HENNEPIN COUNTY
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Video Reference
A Pilot Project
2010

Origin

- Changing nature of reference service
- Decrease number of staff available
- Increased size of new buildings
- Growing awareness of customer preferences for contact – email, chat, im, comment boxes, twitter, facebook

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Genesis

- Make effective and efficient use of technology as a tool for providing reference service

- Retain reference expertise between and throughout buildings

- Increase capacity of in -building staff to be available for alternate assignments in and out of buildings

Technology Tools

- Free software (Skype)
- Existing computers
- Low cost microphones
- Low cost or built in video cameras

Changing nature of librarian's role

- Increased desire to serve in community and provide programming
- Make best use of professional staff – 'just-in-time' reference staffing rather than 'just-in-case'

Process

- ## Set up Pre-Test
  - ### at six locations
    - Learn about sound quality
    - Customer Interest
    - Impact on in building activities
    - Placement of station

Process

- Initial meeting in test locations
- Talking points sent out prior to test and communication plan in place
- Set-up and test software and equipment
- One staff with customer workstation and librarian out of sight location in same building
- Run sessions and take surveys
- Collect staff observations

Customer Response

- Overwhelmingly positive
- Initial concern about replacing staff with computers
- Liked the use of technology to address needs
- Found it easy to use

Staff Response

- Enthusiastic
- More libraries wanted to be pre-test sites than we're able to accommodate
- Sparked a lot of staff ideas on how the tool could be useful for their work

What we've learned

- Customers appeared comfortable
- Easy to use and setup
- Staff saw the tool as useful
- Was not disruptive to other library business
- During pretest found no reason not to move forward with structured pilot project

What we've learned

- Video reference is hugely attractive to children
- Time of day and location of service important
- Buy in by staff is important to success

Limitations

- In house access to tool only
- Limited hours
- Equipment quality
- Limits on customization of software

Proposed Staffing Model

– Not a replacement for reference staff
– Method to manage reality of reduced number of professional staff
– May require redistribution of staff from existing locations
– Move forward with staff in centralized location for limited number of hours per week – contrast with distributed model for IM/Chat
– Centralized location as host site could allow better connection with IT staff, subbing behind illness and vacations, but may not be feasible

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Our Next Steps

- Pilot Project (if pre-test warrants)
  - One location
  - Fixed hours – 10 per week/2 daily
  - Possible temporary staff reassignment
  - Fixed duration – 6 months
  - Assess success

Thank You

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