

Impact of the Internet on reference services in higher education libraries in SA

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Research questions

- Student access, use and training
- Reference librarians's use
 - Integrated as a tool
- Reference librarian training and knowledge
 - To give instruction

Methodology

- Questionnaire for quantitative data
- Interviews for qualitative data

Questionnaire

- Pilot October 2001 in Western Cape
- Identified appropriate respondents in the 36 institutions
- 92 individuals including directors, deputy directors, reference librarians co-ordinators and team leaders
- November 2001
- 2 weeks
- Reminder and another 2 weeks
- 25 responded representing 20 institutions

Questionnaire

- E-mail with
- Attachment
 - MS Word
 - .txt
- Web at www.capewebdesign.co.za/library
 - MS Word
 - .txt

Interviews

- Target population – Faculty Librarians
- Pilot June + July 2001 in Western Cape
- Interviews August and September 2001
- 3 UWC
- 5 Cape Technikon
- 1hr to 1hr 30 minutes

Questionnaire

- Library Characteristics
- User Internet use and training
- Reference librarians' Internet use
- Library Web site
- Online subscription databases
- Open-ended question at the end of each section

User Access

- End-user access – all but one
- Period 3.5 years (+/-1998)
- Majority provided free access to staff and students
- Just over half provided access from all user terminals in the library
 - Compared to one third in 1994 Tenopir & Neufang study

User Access

- Ave of 29 user terminals
- Ave of 17.5 Internet terminals
- Ave student population of 12 211
 - One user terminal for every 421 students
 - One Internet terminal for every 698
 - (exclude access outside of the library)
- Not reflect difference between HDI and HAI
 - 4 at UWC and 19 of 39 at Cape Technikon

User instruction

- On-site
 - All but 3 provide instruction
 - Not as part of library instruction
- Remote
 - Less than half (40%) do not provide instruction
 - Via E-mail
- Trend to one-to-one at point of use
- Consider ave 1 565 students for every one reference librarian

User Internet Use

- Academic rather than recreational
 - Academic use included database access, search engine searches, specific url's and image searches
 - Non-academic use included job advertisements, current affairs, entertainment and e-mail
- Search behaviour have changed
 - Doing searches themselves
 - Web first
 - Preferred full text databases

User Internet Use

- Attitudes toward research process changed
- User expectations have increased
 - *‘Users expected to be able to answer every question, and do every research project online, ... users expect full-text and are surprised if a source is not full text’ (Tenopir & Ennis, 1998)*

Reference interaction

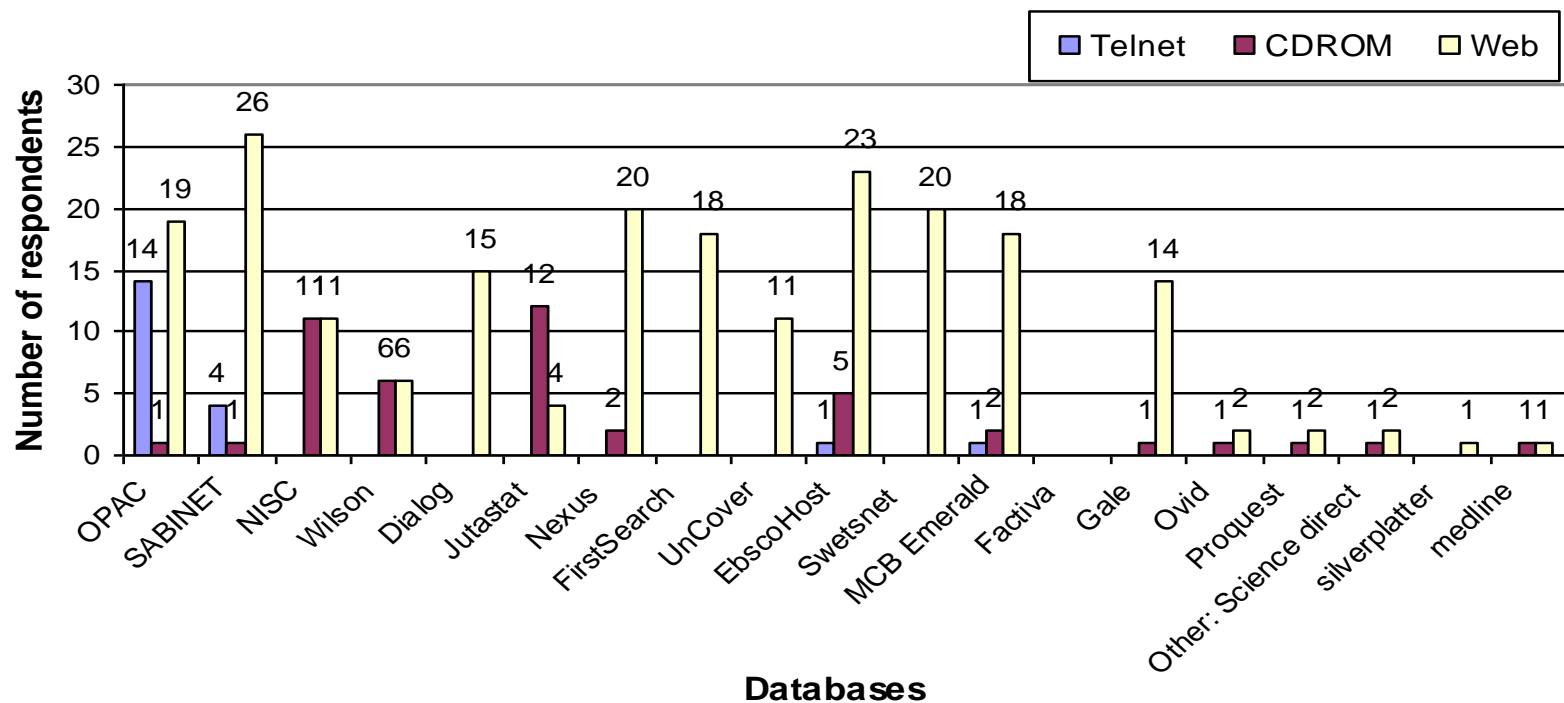
- Length of interactions increased, the number have not.
 - Increased no. of databases available
 - Sophisticated search function of databases
 - Selecting best resource more complex
 - Queries involve answering questions and instruction on access and use

