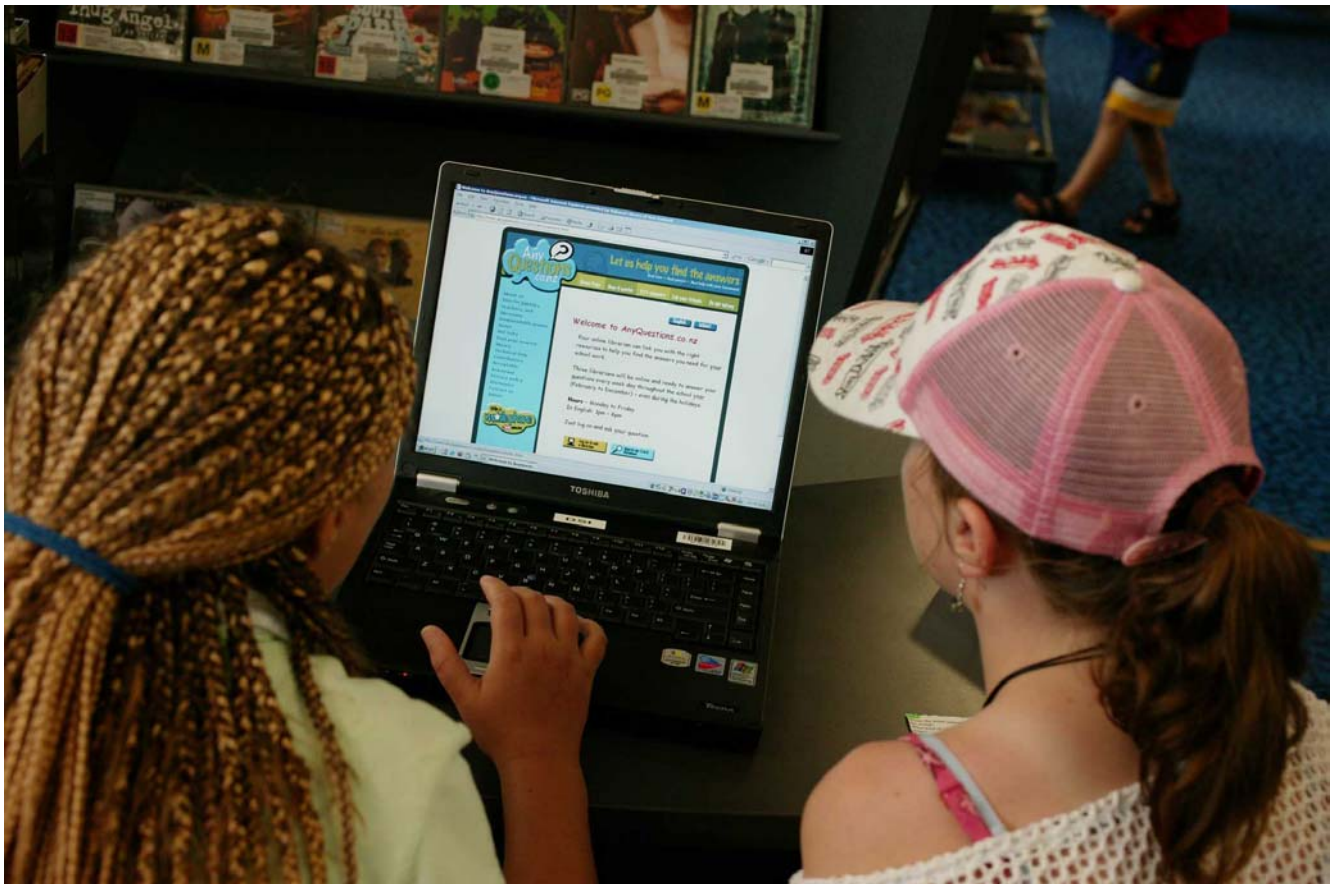




<http://www.anyquestions.co.nz/>

A collaborative venture of ⇒ Christchurch City Libraries ⇒ Wellington City Libraries ⇒ Auckland City Libraries ⇒ Manukau Libraries ⇒ National Library of New Zealand Te Puna Mātauranga o Aotearoa ⇒ The Ministry of Education ⇒ School Library Association of New Zealand Aotearoa ⇒ The Correspondence School ⇒ Horowhenua Library Trust
⇒ With funding from Sun Microsystems



⇒ **NEW ZEALAND POST
PROCESS MANAGEMENT
AWARD 2005**

Overview

Can a guinea pig overeat? Were dinosaurs smart? Can you catch Alzheimer's? These are just a few of the questions the AnyQuestions.co.nz team have helped New Zealand students to answer.

⇒ **“This is the best website I have been on.”** verbatim exit survey comment

AnyQuestions.co.nz gives all New Zealand school children their own free online expert who will guide them through the millions of internet pages to locate quality information.

