

LIVEPERSON SUCCESS STORY

Librarians use live chat to provide 'cyber buddies' to patrons throughout Ontario, Canada, enhancing access to information among the province's students and citizens alike

About Knowledge Ontario

Knowledge Ontario (KO) is a provincially-funded collaboration of libraries, cultural heritage organizations and educational institutions. Its focus is on connecting Ontarians with digital content to support their information and learning needs. KO delivers enhanced services to and through the province's publicly funded libraries by supporting equity of access to information, creation of digital content, research and literacy.

The Challenge

Over the past decade, patronage of libraries has been in decline, particularly among younger people who view the Internet as the ultimate source for any information or data they need. While the Internet is undeniably vast and powerful, it lacks the filters most people need to assess the quality and veracity of information sources. Traditionally, librarians have probed visitors about their needs and then guided them to sources that are both credible and appropriate to their purpose. KO needed a way to insert the librarian back into the research habits of patrons who prefer to stay online.

Additionally, equity of access to information is a top priority for KO, and for librarians everywhere. Unfortunately, unfettered access can be a challenge, particularly to citizens in rural and remote areas of Ontario, the province's French speakers and First Nations communities. KO wanted to ensure equity of access to information by making top-notch research assistance available to all residents of Ontario, regardless of where they were located.

Finally, KO wanted to develop the skill sets of Ontario's librarians by enabling them to use the tools of Web 2.0: instant messaging, social networking, blogging and portals.

The Solution

In January, 2008, KO launched askON, an online research help service that allows visitors to chat in real time with an information professional. Built on LivePerson's award-winning live chat solution LivePerson Pro, askON lets patrons click on a button on their local library's website to request information, research assistance or other library services via live chat.

Pooling Resources

The pilot began with ten public and seven academic library systems contributing resources to staff a mutually agreed upon schedule: 11am-10pm Monday through Thursday, and 11:00am-5pm Friday and Saturday. Contributions of staff hours are based on library size, enabling the smaller libraries with fewer resources to leverage the resources of the large ones, thus meeting KO's goal of creating equitable access to information for all of Ontario's citizens. Because chats are conducted via the Internet, the librarians can be located in any participating library in the province – not the one which happens to be local to the patron.

One year after the launch of askON, there are 36 participating library systems serving thousands of patrons throughout Ontario and there are plans to add a significant number of Northern and rural libraries in 2009.

Helping Visitors in Real Time

askON librarians use live chat to probe visitors on how they'll use the information they've requested, and to make recommendations based on their responses. For example, a visitor who requests information on head and neck cancer for a high school science report will need a different set of resources than a visitor who has recently received a diagnosis of the disease. The librarians use LivePerson's push page technology to send links to resources and articles relevant to the patron's request.

"So many people need help navigating through the information that's out there, to find what's relevant to them, and filter out what might not be legitimate," said Virginia Roy, Project Manager for Ask Ontario. "askON is turning our librarians into cyber buddies for a wide range of Ontarians. They can help users figure out what keywords to enter in order to get the results they need, and what tools and resources to use first."



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Collaboration Between Librarians

askON librarians rely on collaboration amongst themselves in order to speed their response time to users requests. They've created an intra-library portal that serves as a resource center with quick links to topics that receive frequent requests (such as topics assigned by grade level by Ontario school curriculum) as well as profiles of all the participating libraries. Additionally, askON librarians use live chat between themselves to request help in responding to inquiries. "The back channel provides support lets the librarians leverage the skills and experience of their colleagues," said Ms. Roy.

Tangible Benefits

Since its launch, askON has handled over 13,000 requests in a wide variety of subject areas across all its participating libraries. Requests range from quick fact checking, to providing in-depth research on a wide variety of subjects.

Reactions to the askON are measured in exit surveys presented to the patrons. Of those who complete the survey, some 86% stated that the service provided more than what they expected, or exactly what they expected.

"We're especially pleased with the development of our staff," explained Ms. Roy. "The librarians are comfortable with the LivePerson software, and are beginning to handle multiple chats simultaneously. Participating in askON has introduced them to the world of instant messaging and blogging – important aspects of Web 2.0."

About LivePerson

More than 7,000 small and mid-size business (SMB) customers use LivePerson's award-winning live chat and contact center solutions to improve customer service, increase online sales, and manage interactions across all channels: chat, email, and self-service knowledgebase.

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The screenshot shows the website for ASPHODEL NORWOOD PUBLIC LIBRARY. The header includes the library name and a search bar. Below the header, there are navigation links: "Use your library", "At your library", "Support your library", and "Our favourites". The main content area features a large "askON" logo with the text "online research help" and a button that says "Click here for LIVE CHAT". Below this, it says "Live Chat by LivePerson". To the right, there is a "Love YOUR Library" banner with a video player showing a person's face. Below the video, there is a section titled "Very Odd Indeed" with a video player and text: "Can't get enough of Koontz's Odd Thomas (January's Book Club Pick)? Check out this great website with online episodes and fun activities! The Lingering Dead Detector is just". To the right of the video, there is a "Library Hours" section with a table of hours for NORWOOD BRANCH and WESTWOOD BRANCH.

Day	Hours
NORWOOD BRANCH	2363 County Road 45 Norwood, ON N0L 2V0 (705) 639-2228
.....	2:00pm - 7:00pm
W 9:00am - 1:00pm
T 2:00pm - 7:00pm
F 9:00am - 1:00pm
S 9:00am - 12:00pm
WESTWOOD BRANCH	312 Centre Line

With askON, librarians are standing by to help patrons find relevant and trustworthy information. askON librarians use live chat to probe visitors on how they'll use the information they've requested, and to make recommendations based on their responses.