



## Why chat? Why not just offer email reference?

Have you called your bank and gotten a voice mail tree with multiple options? After you figure out the right number to push, you're still listening to pre-recorded messages. Isn't there a live person to help you?

Have you sent a co-worker an email message with several questions and he responds to only one question, leaving the others unanswered?

Have you needed one piece of information to complete a project, but the person with the information isn't available?

We value real-time communication because it offers us the means to get our questions answered quickly and effectively.

Chat reference, because it takes place in real-time, offers a number of advantages over email reference:

- Faster response
- More personalized service
- Enables reference interviews
- Can demonstrate search strategies and provide instruction
- Connection with tech-savvy users
- Expands the range of delivery options for library users

What about the service expectations of our customers? Jim Sterne, author of *Customer Service on the Internet* (John Wiley and Sons, 2000), focuses on the high level of expectation that is created by online retailers like Expedia and Amazon.com. He says that, "It doesn't matter what industry you're in—if you're on the Internet, you're competing with the best and the brightest."

List the benefits of starting a chat reference service at your library below. Then, list the obstacles or challenges that have to be overcome.

BENEFITS	CHALLENGES

Circle your biggest benefit and your biggest challenge. Keep these in mind as we look at planning and implementing a chat reference service.