As a national service, it's a world first and makes great use of technology to allow the online generation to become independent information users.

In fact, AnyQuestions.co.nz is so successful the service has been heavily subscribed since its official launch with, at times, twice as many students trying to connect to the service as operators can serve.

1. Need and Proposed Benefit

The internet is changing the way New Zealand school children search for information. But are they doing this effectively? Are our libraries supporting these customers properly?

⇒ **“It's a cool website that is NZ made, which totally rocks!!! AND it helps you understand things better and teaches you!!!”** verbatim exit survey comment

In February 2004 the joint venture partners began to address these questions with a feasibility study into offering an online librarian service to all New Zealand school children to assist in their search for quality electronic information. This service needed to support the partners' organisational objectives as outlined in Appendix 1.

The aim was to find out as much as possible about what children were likely to be looking for, tailor a service to meet their needs and identify the resources required to do this.

We found that urban and rural school students, and those from a range of cultural backgrounds and deciles, frequently use the internet for research.

Students said they access the internet from school, home and their public library. They use the Internet as a first resort, value its convenience, speed and accessibility, but they find sorting through the huge volume of retrieved material frustrating.

⇒ **“It's very helpful. Librarian Manu is really really nice”** verbatim exit survey comment

Students mostly search the internet alone, but often under the supervision of their parents or school. They rely heavily on their friends to help them find good sites. Above all, they like to be able to find information for themselves.

Students between 10 and 14 years old generally do their research at school or before 6pm, whereas older students more commonly do their research at school and after dinner.

Students multi-task. They might help friends with homework on *MSN*, while listening to music, sending and receiving text messages and while doing their own internet research.

The majority of the students interviewed said they would probably use the service most during school terms.

Parents, teachers and school library staff said they would find this service helpful for their children, as long as there were assurances about safety and service standards.

We used this information to develop a business plan for the pilot online service AnyQuestions.co.nz

2. Effective Project Management

Anyquestions.co.nz represents a unique collaborative model that draws on a wide range of skills and experience (including marketing, technical services, reference, information literacy, training and project management) of staff from the partner institutions and agencies across the country.

Successful initial discussions with Sun Microsystems Ltd ensured up-front funding that allowed the idea of a virtual reference service for school children to be taken from concept to service delivery.

2.1 Team recruitment:

While the National Library took a strong leadership role, the choice of a well regarded public library project manager Michaela O'Donovan, gave credence from the outset to the collaborative intent.

Critical to the success of the project was an early partnering workshop, at which the partners agreed on a vision and a way of working towards it. This was documented in a partnering agreement. Key to the success of this approach was the participation of the entire project team, not just the decision makers.

2.2 Tyranny of Distance:

It is noteworthy that the project was achieved remotely. The project team met at the partnering workshop and again at the launch party! This was made possible by a structured project management and reporting approach, agreed communication protocols and action response times.

2.3 Governance and Membership

A legally binding Deed of Consortium was drawn up for the pilot project to document decision-making principles and staff and service commitments. This enabled the joint-venture group to manage risk to their own organisations and contract for software and hosting services.

2.4 Standards, Support, Procedures and Guidelines

The project team agreed that consistent responses to students, comparable skill levels among operators and agreed service standards across the partner agencies were critical to the success of the service. The team worked through each of these areas, developing collaboratively the specifications for operators and agreeing on service standards and procedures for all participating organisations. This included an internal review and coaching process for operators in each organisation.

⇒ “It’s really wicked that u have real people answering all the questions, so I do not get told off for not finishing my homework.” verbatim exit survey comment

[NetSafe, the Internet Safety Group](#) provided valuable input into student and librarian safety, referrals procedures and service guidelines.

2.5 Training:

The project developed a four-module training package covering online resources, software, information and search skills, together with information about student needs. This was developed and delivered by a cross-agency team to operators in four cities, Auckland, Christchurch Wellington and Palmerston North. All operators have also been vetted by police. This shared training is seen as one of the key factors in removing barriers between organisations and aligning diverse cultures into one AnyQuestions.co.nz service culture.

2.6 Going Live:

We wanted to ensure our operators were comfortable online before we began to market the service. To do this we held a six-week bedding-in period at the end of the 2004 school year. This proved successful as a low-key introduction for operators before our marketing campaign in Term 1, 2005.

2.7 Marketing:

AnyQuestions.co.nz has been very successfully marketed to its target audience by a small group from three partner agencies, The National Library of New Zealand, Wellington City Libraries and Auckland City Libraries. High numbers of students are accessing the service from across the country. Promotional material, including bookmarks and stickers, went to every school in New Zealand to coincide with the launch. As well, posters and publicity material is available on the AnyQuestions.co.nz website for download.

