WhatsApp at HKUST Library: A New Channel for User Communication

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Outline

Background
- HKUST Library communication channels
- HKUST information service desk trends
- Social media trends
- Use of smartphones trends

Project Details
- Goal
- Challenges
- Service soft-launched in January 2014
- Results so far
2013 HKUST Library communication channels

• Walk-up to the service points
  – InfoDesk, Circulation Counters, Information and Learning Commons Help Desks
• Phone
• Email
• Online “Ask a Librarian” form
• Other Online Channels
  – Library website, news blog, Facebook, YouTube, RSS feeds, etc.
VR, DR, & Social Media Trends

• “Digital Reference” has been around for years
  – IM; “ask a librarian forms”, various chat software

• HKUST had considered chat, text, & IM in past
  – Concerns about whether IM worth time & effort
  – SMS = $$$$$
  – HKUST’s Blog, SmartCAT, Facebook, etc. get little interaction from users

• Free WiFi texting recently growing popular
Smartphones Now Ubiquitous in Hong Kong

• Hong Kong’s smartphone penetration = 87%¹
• 90% of students have Smartphones²
  – Most popular uses: phone calls, SMS & WhatsApp
• Students seem to use smartphones everywhere
• WhatsApp tone ringing frequently in Library

2013 – Thoughts & Goals

2013 Spring

• WhatsApp thoughts
  – Free with WiFi connection throughout HKUST
  – Most smartphone users also have internet connection via providers off campus
  – Easy to install & use!
  – Very common among HK people (even non-techies)
  – No need to download widget or do anything special

Goal: Start to use WhatsApp for InfoDesk Services

Summer –> Fall 2013

• Ref & Systems colleagues began to talk and plan
Service Model Drives Decisions

• Keep it simple
• Keep it inexpensive
• It’s just another communication channel
  – WhatsApp Service is just another medium for Information (Reference) service – like phone, email, or walk-up
  – Best (at least initially) handled like other forms of questions – via the shift-work at the InfoDesk
  – Only one staff responsible at a time (whoever is on the InfoDesk shift)
Challenges

Just buying a mobile phone not best solution
  – InfoDesk shift work (2-6 hour shifts)
  – Security (misplaced, lost, or stolen)
  – Battery Charging
  – Small keyboard & thumb dexterity
  – Want easy way for staff to input Chinese

Why not try and set-up answering WhatsApp (& WeChat) via desktop computer
Technical Challenges

Emulating Android mobile screens and inputs on desktop computer

😊 Google’s Android emulator: mainly for developers
😊 Genymotion: display issues
😊 BlueStacks App Player: OK speed; few display issues ✓ adopted

Emulator on PC does not have physical SIM card, but WhatsApp requires communication via the mobile phone number during installation

– Resolved

The emulation PC is housed in Library Server Room

– InfoDesk staff connect to this PC via Remote Desktop Connection
Click this icon to launch WhatsApp

BlueStacks Player for Windows
Librarian at InfoDesk checks WhatsApp on PC

Patron chats to librarian via WhatsApp

Hi. Studyroom LG407 is making noise. Can I bother you to do something about it?
Human Challenges– Service Guidelines

• Similar to phone & email:
  – If you can answer quickly & easily via this medium, do so
  – If not, refer to others or suggest other mediums
Human Challenges - Training

November - > December 2013

1. Systems colleagues wrote basic instructions

2. Systems initial briefing & training Ref staff (mid-November 2013)

3. Ref colleagues wrote up service guidelines & posted those & the system instructions on staff manual (mid-December 2013)

4. Ref staff & staff from other depts. who serve at InfoDesk met for Q&A & discussion (mid-December 2013)

January 2014 – soft-launched service
Human Interaction – Staff Acceptance

Some trepidation at first

What helped?

• Soft-launch in January - knowing initial uptake would be low (between semesters)
• Reminder that it was just another form of what we have been doing for decades
• Reassurance that one could call on other colleagues to help
• Positive reaction from patrons after start of new semester (Feb 2014)
WhatsApp Promotion

February 2014

- Facebook posting
- Email announcement
- Library Newsletter article
- Physical signs at Circulation Desk & InfoDesk
- Added to all general contact pages on Library Web pages & Libguides
Hi,
I know there are several databases at library
I would like to know whether I can access to magazines like the economist, Time magazine via the databases? thanks. :)

Hi, Victoria at InfoDesk here. - Yes, you can access many magazines via databases - the 2 easiest to use are Proquest [http://library.ust.hk/cgi/db/pqd.pl](http://library.ust.hk/cgi/db/pqd.pl) and Ebsco [http://library.ust.hk/cgi/db/ebsco.pl](http://library.ust.hk/cgi/db/ebsco.pl). The Economist is available via Proquest - access via the Library catalog here to search just that title. [http://ustlib.ust.hk/record=b599666](http://ustlib.ust.hk/record=b599666).

