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Site search and instant messaging reference. A comparative study.

Internet Ref. Serv. Q. 8, No. 1-2, 167-182 (2003).

Site search and online reference, using chat or instant messaging, are two new tools for providing electronic reference services in the online environment. This study compares patrons' use of Morris Library's Site Search and Morris Messenger, its online reference service, to analyze their perceptions and the results found with each. Researchers found they are perceived and used in similar ways despite their differing purposes and mechanics. Time of peak use, content and type of queries, and location of users are similar for both tools, whereas length of session and results found were quite different. Many users do not initially realize that Morris Messenger has a human behind the interface, or that Site Search is merely another keyword search engine, limited to library Web pages. The study confirms the need for real time, human help to fill information needs. (orig.)

Classification: R50