

**Selected Members of the CCL-EAR Committee Review
of QuestionPoint, Collaborative Reference Service
December 2003**

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 QuestionPoint.

QuestionPoint is a collaborative and standalone reference service that allows libraries to respond to, track and manage reference questions from patrons via the Web. The QuestionPoint software is hosted by OCLC. With QuestionPoint libraries can provide web based submission forms, co-browsing, email based interaction and live chat to their patrons from any library webpage.

The use of QuestionPoint’s enhanced version adds electronic resources through the use of streaming video, voice-over Internet Protocol (IP), and web-based sharing of software applications, that can enhance library instruction. QuestionPoint includes access to a global knowledge database of previously asked and answered reference questions. Libraries also can refer unanswered questions to other libraries in their library’s cooperative as needed based on availability and expertise.

Libraries interested in using the QuestionPoint software in a collaborative method will have to contact and establish their own virtual reference procedures and practices with libraries that they are interested in working with collaboratively.

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 QuestionPoint, a collaborative reference service software, hosted by OCLC. Though other staff may have helped in the review process, completion of the form was by the CCL-EAR committee member(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 resources 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:

- SEARCH INTERFACE
- USER SUPPORT SERVICES
- COST
- TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

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?

The entire QuestionPoint interface is resizable on both the librarian and user’s platform. The left side frame has conference monitor information that includes a call queue window, current caller information, scripts and a text chat window. The current caller information window on the left side contains web browser information, IP address, connection information, email address and the caller’s name. These windows can be resized both vertically and horizontally. Due to the interactivity of the software, training is recommended for library staff answering questions. For the library patron, the interface is very intuitive and operates very similar to other chat software in online course management software products and other web-based chat services.

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 helpline available?

Training is provided by OCLC Western staff and could take the form of onsite help sessions, web sessions, or help sessions conducted at a central site. There are online tutorials for QuestionPoint, and online questions can be submitted. Telephone help is available from the OCLC Western help desk that is open 8am to 5pm pct, and the OCLC UNS telephone that is open Monday-Sat. 4am to 4pm pct (Sat. is 8am to 12pm).

COST

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

Pricing is based on a per-institution basis. QuestionPoint is priced at \$1,700 dollars a year for one library profile. This basic package includes chat and email capabilities, browser and document sharing and access to the knowledge database of previously asked and answered reference questions. There is an enhanced package with voice and video capabilities. The enhanced package is \$3,400 dollars per year.

Consortium pricing is also available for the California Community College Libraries. The cost of \$48,450 dollars would include 15 profiles with the enhanced profile for all 110 California Community College Libraries with training by OCLC Western included. An additional guaranteed discount of 10% is included with the purchase of at least 10 profiles. Consortium pricing would also include an additional 5% OCLC governing member discount and increased discounts based on the total number of profiles purchased.

TECHNICAL REQUIREMENTS

Librarian Computer

- Pentium 300 MHz multimedia PC or better
- Microsoft® Internet Explorer (IE) 5.01 with Service Pack 2 or higher.
- Microsoft Windows 98, 2000, NT Workstation 4.0 with Service Pack 6, XP Professional, or XP Home
- Network must be able to provide a TCP/IP address with Port 6081 open to crm.questionpoint.org.

Patron Computer

- Microsoft® Internet Explorer (IE) 4.0 (or higher)
- Netscape® Navigator or Communicator 4.x only (higher versions not supported)
- Microsoft Windows 95, 98, 2000, NT (with Service Pack 6), or XP (Macintosh, Linux, UNIX, or other operating systems not supported)

OVERALL ASSESSMENT

QuestionPoint's knowledge database is a feature that is not currently offered in 24/7. In addition, QuestionPoint has the most enhanced interface offering Voice over IP; however as demonstrated, this functionality isn't practical in most situations. In other areas QuestionPoint's interface delivers no obvious advantage over 24/7 and Docutek VRLplus, and the fact that QuestionPoint library subscribers must develop their own networks, policies and procedures is a distinct disadvantage. Lastly, it seems clear that the additional features of a knowledge database and Voice over IP do not justify the high cost of QuestionPoint compared to 24/7, which is currently free.