**VIRTUAL REFERENCE SERVICE**

Virtual reference service is an on-line reference service. In earlier days this service was known as digital reference service and Chat reference service as the near synonym to virtual reference service.

Virtual reference service is a service by which a library reference service is conducted online, and the reference transaction is a computer mediated communication. It is the remote, computer mediated delivery of information provided by library professionals to users who cannot access or do not want face-to-face communication. Virtual reference service is most often an extension of a library’s existing reference service programme

**Elements of Virtual reference service**

The virtual reference service incorporates the following elements or components:

\*The user or patron

* The interface (web form, e-mail, chat, video etc)
* Digital sources (including CD, web resources, local digitized resources etc)
* The information professional (Reference librarian, Information Managers etc)
* Request of the users

**Methods or Modes of Virtual reference service**

Based on the mode of receiving and answering the queries , virtual reference service can be broadly divided into two types:

* Asynchronous ;and
* Synchronous

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**Asynchronous Method**

This mode involves a time delay between the receiving question and providing answer such as e-mail reference service, texting etc.

**Synchronous Method**

This transaction takes place in ‘Real time ‘ with an immediate response to the query i.e Instant Messaging, Video conferencing etc . Here synchronous virtual reference refers to any real time computer –mediated communication between reader and information professional .So it is also called Real time Virtual Reference Service.

**Forms of Virtual Reference**

**Webforms**

Webforms are created for virtual reference services in order to help the user be more productive in asking their questions. This document helps the librarian to locate exactly what the user is asking for. Creation of webforms requires design consideration. Because webforms substitute for the reference interview, receiving as much information as possible from the user is a key function.

**Elements commonly found within a webform Format**

* A return e-mail address to send the answer to the question
* The question being asked
* The type of question
* What sources have been consulted by the user
* How the user is planning to use the information
* Location of the user

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* A name to personalize the interaction

* A date by which the information is needed
* The type of sources being requested Print or electronic)

**Chat using Commercial Applications**

Several applications exist for providing chat-based reference. Some of these applications are:

# Question point

#Tutor.com

# Aspiringkidz.com

#Vienova. Com

#VRLPlus .etc

These applications bear a resemblance to commercial help desk applications. These applications possess functionality such as : Chat, co-browsing of webpages, webpage and document pushing, customization of pre-scripted messages, storage of chat transcript, and statistical reporting.

**Chat using Instant Messaging**

Instant Messaging (IM) services are used by some libraries as a low cost means of offering chat-based reference, since most IM services are free. Utilizing IM for reference services allows a user to contact the library from any location via the Internet.

**E-mail Reference Service**

This is simple, cheapest and cost effective service in which transaction involves exchange of information. User sends the query in the form of message

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and receives an answer at a later time. Following are some of the e-mail services provided to the users.

* Inforocket
* Askme
* All Experts
* Question point etc.

**Video Conferencing or web camera services**

Video conferencing is introduced as a remedy to the communication problems inherent in text based services. This digital form include visual elements where user and librarian both can use text and speech transactions and they can hear each other just face to face interview.

**Digital Reference Robots**

An artificial intelligence is used to response the questions when the reference librarian is not available, is known as Digital Robots. The most well known of this type of services is Ask Jeeves. The operation of this service involves use of software to search the database of questions and answers.

Questions

1. What is virtual reference service ?
2. Explain various modes and forms of virtual reference service