AnyQuestions.co.nz has been enthusiastically reviewed in the media. The service has been recommended in *The Sunday Star Times* "Site Seeing" section (20 March 2005), promoted by Paul Reynolds on TV1's *Breakfast* and recently on Sticky TV, where viewers have named it as their favourite homework website.

3. Participatory Approach

The key stakeholders for this project were:

- New Zealand school children and their parents and carers: Our initial research project indicated the demand for this type of service and contributed to the service design. This was validated at critical stages of the implementation project by user testing through our seven reference group schools.
- Partner organisations: We wanted all partner organisations, not just the participating team members to own this service. Clear definition of the project scope and objectives ensured the partner organisations' vision and goals were being addressed. Regular partner news bulletins, briefings by project team members and visits by the project manager kept the organisation partners up to date.
- Other libraries and information providers: We recognised that the New Zealand information sector would be interested in aspects of this service, from the collaborative approach to the virtual reference service itself. Regular updates on industry listservs (email discussion groups), journal articles and presentations at professional development events were maintained throughout the project.
-

4. Innovation and Originality in Process Management

Anyquestions.co.nz is unique and innovative within New Zealand for harnessing:

4.1 The power of many: Each partner contributes only the staffing that would be required to service their own catchment proportion of the entire customer base of New Zealand school students.

The result is a free web-based virtual reference service for all New Zealand school students, available Monday to Friday between 1pm and 6pm in English, and 1pm and 2pm in Te Reo Māori. The service connects trained reference librarians (or operators) with school students, using interactive chat to help them locate the online information they need.

The service uses interactive Docutek VRL*plus* software, customised for New Zealand use. The software has two main components: a chat frame and a co-browse window. The chat screen allows the librarian to discuss the question and search strategies with the student and the co-browse engine allows both librarian and student to visit appropriate sites together in real time. Librarian and student can take turns to lead, a form-filling function lets each see what the other is typing into the search fields, and the librarian can also point out results on the student's browser window with an interactive arrow.

⇒ “It can be a
huuuuuuuuuuuuge
help with
homework.” verbatim
exit survey comment

The unprecedented collaborative nature of the project was recently acknowledged with AnyQuestions.co.nz scooping a GOVIS On the Frontier Buzzie Award.

4.2 Capability development: The service uses a subtle information literacy approach, whereby operators help students “unpack”, or break down, their question, model good search techniques and take them to quality sites.

This innovative approach to supporting students' research, rather than simply giving them the answer, is the central point of difference with the AnyQuestions.co.nz approach. So far students have been polite and immensely willing to work one-to-one with librarians in this way. Their comments tell us that they enjoy being part of the process. The service is transparent, accountable and safe as a result of a design requirement whereby transcripts are unable to be edited by either party to the transaction.

Students have also spoken about the convenience and anonymity the service provides for them.

5. The success in financial and non-financial terms

This collaboration has attracted corporate sponsorship, allowing the service to be launched at very little expense to each partner organisation.

⇒ “U r great”
verbatim exit survey
comment

Start-up funding for this project was provided by Sun Microsystems. Partner organisations contributed team-member time to the set-up phase (one full-time equivalent in total across all partners) and operator time to the live service. Software, legal and training costs are covered by a further grant from Sun Microsystems and from the Ministry of Education's Digital Opportunities fund.

AnyQuestions.co.nz has been running at or above capacity most days since its launch. A two-year development plan for the service is under way and evaluation of the service against the partners' goals will be undertaken in 2005/6.

Since February this year:

- 4870 sessions have been held with New Zealand school students
- 66 percent of sessions are between six and 20 minutes duration, demonstrating the personalised support this service offers
- 80 percent of students who responded to our satisfaction survey (including students who were not able to be served during that visit), have told us they would use the service again
- 73 percent of students who responded to our satisfaction survey (including those not served this visit), have told us they would refer the service to a friend.
- The main age range of students using AnyQuestions.co.nz is between 9-13 years
- Students are willingly engaging in the information literacy approach, as supported by the Sticky TV accolade.
- The most frequently reported request from survey respondents is for more librarians.
- The next most frequently reported response is that the service met the students' needs at the time of the visit.
- The majority of our operators across the country report improved search skills, increased knowledge of internet-based resources and satisfaction and enjoyment from working with students using interactive chat
- Most students are accessing the service from school and home with 5 percent coming in from public libraries.
- Students from every region in the country have used the service.

6. The right thing to do?

School children told us that they use the internet as their first resort for information, but struggle with finding quality information. We believe AnyQuestions.co.nz goes some way to addressing this need, as demonstrated by the above early results.

The collaborative approach has allowed a service to be developed by agencies that would not have had the critical mass of customers to warrant doing so individually. The project has also allowed agencies to test the virtual reference market with significantly less financial and staffing investment than going it alone.

