening hours mo-thurs 11-17, fri 11-15
Virtual reference + ILL

Kaukopalvelu

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• Questions & information: nina.granlund@kirjastot.fi
• Kiitos!