Librarian Access

- All had access
- Ave 5 yr access
 - Pakistan University Libraries have had access since 1995 but only half of the universities provided librarians with access (Saeed et al, 2000)

Database Access

Online services and format



Librarian Access

- 76.9% had Web OPAC
 - Compared 10% of the University libraries in Pakistan in Saeed et al study in 2000.
- Majority of online databases were Web-based
- Preferred mode of access was Web
- CD-ROM access less

Librarian Use

- Web OPAC ave of 15.6 per day
- Online databases ave of 13 per day
- Open Web ave of 10.3 per day
 - Compare to 6.74 per day in Malaysia (Abdoulaye & Majid, 2000)
 - On-site ready reference, e-mail and search engine use

Librarian Use

- Low usage for electronic queries (queries received via e-mail)
 - Ave 2.25 queries a day
- User assistance
 - 13 per day OPAC and online databases respectively
 - 7.8 per day open Web
- Internet is another tool that users need assistance with

Librarian Use

- Mediated rather than end-user searching
 - 1994 to 2000 ARL studies show opposite trend
 - Insufficient facilities therefore offer via librarians
 - Cost of access because notable exceptions were EbscoHost, Swetsnet, Emerald and Gale
- Library Web Site
 - Only 25% involved in Library Web design
 - Only 29% had individual pages and spent an average of 6 hours per month updating and maintaining

Librarian Training

- Combination of methods with
- 84.6% attended formal workshops
- 73.1% surfing
- No in-house staff training, outside body e.g. CALICO, SABINET
- Formal workshops viewed as introductory
- Self learning, by reading and in answering queries, was valued more

Librarian Attitude

- All interviewees had a positive attitude
 - Valued immediacy and ease of access
 - Vastness of information – expand library collection
 - Speed of retrieval
 - Availability of full text
 - 24/7 availability
 - Local and International communication
- Tool that helps librarians do their jobs
- Increased job satisfaction

Librarian Attitude

- Frustration
 - Poor bandwidth
 - Lack of sophistication of search engine functionality
 - Lack of information literacy amongst users
 - Information overload
 - Short life span of Internet sites
- Internet has revitalised reference librarianship

Conclusions

- Libraries do not have sufficient user terminals for the optimum use of the Internet
- User instruction inadequate
- Reference process took longer
- Internet is another tool that users need assistance with

Conclusions

- Few librarians were involved in the Library Web Site and had individual pages
- Internet both a job satisfaction and frustration
- While librarians have integrated the Internet as a tool, they have not gone beyond that.

Recommendations

- National strategy for SA for higher education
 - Skills of graduates
- National target for number of Internet access points to number of students
 - E.g. Ireland target is 1:3, but currently have 1:33 - 2001
- All computer should provide Internet access 24/7
 - E.g. In 1999 the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology transferred all campus computer laboratories from ITS to the Library and converted them into a Learning Resource Centres. This includes instruction on information literacy and basic computer literacy

Recommendations

- Electronic reference services
 - A.k.a. ‘digital reference, online reference, ask-a service’
 - Mechanism by which people can submit their questions and have them answered by a library staff member through some electronic means (e-mail, chat, Web forms etc.) (Janes, Carter & Memmot, 1999: 146)
- Benefits: Remote users, 24/7, compete with ask-a service, participate in global reference network of CDRS (Collaborative Digital Reference Services) of Library of Congress

Recommendations

- Already providing e-mail but developed as a core service
 - Advertise and promote
 - Budget
 - Staffing
 - Service policy: who, to what extent, how fast
 - Infra-structure supported on campus
 - Evaluation

Recommendations

- Internet instruction
 - Less point of use instruction and more special classes and integrate with library instruction
- Online instruction
 - Online tutorials, e-mailed lessons and live instructions classes using chat technology – the virtual classroom.
 - For Internet as well as OPAC and other online database instruction

Thank you!