

## **California's 24/7 Reference Service Ask a Law Librarian via Live Chat**

1. Title: "Ask a Law Librarian"
2. Goal: To provide live chat and email answers to legal information questions asked to the 24/7 Reference Service and Q & A Café. The law librarians serve as legal reference experts for California's 24/7 Reference Service and Q & A Café substantially funded by federal Library Services and Technology Act grants.
3. How promoted, advertised and utilized:

The Judicial Council of California, Administrative Office of the Courts, has an excellent self-help website. We informed the self-help staff about the live chat and e-mail service and gave them the portal link. During 2002, which was the first year of the service, the link was buried under "other free services." We worked with them to raise the visibility of the reference service as they were redesigning their website. It was decided to put an "Ask a Law Librarian" icon on every page of the redesigned site. On January 2, 2003 the new Judicial Council Self-help Website went live.

It is possible to review the transcripts by the individual librarian who was involved in the live chat and emailed sessions and by the program coordinators. Regular evaluation of the transcripts has led to many changes in the program including, scripts for frequently asked questions, changes in the placement of the icons on the judicial council website, additional training and discussion among the reference librarians about how the questions are answered.

Use statistics are evaluated on a regular basis to schedule the live chat librarian's hours. Scheduling, requests to cover individual hours among the group, and program discussion is conducted via a listserv hosted by Los Angeles County Law Library.

As a benefit of providing reference staffing participating California County Law Libraries may place a link to the service on their own local library website. In 2003, six law libraries maintained links directly to the "Ask a Law Librarian" portal. Members of the Council of California County Law Librarians also talked to their local courts, showed them the service and suggested that they make referral their websites, and at clerks offices. All courts have some type of link to the Judicial Council's self-help site. The users surveys also indicate that court officials are directly referring to the "Ask a law librarian service."

110 California Public Libraries and 42 California academic libraries have links on their websites to the 24/7 reference and Q&A Café portals. The public and medical librarians who field live chat reference questions for California's 24/7 Reference and Q&A Café programs are trained to bring law librarians into law related calls when a

law librarian is monitoring. When there is no law librarian available, they are trained to offer the caller a referral to the joint QRC email box and a law librarian sends an email response. Missed calls when the law librarian is busy with other callers are programmed to automatically forward to the joint e-mail box. Any local promotion for other types of libraries are promotes all the live chat services.

Caller surveys from May 2003-December 2003 indicate that 45% of callers found the service by surfing the net and another 24% found the service from library websites. By matching comments with the "other"25%, many specifically mentioned the court websites or referrals.

#### 4. Response by target audience:

The primary target audience for the service is residents of California. The primary evaluation tool for the service is an on-line survey that the pops up on the caller's screen at the end of the live-chat session. The survey questions include who is using the service, how they found out about the service, and if the service and information is what they wanted. There is also room for comments.

There were 2,465 surveys completed between May and December 2004. 52.13% were satisfied with the answers they received and an additional 29.9% were somewhat satisfied. When comparing the stats with the comments, the reason many were unsatisfied or were only partially satisfied is that they expected to be given legal advice. Almost 12% were repeat customers. 80% reside in California and others were dealing with California legal issues or cases.

Beginning with the first day of the revised California Courts Self help Website when the "Ask a law librarian" link was placed on the navigator bar of every page, live chat questions increased from less than five questions a day to an average of five questions an hour. The pace has not slowed down.

#### 5. Who's Involved:

The overall 24/7 Reference program of the Metropolitan Cooperative Library System is Susan McGlamery at [smcglamery@mcls.org](mailto:smcglamery@mcls.org), 310-341-7444. The program coordinator for the Council of California County Law Librarians is Shirley David at [sdavid@saclaw.lib.ca.us](mailto:sdavid@saclaw.lib.ca.us), 916 874-6013. Librarians from the Bernard E. Witkin California State Law Library and at the county law libraries in Orange County, Los Angeles County, Riverside County, Kern County, Sacramento County, Contra Costa County, San Francisco County, Butte County, Placer County, Fresno County, Sonoma County, San Bernardino County, and Alameda County provide the live chat and email responses to the questions.