Just a follow-up. This section of the Library Guide for LANG 1002 can give you more info on how to search for magazine articles [http://libguides.ust.hk/content.php?pid=523292&sid=4304702](http://libguides.ust.hk/content.php?pid=523292&sid=4304702). Please contact us again if you have more questions.

Thanks for your help, Victoria;)

My pleasure. Please continue to use our WhatsApp service (and tell your friends) :)

A WhatsApp question and answers
Another WhatsApp question

Hi

I have problem moving the bookshelf DS775 in LG4

The buttons doesn't work
Bilingual - WhatsApp Service

Note: Library was closed on April 20 (Easter Sunday) and therefore the first question could only be answered after Library opened at 1pm on 21 April (Easter Monday).
Users Like the WhatsApp Service

Hi Library helper, may I ask whether the “Subsidy scheme for acquiring dissertations and these

Yes, each RPG has a quota of three theses or dissertations in one calendar year, and there or borrowed.

I got it. Much appreciated your prompt reply. This whatsapp service is awesome 😊
Users Like the WhatsApp Service

Social comparison, stress, and coping? 12:49PM
Pers soc psychol bull march 1990 16: 74-89 12:50PM
You can find the full-text article on the Web. Just search the journal title "Personality & social psychology bulletin" and you will find it.

Seems that I cannot open it 1:02PM
Sorry, our library dose not subscribe this e-journal, but we have the article in microfiche format on LG1 (Media Resources Collection).

Oh I see 1:17PM
Thanks! 1:17PM
This is the library record http://catalog.ust.hk/catalog/bib/b495222. You may go there to get it. If you need help with using the microfiche machine to view the article, please don’t hesitate to ask the library staff at the Media Resources Counter (LG1) or come to the Information Desk (G/F)!

Thanks a lot! 1:27PM
You’re very helpful! 1:27PM

No problem. Have a nice day! 1:47PM
Hello! 5:49PM
My name is [name]! 5:49PM
I am turning to a librarian with a request? 5:49PM
I just left the library and am on a bus towards sai kung. Regardless, i forgot my octopus card on the printer in l1 5:50PM
The one that is next to the room with mac computers 5:51PM
Is it possible that someone collects it and i pick it up later? 5:51PM
?? 5:52PM
We can calling the LC helpers to check 5:53PM
I would be very thankful! 5:54PM
I left it just 15 min ago 5:54PM
Found. Are you coming back to pick it up? Lost & found item will be forwarded to the Circulation counter and the main library will close at 7:00pm today. 5:56PM
I have a business ethics project for 4 hours in sai kung, so i will collect it as i return to campus! 5:56PM
I assume i can pick it up tomorrow in such case 5:57PM
Thank you so much for the assistance! 5:57PM
OK, don't worry. The card is sent to the Circulation counter (where you borrow and return books). 6:02PM
Wonderful! Your help has been greatly appreciated!!! 6:02PM
You are most welcome. 😊 6:03PM
## Patron Response Stats

**InfoDesk Reference Statistics**  February 4, 2014 - > April 29, 2014

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question Format</th>
<th>Question Count</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Email</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>2.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>WhatsApp</td>
<td>60</td>
<td>6.8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Phone</td>
<td>71</td>
<td>8 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Walk-Up</td>
<td>729</td>
<td>82.6 %</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Totals</strong></td>
<td><strong>883</strong></td>
<td><strong>100 %</strong></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Comparable to chat reference in other HK Libraries:  
**FY 2012-13**:  Lingnan = 132 chat sessions & HKBU = 226

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Fall 2014 will give better idea – usually fall semester = ~ 2/3 of all InfoDesk questions
Wrap Up – Thoughts for Future

How may this impact academic libraries’ communications with stakeholders?

– Helps users by being very convenient (users always have their smartphones with them, in the Library, at home, on a bus, etc.)

– May help users know they can turn to the information services for all questions, big & small

– May help library to promote other services (e.g. research consultation, ILL, etc.)
Thanks