Advantages for students using AnyQuestions.co.nz have been:

- Assistance for students to locate quality information, while also teaching them online information skills.
- Accessible from any internet-enabled computer, from anywhere in New Zealand, at a time convenient to the student.
- Students can be more independent users, as they don't always need a parent to drive them to a library
- Service in Te Reo Māori.
- The service is safe – all operators are police vetted and the service has been developed in consultation with NetSafe
- Uses pre-selected websites for more effective searching.

- Maintains anonymity and privacy of customers.
- Is fun and educational, easy and accessible, helpful and reliable, safe and credible, cool and relevant.
- Introduces New Zealand sites containing reliable, quality information, for example DOC, Te Ara, EPIC, Matapihi

Spin-offs for partner organisations have been greater use of customer research for service design, a supported move towards reference service in an electronic environment, improved online skills for all operators. New staff skills from the project have been re-used in the local environment.

This has been an eventful journey, but the continued commitment of the founding partners to the research and development phase supports our belief that it is the right thing to do!

Real time, real person, real help with your homework.

<http://www.anyquestions.co.nz/>

Appendix 1: Outcomes

The project goals support the following objectives of the partner organisations:

Organisation	Outcome for the City/Strategic Goal or Objective	Citizen, Customer and Community Strategy	Management Strategy
Auckland City Libraries ¹	Strong and healthy communities Celebrating and recognising diversity Economic prosperity	Equality of access and be an affordable city Become a successful multicultural city recognising all people and cultures Become a successful multicultural city recognising all people and cultures Opportunities built on knowledge, technology and a skilled workforce	Aucklanders are able to participate in the opportunities offered by the library Tangata Whenua see a strong Maori identity developed in partnership with them Informed Aucklanders recognise the value of the library to the Auckland community Aucklanders receive more value from their library as a result of strategic partnerships Literate Aucklanders enjoy their library for reading and learning Enriched Aucklanders and visitors experience the past through the treasures held at the library Welcomed Aucklanders feel a sense of community belonging at their library Multicultural Aucklanders trust the neutrality of their library as a safe and secure place Knowledgeable Aucklanders find answers at their library Innovative Aucklanders contribute to growth from ideas discovered at their library Successful Aucklanders prosper because their library has helped them achieve

¹ [Auckland City Annual Plan 2004](#)

Organisation	Outcome for the City/Strategic Goal or Objective	Citizen, Customer and Community Strategy	Management Strategy
Christchurch City Libraries ²	Maximising opportunities for residents to participate in learning and leisure activities	Create an environment that encourages enterprise, innovation and development of new ideas and technologies and minimises barriers to economic development	Strengthening communities by facilitating collaboration between public, private and community agencies Ensuring that the needs and aspirations of children and youth are taken into account Develop cross-sector networks at local, regional, national and international level which will deliver positive outcomes for the people of Christchurch Provide leadership and advocacy in partnership with public, private and voluntary agencies which ensure the city's interests are reflected in regional and national decisions
Manukau City Libraries ³	Educated and knowledgeable people	Provide infrastructure for a growing city	Achieve efficiencies Explore alternative ways to deliver services
Wellington City Libraries ⁴	Wellington offers a diverse range and an abundance of quality recreation and leisure activities that are accessible and affordable	All WCL strategic directions: Access Link Making available local Taonga Skilled, experienced staff Personalisation	Supports recommendations of 2003 Review of Services to Teens Supports recommendations of 2003 Information Delivery Review
NLNZ School Services ⁵	Curriculum and library information support to schools		Promoting collaboration to further the work of the National Library and other New Zealand information agencies, as well as fostering linkages and networks in New Zealand and overseas

² [2004 CCC Financial Plan](#)

³ [Manukau City Council Strategic Plan 2001-2011](#)

⁴ [WCC Council Plan 2003/4, WCL Business Plan 2003/4](#)

⁵ [Informing New Zealand: Framework for Planning](#) NLNZ 2003/04

Organisation	Outcome for the City/Strategic Goal or Objective	Citizen, Customer and Community Strategy	Management Strategy
Ministry of Education ⁶	Learners have ready access through ICT to a wide and well-focused range of learning resources that are selected, organised, and managed to be responsive to their needs and relevant to the curriculum.		Strategies for schools, government and other stakeholders towards achieving this goal are to: * work in partnership with other agencies and stakeholders to make appropriate resources readily available to schools through Te Kete Ipurangi; * promote effective and efficient management of learning resources within schools, through the publication of guidelines for school library and information services and successful models of intranet development and use.

⁶ Digital Horizons - Learning through ICT - A strategy for schools for 2002-2004. <http://www.minedu.govt.nz/index.cfm?layout=document&documentid=6760&indexid=6918&indexparentid=1024>