



Virtual Reference: A Glossary of Terms

24/7: Reference services that operate 24 hours a day, seven days a week. Also the name of a real-time virtual reference software vendor.

Asynchronous: Any interaction not occurring in real-time. A characteristic of e-mail virtual reference.

Call Alert: A sound (ring, ding, etc.) that signals a new incoming patron question in a chat reference software.

Call Center Bridge: Software that allows a single telephone line to handle both voice (telephone) and digital (e-mail, chat) questions and to position them in a single queue.

Chat (also called Interactive chat): Real-time communication between two users via computer. Once a chat has been initiated, either user can enter text by typing on the keyboard and the entered text will appear on the other user's monitor.

Co-browsing: With chat software, this feature allows the librarian and the patron to navigate the Web together remotely, viewing the same Web pages or databases.

Dropped calls: A transaction in which a patron leaves or is otherwise disconnected from the session before it is completed.

Escorting: Escorting allows the librarian to guide a patron on the Web; a librarian clicks a button and 'pulls' the patron around to various sites.

Form sharing: The patron and librarian can collaborate together and jointly fill out a Web-based form, search query or online application.

Plug-in: A hardware or software module that adds a specific feature or service to a larger system. The user often must download plug-ins in order to enable such additions. For example, there are plug-ins for the Internet Explorer and Netscape browsers that enable them to display different types of audio, video or animation files.

Push Pages: The simplest of Web-sharing applications, in which a librarian can cause a specific Web page to be displayed in the patron's browser window.

Queue Management: A queue refers to a lineup of questions submitted, whether via voice mail, e-mail, or interactive chat. The order in which queries in a queue are answered depends on the priority system being used. Some software applications offer the ability to sort questions in the queue by pre-determined criteria. Most commonly, questions are answered in the same order that they were placed in the queue.

Seat: An individual operator for a real-time virtual reference software package. Some vendors charge by the seat for additional operators, allowing you to have more than one librarian on chat reference duty.

Scripts: Pre-scripted messages that save you typing time in a chat reference transaction. Also called canned or pre-formatted responses.

Synchronous: In real-time, occurring at the same time. A characteristic of chat reference.

Transcript: A written record of a chat reference session, including all librarian and patron typed statements and URLs, which can be e-mailed to the patron, retained for future reference, or archived.

Voice Chat: A chat session that utilizes VoIP rather than typing to send messages.

VoIP (Voice over Internet Protocol): Also called Internet telephony. A category of hardware and software that enables people to use the Internet as the transmission medium for telephone calls. For users who have free, or fixed-price Internet access, Internet telephony software essentially provides free telephone calls anywhere in the world. To date, however, Internet telephony does not offer the same quality of telephone service as direct telephone connections. There are many Internet telephony applications available. Some, like CoolTalk and NetMeeting, come bundled with popular Web browsers.