

Summary of AskMontana Accomplishments in 2008

What is AskMontana?

AskMontana is a consortium of 20 libraries (academic, public, school, and special) who provide chat and email reference services. We use OCLC's Questionpoint software to provide this service. We are a member of the 24/7 cooperative that allows us to offer chat and email 24 hours a day 365 days a year. Non Montana librarians help our citizens when a Montana librarian is not available. In return we agree to help non Montana patrons at least 20 hours a week.

Goal 1: Increase usage of the service

Implemented a marketing program that targeted high school and college age students. Materials were sent out to every school in Montana. We changed the look and feel of the website to make it easier to use and more exciting.

We saw an 18.3% increase in the number of transactions. In 2007 the cooperative had 2506 transactions. In 2008 we had 2964. Transactions are both chat and email questions.

We began encouraging libraries to link AskMontana on their website. This is an area we need to work on in the coming year.

Goal 2: Patrons receive excellent service

We provided a face to face training for librarians that gave a refresher on reference skills and using the software.

We improved our one day response to email and chat follow-ups from 64.5% to 70%. This is another area that we would like to improve.

Patrons responded positively in surveys about our service. See below for some sample survey responses.

Goal 3: New libraries join the cooperative

Flathead County Library, Lewis & Clark County Library, and MSU joined our cooperative last year.

A few patron comments

"What a great service, especially for writer like me who often work when the library itself is closed. Thank you! I appreciate this positive use of my tax dollars, and your interest in keeping all those librarians out of the bars at night..."

"This service is awesome. You should make it more accessible for people to use. I would recommend it to anyone. Thank you so much."

"Never used this service before, but found it extremely helpful and efficient!"

A few librarian comments

“[We decided to join AskMontana because] we liked the idea of “leveling the playing field” for all Montanans. Anyone can ask a question at any time now. It is also a way to maximize staff’s abilities. Some days we don’t get any in person reference questions so those who do the reference work can still use those skills. And one more... More and more of people’s time is spent online so why not be where they are. I think the service is great and well worth the investment of time and money.”

“[This is beneficial to the library and patrons because] library gains exposure of services and assistance, patrons get information when they need it”

“Our patrons don’t take advantage of the service enough but we are working on ways to resolve that. It’s been beneficial to us as a library to be more involved with state projects and other libraries. Funding is always an issue and we are thankful for any support the state may provide.”