

Montana Virtual Reference Cooperative Meeting
April 10, 2006
MSU-Billings

In attendance:

Anita Scheetz (Fort Peck Tribal Library)
Liz Babbitt (Bozeman Public Library; proxy for Livingston Public)
Betsy Garlish (Montana Tech)
Nansu Roddy (Bitterroot Public Library)
Jan Jelenik (Rocky Mountain College)
Dee Ann Redman (Parmly Billings Library)
Brent Roberts (MSU-Billings)
Bobbi Otte (Rocky Mountain College)
Tricia Browning (Meagher County/City Library)
Bridgett Johnson, (Lewistown Public Library)
Bruce Newell (MSL via phone)
Sheila Bonnard (MSU-Great Falls; proxy for MSU-Northern)

Committee Reports:

Executive – Betsy reported that the main work of the executive committee has been to finalize the QP contract.

Finances – Jan reported that the cooperative currently has a balance of \$4714.80. Income was \$15,603. Expenses were \$1200 to OCLC for training, \$6,975 for the QP profile and \$2713 for cooperative service. Anticipated costs for FY '07 are \$13,185. To cover this with current coop members, costs would be \$321 for the small libraries, \$643 for medium and \$964 for large libraries. These estimated costs are based on the 24 current members and would change if more libraries joined. The group decided not to add a \$100 surcharge for marketing and training since we have a healthy balance. It was also decided that we would like to continue doing our own pricing and billing and not have OCLC bill each library. It was also decided that new libraries should be charged a one-time fee in addition to the basic cost to cover initial training and setting up a profile. Right now the minimum cost for a new library to join would be \$330.

Marketing – Sheila reported that the committee is focusing on marketing to new libraries because of 24/7. An article was written by Betsy for Focus, Sheila & Betsy are preparing a presentation for Significant Tidings at MLA, and Anita will include VR in the panel she is on at the MLA membership dinner. After MLA, efforts will focus on marketing 24/7.

Statistics – Liz prepared an excellent handout of current statistics showing increased usage and also the number of chats requested after hours. A copy of the stats report will be sent with these minutes.

Training – Brent is working with OCLC to provide 2 online training sessions – one on managing profiles and one on the new chat. The committee also hopes to offer hands-on training options in the summer.

Scheduling – an updated schedule has been sent to Mike Price to load on the MSL web page – this will stay in effect until July. May to July will be our transition period and we will continue to keep our scheduled hours during that time. In July, we will have to start manning hours for the global cooperative (20 hours minimum) but those hours can be more flexible because of global coverage.

There was much discussion during the reports about the problems that are occurring since the “upgrade” to flash chat. Questions that came up included: Is marketing worth it until we are confident of the product? How can we ask other libraries to join when we don’t know how much it might cost (ie if we have to pick up the tab for global coverage in 2007)? Do the numbers of questions justify the costs? Do we have to stay with QP?

Old Business:

QP “upgrade” - May 1 is the date for moving to the global network. Before May 1, each library will have to have its “service unit profile” completed. OCLC will provide training prior to that to walk us through the process. Betsy will coordinate. Global will have public and academic queues. We can monitor both until July when we start manning the global network. After that, those on shift will man the queue appropriate for their libraries – ie public or academic, not both.

QP problems – because of the continuing problems with the new flash chat, it was decided that a more systematic way of reporting and recording these problems should take place. Anyone encountering a problem should report it to OCLC using the support form on the QP page. After reporting the OCLC, a message should be sent to the MSL listserv so everyone in the cooperative is notified; Nansu has volunteered to tally those problems so that we can see the extent of the problem and be able to share this with OCLC.

The list of problems so far: chat freezes when a new patron comes in; no notification “ding” when a new patron arrives; can’t IM another librarian; old chat option is gone so no fall back if there are problems; getting kicked out of QP (window closes) but showing as logged in after restart; lag time on chat (to the extent of losing patrons because they think no one is there and vice versa); screen box comes up but can’t interact; having to do some much browser configuration, cache clearing, before using chat

New Business:

Bruce recommended that the cooperative write a letter to the state library requesting funding (\$6210) for global coverage for 2007 and have that letter in before Wednesday's Library Commission meeting. He also suggested that a representative from the cooperative be present at that meeting and Betsy volunteered.

\$100 proposed surcharge for '07 to cover training and marketing was not approved.

Sheila and Nansu volunteered to research other VR services and IM options over the summer. This information could be used for negotiations with OCLC or a decision about changing services, if that proves to be an option.

Duly recorded and submitted by S. Bonnard