

**Selected Members of the CCL-EAR Committee Review of  
Docutek VRLplus  
January 2004**

During the fall 2003, selected members of the California Council of Chief Librarians, Electronic Access and Resources Committee (CCL-EAR) undertook a “hands-on” review of Docutek VRLplus (virtual reference librarian system).

Docutek, an e-learning collaboration and communications company, and Virtual Library Solutions have an agreement to cross-sell products and services. Docutek is offering 24/7 online virtual librarian assistance. Docutek also has an agreement with Proficient Systems to use technology that provides capacity for full co-browsing.

REVIEW PROCESS

Selected members of the CCL-EAR committee, independently or in concert with other qualified professionals on their campus library staffs, reviewed and evaluated Docutek VRLplus. Though other staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee(s) only and not transferred to others. Ratings were based upon the potential value of the proposal to the California Community Colleges as a whole and not solely on the needs of any specific campus.

Attributes of the information resource were assessed on a scale of 1 to 4 with 1 representing the “least value” and 4 representing the “most value”. The following attributes were examined:

**INFORMATION DATABASE**

*Consider its functionality, the appropriateness of format (bibliographic/full-text), the content of the information, the adequacy of coverage (retrospective, current), and its value to the California Community Colleges as a whole.*

**SEARCH INTERFACE**

*Consider the functionality and ease of use of the interface. Is it intuitive or is an excessive amount of training required? Are any crucial features missing from the search interface?*

**USER SUPPORT SERVICES**

*If documentation is required for successful use of product, is it available, comprehensive, and well written? Is online help adequate and user friendly? Does vendor supply training if it is needed? Is a telephone help line available?*

**COST**

*If cost is available, does it seem reasonable in terms of comparable products?*

**ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE**

*Is access/connection to product reliable and stable? Is response time adequate?*

**OVERALL ASSESSMENT**

#1 ---- No Support

#2 ---- No Support at this time. Future support conditional upon enhancements noted below in Comments Section.

#3 ---- Support and Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College libraries for their acceptance or rejection. Would like to see enhancements in product noted below in Comments Section.

#4 ---- Outstanding offer and opportunity. Recommend proposal be forwarded to California Community College campus libraries or their acceptance or rejection.

Following are the results of the CCL-EAR Committee's review as well as comments taken from the individual Review Reply Forms.

### **INFORMATION DATABASE – Rating: 4, 4**

Docutek VRLplus (Virtual Reference Librarian) enables reference librarians to chat –enabled exchanges directly online with patrons in real time with a fully integrated email reference function that allows reference help when the chat is not running.

Web pages can be pushed and with the escorting feature function, there is co-browsing and form sharing that allows the patron to see the steps of answering a question. The patron can also save and print or email the transcript.

Docutek can be mounted locally so that libraries can also use it to share files, pre-script chat messages, customize the software to integrate with the library site, transfer request to other campus sites or to remote locations (enabling 24/7 reference), and access reports and statistics on demand.

Librarians can easily manage multiple simultaneous sessions with features that include the ability of libraries to link systems and automatically create and share an online reference expert system.

“Users have an immediate interaction with a reference librarian on-line, but when a librarian is not available, the user can still get assistance through E-Mail reference, they can call for assistance using a telephone number listed, and they can search the commonly asked questions, available through a database.”

### **SEARCH INTERFACE – Rating: 4, 4**

The interface is quite usable and intuitive. The online help screens are very visible and furnish full explanations of options and links.

The administrative function home page is easy to navigate and has excellent heading and explanations that seem to address any question that might come up. It is possible to do everything from accounts management (create, editor delete accounts) to systems statistics (generate system reports for chat sessions, questions, and surveys). Once into the function it is easy to just fill in the blanks and have, with very little trouble, managed to generate a completed document.

The patron reference services page is equally easy to navigate. The options are talk, email, search, and call us. Each heading has a brief explanation and links to the appropriate page when the patron finds a simple form to fill out and links to the desired items. The email page has a submission form that asks for name, email, status, subject, and question. One is then asked to submit the question. All of the other forms are also easy to deal with.

“When a student enters a live interactive session through the Talk button, the user fills out a form that includes a handle name he or she can enter, and after the remote VRLPlus software runs a configuration check, the user then waits for a librarian to take the user’s question. Through co-browsing, the user has the opportunity to follow visually what the librarian is doing, step-by-step. These actions are later recorded in the transcript, along with the conversation, of which the librarian can later send to the user.”

### **USER SUPPORT SERVICES– Rating: 3,3**

There is very good user support available both online and by telephone. Technical support contacts are available weekdays by phone, fax, and email. They promise to return your call the next business day. It would be very helpful to have after hours and weekend help for this product as we anticipate a growing use of virtual reference by both basic library users and distance education users at times outside of the normal business day.

Based on their reputation, Docutek has excellent response time and help during the day.

“If the user who is connecting to chat mode does not have the necessary software settings or components, Docutek manages in its configuration check to provide an easy-to-follow checklist as to what the user needs to do. The user clicks on the listed items’ links and is then led to easy-to-follow directions on how to change settings on one’s computer as well as to where to go to download the free software needed (such as an updated version of a browser or of Java, or how to change the settings in Microsoft Windows).”

### **COST – Rating: 4,4**

The cost is \$1995 for installation and \$1995 per year for five seats of reference (five librarians can deal with multiple patrons at one time). This amount entitles you to all of the enhancements that become available. There is free online training but there is a charge of \$1500 for onsite training.

### **ACCESSIBILITY OF SERVICE – Rating: 4,4**

The database is 24/7 and was always available with excellent interactive speed both on and off campus (speed is better than fair on dial-up).

Any planned maintenance is announced in advance by email and is done in a timely manner.

“While the database favors users who have up-to-date browsers, it is usable with Netscape 4.7, along with Internet Explorer 5.5 and above, and Netscape 6.2 and above.”

### **OVERALL ASSESSMENT – Rating: 3.85, 3.85**

This is a great virtual reference product. It is very accessible and intuitive to use by both patron and librarian. It should be considered by all community colleges. A library can offer reference assistance to all students both on and off campus, giving more than lip service to our distance education students.