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Pour trouver un terrain d'entente commune en matière d'archivage à long terme des médias numériques en Suisse et pour mettre en évidence les possibilités de coopération, la BN a organisé en novembre 2003 un colloque sur le thème «Disponibilité à long terme des publications électroniques dans les bibliothèques patrimoniales suisses – un défi à relever ensemble». Les directrices et directeurs de toutes les bibliothèques cantonales ont suivi les différents exposés et ont pris part aux tables rondes.

Il a été décidé lors de cette journée que le projet e-Helvetica devait proposer un modèle de collaboration entre la BN et les bibliothèques cantonales. L'idée de proposer une procédure possible pour la conservation des objets sur disquette dans les bibliothèques cantonales fera l'objet d'un autre programme.

Jusqu'à ce que l'objectif du projet e-Helvetica, en l'occurrence l'exploitation automatisée d'un système d'archivage selon OAIS (standard ISO «Open Archival Information System») soit atteint, la BN va continuer à découvrir les univers numériques dans un mouvement collaboratif. ■

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Dossier «Mondes numériques»

Linking Digital Library Services with Users

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The U.C. Berkeley study of *How Much Information*?[1] states that about 5 exabytes (1 exabyte = 2^{60} bytes) of new information was produced in 2002. Almost 800 MB of recorded information is produced per person each year based on the entire world population of 6.3 billion people.

Overwhelmed? Maybe.

For librarians and information workers it is both exciting and challenging news. Digital libraries are an important part of the information environments we live in. Digital resources and access systems are the primary focus of many library professionals.

No doubt, more and more people use digital libraries over the Internet. Some do not feel the need to visit the physical libraries.

A library is increasingly represented by the library's Web site, the online catalogs, e-journals, and databases accessible over the Internet or the Intranet.

Indeed, there are many information sources, among them the library, that people use to find the information they need. Need information on a new topic? Google it. Want to know if the library has a specific book? Go to the online catalog. Click, click. Search, browse, download, e-mail, save or print.

There is so much information we can find with a connected computer in the office or on the road. We accomplish many day-to-day tasks with keyboards and clicks.

Even though the search engines can return many relevant links within seconds, the results are not always exactly what we are looking for.

While experienced searchers may be able to refine search strategies and take advantage of the advanced search options, many would not bother to take those extra steps to get more accurate results. Besides search, many Web sites and databases are designed for browsing.

How do you navigate? Do you see all the menu links on the top, left, right? Do you prefer clicking on embedded links, or is your mouse quickly over the graphics? Do you feel lost and frustrated sometimes?

Searching for information is not always hassle-free. Sometimes we just can not find what we are looking for, even we believe the information is available somewhere.

Make a phone call to the library hotline? Write e-mail and wait for a reply within 48 hours? Well, too much trouble in most cases.

Many people think that a digital library means digitised library collections, online catalogs, e-journals, and databases. What else? People and services! They are an integral part of the digital libraries.

The libraries that have actively participated in the digital library movements are also striving to provide a broad range of services to support digital library users.

