

Connectivity and Computer Questions: Improving Practice Through Question Analysis

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The Scenario

Increasingly, resources are available electronically only, accessible remotely, and require greater technological skills on the part of users. Roughly one third of questions at the reference desk concern electronic resources, services, or computer help. This study determined the nature of these types of questions, categorized them, and helped develop strategies to improve users' access to information. A secondary goal focused on developing a greater understanding of the changing role of reference librarians and the skill set required in this increasingly electronic environment.

Methods

- Microsoft Access database developed to log every question
- Every connectivity or computer question recorded and categorized
- Six months of data collected
- Data analyzed to identify common questions and problems experienced by users

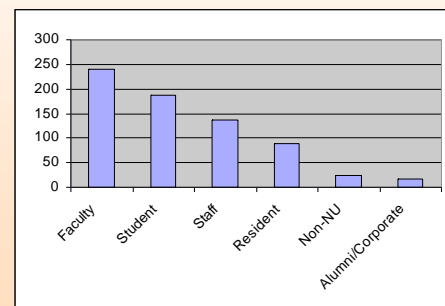
Question Categories

- Connectivity—accessing or connecting to resources
- Library Services—registering for web site, ILL requests, remote access
- Printing
- Hardware/Software
- Handheld (PDA)
- Wireless

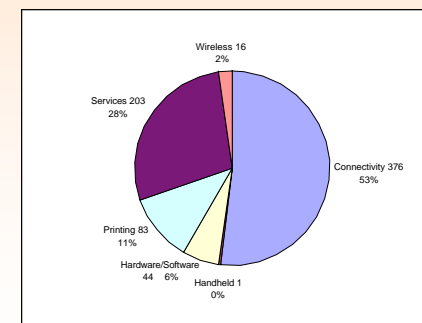
Database Form

The screenshot shows a form with fields for: Number (594), Staff Member (3m), Date (1/3/2004), Time (4:55 PM), Time to answer (5 min.), From (Chicago campus), Affiliation (Resident), Received (In person), Connectivity (Printing, Library Services, Wireless), and Answered (Forwarded, Training).

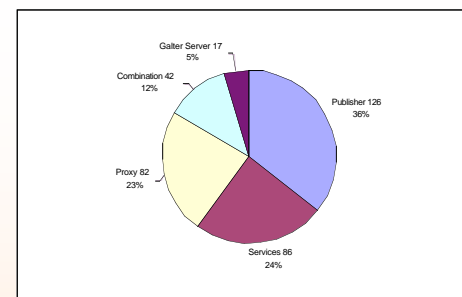
User Affiliation



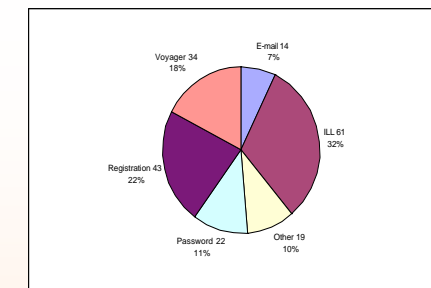
Questions by Category



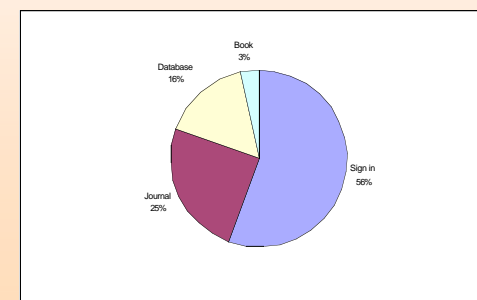
Connectivity Questions by Source



Services Problems by Cause



Problems by Resource Type



Selected Recommendations

Issue	Solution
Users forget their passwords	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve visibility and wording for Forgot Password link
Users don't know how to register for site	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Improve visibility of Registration link • Create registration guide
Publisher problems constitute 29% of questions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Make resolving publisher interruption a higher priority for staff • Pursue beginning-of-year service interruptions more aggressively • Quickly publish news items to notify users • Indicate problems in e-journal list
Web site does not provide point of need instruction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop troubleshooting guide for access • Develop usage guides & tutorials • Create Help section
Proxy issues constitute 19% of problems	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure proxy server software works properly • Regularly update software • Work with providers to resolve proxy issues • Indicate problems with proxy access on resource listings