

## Resurrecting Reference



*An Infopeople Webinar with  
Joan Frye Williams and George Needham  
July 31, 2008*

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## Librarians Love Reference

- Thrill of the chase
- Constant variety
- Fun facts
- Independence
- Gratitude
- Feel smart



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## Civilians Don't

- Boring
- Takes too long
- Information doesn't solve the problem
- Dependence
- Feel stupid



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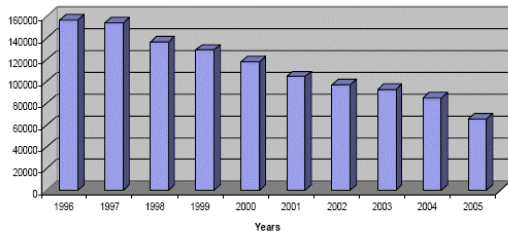
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## ...which leads to...

ARL Reference Statistics -- 1996 - 2005



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## ...and raises the question of...



- Denial
- Anger
- Bargaining
- Depression
- Acceptance

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## What to Do?



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**Can't We Just Educate  
These People?**



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**Time to Rethink**



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## Rethink Who?

- Reference associates
- Dispatcher



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## Rethink When?

- 24/7 services
- Appointments



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## Rethink Where?



- Virtual
  - IM (Meebo Me, etc.)
  - Wikis
  - Twitter
  - Co-browsing
- Roving (lurking)
- Embedded

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## How The Library World Treats Civilians



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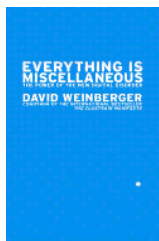
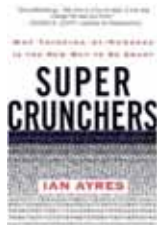
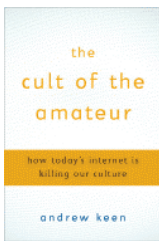
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## The Decline and Fall of the Expert



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## What Civilians Really Want

- Convenience
- Quality
- Acknowledgement
- Ability to customize
- Respect for their time, intelligence, and priorities



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## Social Information Discovery

net advertising ajax apple architect  
community computer cooking cool  
entertainment film finance firefox fla  
hardware health history home hc  
java javascript jobs language  
mp3 music network news  
politics portfolio productivity pt  
rss ruby science search secu  
toread travel tutorial tutorial  
wordpress work writing xml youtube



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## Disintermediation of Proprietary Databases

Google  
Scholar 3.5.14

Search [input field] [button] [input field] [input field] [input field] [input field] [input field]

Stand on the shoulders of giants

Inspired by the internet? See if your library gives you access to the whole paper

Google Home - About Google - About Google Scholar

©2008 Google

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## Limitations of Current Reference Models



- Library-centered
- Process dense
- Transaction-based
- Anonymous
- Unaccountable
- One at a time
- From scratch

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## Beyond the Right Answer to the Right Result

- Leverage library resources *to*
- Enable civilians to solve problems on their own terms *for*
- A reasonable investment of time, money, and effort.



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## Reference Deconstructed



- Intercept
- Triage
- Response
- Follow-up

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## Intercept

- At point of interest/need
- Integrated with other tasks
- Hip to hip
- “What can we do for you?”
- MLS not necessary



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## Triage

- How will answer be used?
- Chunk into increments as appropriate
- Match request to appropriate library service/resource
- MLS not necessary



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## Ready Response

- Directional
- How-to
- Referral
- MLS not necessary
- *Symptomatic of need for system improvements: scripts, signage, automation, policy simplification*



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## Upselling



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## Extended Response

- Consulting
- Review/update/enhance your work
- Research
- Coaching/training
- MLS desirable



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## New Relationship

- Peer-to-peer
- Shared control
- Iterative
- Inclusive
- Collaborative
- Transformative



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## How Do We Define Ourselves?

Information → Transformation  
Institution → Infrastructure  
Altruism → Return on Investment  
Past → Future  
Frill → Necessity

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## Ask yourself...

- Can someone overseas do it cheaper?
- Can a computer do it faster?
- Is what I'm offering in demand in an age of abundance?



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## Library as a Tool for Self-Actualization



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## Lay Reference



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## Participatory Reference



- Work table rather than desk
- Layout, assemble, invite
- Show both information objects and relationships between them
- Save, revisit, and build upon previous collaborations

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## Follow-Up

- Did response meet expectations?
- Was response useful in specific circumstances?
- Would you use this service/consult this staff member again?



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**More Co-creation  
Less Desk-centricity**



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**What Would Librarians  
Accomplish if We Didn't Spend  
So Much Time on Desk**



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**Let's Continue the  
Conversation**



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Podcasts at <http://feeds.feedburner.com/InfoblogGeorgeAndJoan>

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