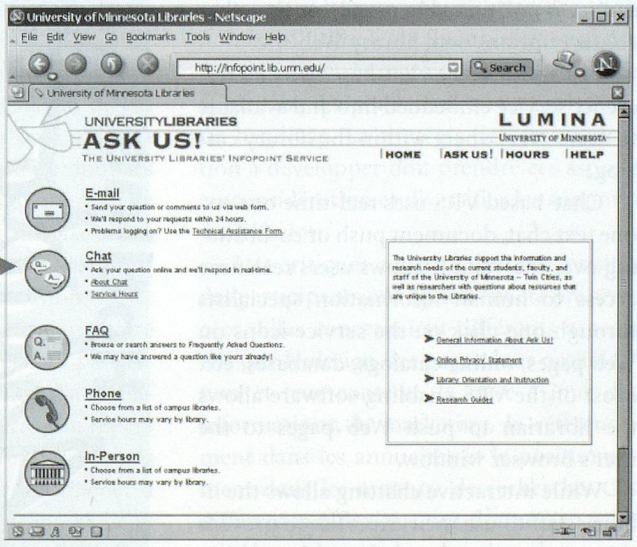

Figure 1. Chat as a new contact channel.
http://infopoint.lib.umn.edu

1 *http://www.sims.berkeley.edu/research/projects/how-much-info-2003/*

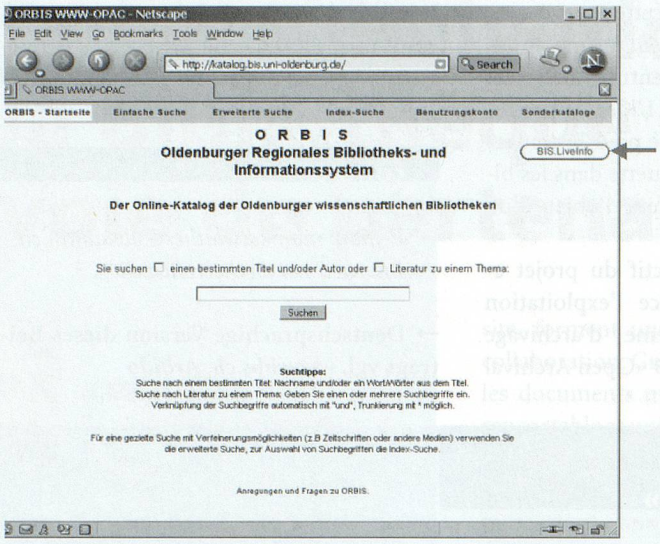

Figure 2. Chat service embedded into the online catalog. *http://katalog.bis.uni-ldenburg.de/*

However, the information-seeking behaviour of users in the digital information age is yet to be better understood and integrated into the design of library portals.

While it is common that the service information is available on the library's Web site, such information is not always easy to find. A library as the service provider needs to ask some important questions: Are the library services conveniently accessible to those who use the digital library resources? How can we bring more services to the users instead of waiting for them to come to the library? Among the many new concepts in the forefront of library service innovation is the chat-based virtual reference service (VRS).

Unlike e-mail reference which is asynchronous, chat-based VRS is synchronous and is gaining acceptance in a large number of libraries in North America and a few European libraries.

Figure 1 illustrates how a real-time chat service is positioned in parallel to the other contact options on a library Web site.

Figure 2 shows a chat-based virtual reference service embedded into and available to users everywhere within the library catalog.

Chat-based VRS uses real-time one-to-one text chat, document push or co-browsing over the Web. It allows users real-time access to human information specialists through one-click on the service icons on Web pages, online catalogs, databases, etc. Most of the VRS enabling software allows the librarian to push Web pages to the user's browser window.

While interactive chatting allows the library staff to use their expertise to provide the most appropriate information within the context of the user needs, real-time page pushing is an efficient way to answer frequently asked questions and instantly show any hard to find information. The service creates a satisfying user experience and often saves the user time. At the end of a service session, the user can obtain a transcript of the chat dialog by e-mail, including the URLs exchanged. The transcripts provide credible and accurate records for any follow-up work.

One of the important characteristics of this new service is the convenience of using only one media, the Web, when the user needs help while using the digital resources over the Internet. It can be as interactive as by phone and as precise as by e-mail. Another advantage is its flexibility: On the one hand the chat icon may be placed almost anywhere you want to offer the service; on the other hand, your service staff may answer chat calls anytime from workstations located in any decentralized offices.

Keep in mind, however, that text chat means real-time interactive writing. Some may feel stressed and others may simply "shy" away. It may not be suitable for in-depth research consultation, either.

Looking forward it is hard to imagine our intellectual life without digital libraries. Digital libraries are not all about digital resources, but also about people and services.

Chat-based virtual reference service will not replace other existing services, but it opens up a new channel for librarians and library services to reach out for closer relationships with digital library users. ■

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