PARTNERING ON VIRTUAL REFERENCE
the case of Biblioteksvagten.dk

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Biblioteksvagten partnering on virtuel reference with:

- libraries from different sectors
- libraries from different regions
- users
- media

Partnering on virtual reference
Partnering/partnership, includes:

• win win relationship
• mutual trust and agreement
• commitment of resources
• sharing risks and benefits
• often long-term
• often cross-sectorial

Partnering on virtual reference
Biblioteksvagten

- Virtual inquiry service of the Danish libraries aka "the digital reference librarian"
- 72 libraries, academic and public
- 300+ library staff engaged
- 84 manned hours per week
- Common website
- Embedded entries
- Webform, e-mail, chat, sms, phone

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Biblioteksvagten – statistics 2009

Total: 29,795 answers

Webform/email: 24,490 answers

Chat/MSN: 5,219 answers

SMS/Text: 270 answers

Phone: 416 answers

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Biblioteksvagten: since 1999

- **Member organization**: no fee at the moment
- **Board**: 4 from public; 2 from academic libraries
- **Employees**: 2 project managers (full-time and 10 h./week) and 1 part-time webmaster
- **Funds**: Danish Agency for Libraries and Media + all the participating libraries
- **Projects**: funded separately
- **Future**: one of the pillars in the upcoming ”The Danish Digital Library”, a common digital mediation of library resources and services

Partnering on virtual reference
Public and academic libraries as partners

- Since 2002
- Email questions are routed
- Public libraries:
  - common interest or hobbies
  - business
  - elementary school
  - high school or shorter education
- Academic libraries:
  - middle or longer education
  - university or research

Partnering on virtual reference
Public and academic libraries as partners

14 university/faculty + 2 college libraries
56 public libraries

Sharing services:

• Taking over questions
• Catalogue of expertise

Different services:

• Staffing hours (academics: Mon-Fri 9-16/15)
• Chat, sms/text (academics: mail/forms only)
• Question traffic (academics: 75 % ”library.dk”)

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Public and academic libraries as partners

library.dk: very important entry to Biblioteksvagten

Partnering on virtual reference
Public and academic libraries as partners

Obstacles

• scepticism from some university libraries:
  • focus on own institutional users
  • no core interest in serving other library customers
  • concern general insight versus subject insight
• learning approach vs delivering exact answers
• not all are participating - concern of free-riding
• Library Act secures sharing of printed material (ILL)
  - but not reference service!

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Other libraries as partners

• handling questions, opening hours and platforms
  • well established and common agreement on the model

• project: national call-center
  • personal service to non-staffed physical libraries with extended self-service public access
  • can Biblioteksvagten be the value adding call-center?
  • project 2010-2011 towards libraries in 3 municipalities, handling technical questions and usual information questions from library users

Partnering on virtual reference
Project: National call-center

Technical issues
- getting access to library area or building
- taking over the user screen
- local IT security issues and policies

Information issues
- knowledge about the local settings and policies
- referring questions to local staff

Partnering on virtual reference
Project: National call-center

Obstacles so far
- only a very few questions
- very hard to decide if there is a need for a call center
- mostly technical issues
- need more data and experiences

More non-staffed libraries on their way...

Partnering on virtual reference
Users as partners

Evaluating the answer
• rating the quality and satisfaction

Comment other answers
• possible to comment the 10,000+ QA entries
• QA database is harvested by Google

”Nut-cracking”
• help us find the answer, access on website and Facebook site

Friends
• be our fan on Facebook or friend on MSN

Partnering on virtual reference
New partners: media sector

Project: Marketing Biblioteksvagten by embedding the ask-a-librarian box

Initial goal: Getting more customers and traffic by being visible outside the library community: on local government website, company intranets and on as many as possible of the top 20 most visited websites

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Visual product: embedding ask-a-librarian box

Seen on various library websites, e.g. library.dk

Possible to have special design that fits the website

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Public service & media as partners

Partnering on virtual reference
Creating insights by marketing analysis:

- **Brand:** what is the DNA of Biblioteksvagten?
- **Consumer:** what are our customers looking for?
- **Market:** Any competition?
- **Trends:** other important observations?

Partnering on virtual reference
Always delivering documented answers to all your questions

Usuarios

- Valores funcionales
- Propiedades
- Ventajas
- Valores signal

Bibliotecas

- Valor emocional
- Personalidad
- Comunicación

Siempre entregando respuestas documentadas a tus preguntas
Structural insights

Brand: Biblioteksvagten

• Unique, no other 1:1 competition
• A product to solve specific problems
• Danish, trustworthy, competent, sustainable etc

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Structural insights

Consumer

• Seeking mobility
• Convenience is everyday
• Simplicity
• Reliability

Partnering on virtual reference
Structural insights

Market

• Too much information on the net
• A lot of ”quick and dirty” solutions
• No one is investing in similar services
• No one is launching similar services

Partnering on virtual reference
Structural insights

Trends

• Mobility, mobility, mobility
• Expecting higher speed
• Always online and using several platforms

Partnering on virtual reference
Portfolio for presenting:

• who and what we are
• why we want you as a partner
• what do your users get
• what do we promise
• facts about us
• statements from our users
• usability tests and question cases
• offering an embedded entry on your website

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Results so far:
So much conversation....

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...and just a little bit of action:
Danmarks Radio
(National public service television & radio)

• ”Til tasterne”: radio and television campaign with a gameshow on IT skills. Access to Biblioteksvagten from the website

• Danskernes Akademi: television concept with university lectures, inspired by BBC and Ted.com. Access to Biblioteksvagten from the website

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...and a little bit more:

Jyllands Posten

- wants embedded form with access to Biblioteksvagten
- wants to create more user interaction
- wants to be associated with the libraries brand
- are testing these weeks

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Media as partners

So far

• tough business, very hard to get through
• connections or know someone who has
• exclusivity means higher priority
• use marketing tools and insights on:
  • your self – define the DNA of your product and business
  • your market – know your competitors
  • your users – how you can engage them
  • your time - in a virtual world, what are the trends

Partnering on virtual reference
Partnering – why bother

“Biblioteksvagten is a service of high quality with potentials of value-adding relevance to most citizens – so why do they not know about it?”

• we need to be where the users are
• we need to re-position the library brand

One solution: use new channels and new positions to market the library reference skills and services

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And please – just ask!
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