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Back Talk -- Virtual and Real Reference

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Ghost Adventures — http://www.travelchannel.com/TV_Shows/Ghost_Adventures — Ditto for the **Ghost Adventures** site. This site features lots of advertising for **Zak, Nick, and Aaron**. To be fair, these two television celebrity groups are trying to earn a living with their ghost hunting. On the **Ghost Adventures** Website, you can Blog, **Facebook**, or **Twitter** to your heart's content, look at fan photos of the guys on their latest adventures, and even purchase a few t-shirts. The **Ghost Adventures** Website, unfortunately, is more about the **Travel Channel** than about actual ghost hunting.

Ghost Study — http://ghoststudy.com/new5/menu_tips.htm — **Ghost Study** is an accessible site, although this reviewer's aging eyes get really tired after reading through yet one more ghost hunting site with a black background and white or grey text! ☹ This site features Ghost Hunting Tips with the endearing 25-entry "The Ghost Hunter's Code (Credo)." The introduction states, "Find out what you really need to know in order to be a true ghost hunter. The list consists of 25 statements that all ghost hunters should take to heart. The CODE will protect you from harm and guide you on your quest. Commit it to memory, and it will serve you well." Adorable, and yet slightly annoying at the same time, this is clearly a Credo meant to appeal to dramatic young adults who are young enough to be this reviewer's grandchildren. Still, this site gives some good advice. A couple of samples include:

"Conduct yourself as a professional at all times. We always want to present ourselves as one in control. And that of course means around other investigators, victims of a haunting, and even to the ghosts themselves. Self-confidence and control will radiate like a beacon of light and thus serve as a shield of protection."

"Addicting habits can be contradictory to your ghostly pursuits. Examples would be heavy addictions to drugs, alcohol, cigarettes, an abnormal sex drive, etc. These things in excess make you vulnerable and susceptible to attack. The attack stems from the entities attraction to your addictions and also because of your weakness. Mind-altering substances are particularly enticing to them."

It is worthwhile to include this site, if only to encourage young library patrons to follow a moral and honest path! Seriously, the site does have tips on how to hunt for ghosts, take photographs, record EVPs, and purchase equipment. Naturally, there are links to expensive ghost hunting equipment.

Spirited Ghost Hunting — <http://www.spiritedghosthunting.com/> — **Spirited Ghost Hunting** (in Western Pennsylvania and Eastern Ohio) has as their motto "We Believe That You Believe!" This site is a good example of your typical regional ghost hunting Website. It has an attractive layout with the usual black background, but this time the text is a glowing lavender color. A photo of an old castle at the top left of the page has a site directory immediately below, superimposed on what looks like a lavender waterfall coming from the castle's front garden. "Spirited," as the site monitors call themselves, is a non-profit group of ghost hunters searching for explanations for allegedly paranormal occurrences. They accept members from all over the U.S., although their main focus is regional.

The Spirited group seems to be open-minded and enthusiastic, not appearing to take themselves too seriously, as many local paranormal groups often do. Spirited has their own **Facebook** page with 531 "friends." Their site offers many video clips of investigations and EVPs on **YouTube**, as well as on the less accessible MP3 links. The page introducing its members has an attractive photo of each member, the investigation page includes a brief history of each location, along with photos and links to more EVPs when relevant. There are personal stories, links to friends' sites — all relevant to the ghost hunting theme — as well as news stories and articles, some discussing controversial topics within the ghost hunting community.

I was very impressed by this group, with its good attitude and professional layout of their online site. I would give **Spirited Ghost Hunting** an A+ as a paranormal investigative group and as the founders of this excellent Website. 🌿



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libraries, let me add that being able to go to its overloaded-with-books political science branch library and ask a question of its staff was a pleasure.

Being a slightly young baby boomer I can't dispute the finding that the technology of navigating the path to the virtual reference service desk puts me off. But I think I also share with the Millennials a distaste for the need to spend more than a minute telling my story. I want the answer, not an opportunity to talk (that is what this column is for). I refuse to read manuals and FAQ's — my "read my mind and give me what I want" attitude frustrates my wife continuously. Since that is not going to happen, I guess I will always be disappointed some of the time. Maybe if at the top of the screen there was a "Help, give me a smart human" button I would have a chance at information happiness.

The **OCLC** report is well worth the read. (At this point I have to divulge that as an **OCLC** Board member I am not exactly neutral and that I feel the need to plug the good things that **OCLC** does from time to time). The authors began their research with an even split in focus groups between users/providers and non-users. They then analyzed 850 randomly drawn transcripts of VRS sessions. Based upon the information obtained in these ways they created an online survey and conducted nearly 300 telephone interviews. They began their research with some fairly simple goals: What is happening with VRS? Is it worth improving and if so, how can that be done? I think they did well on both counts. Go to the **OCLC** Website and download it to your **iPad**. It can be read at the beach or, if you have not read it by the fall, at the next boring meeting you are attending. 🌿

Back Talk — Virtual and Real Reference

Column Editor: **Anthony (Tony) W. Ferguson** (Library and Information Science Consultant and former Hong Kong University Librarian; now relocated to Sahuarita, Arizona) <anthony.ferguson185@gmail.com>

I am now writing you temporarily from the mountains of Wyoming instead of the hustle and bustle of Hong Kong or the dry heat of Arizona. If I ignore the **Taco Bells** and **Wendy's** fast food outlets that I see when I go to town (Afton, Wyoming) and the fact that I am driving myself, I could imagine I was back in the mountains of western Xinjiang province in China. Both have horses, goats and sheep, green pastures and beautiful forests, but the food is better in China if you happen to favor lamb shish kabob, lamb ribs, lamb soup and minced lamb, garlic and ginger mixed with your stir-fried string beans and rice instead of roast beef, mashed potatoes, gravy, and chocolate cake.

I decided to write about reference work for two reasons: first, being in Wyoming caused me to think about my first job as a student reference desk assistant, an opportunity provided by the now retired **University of Wyoming** library director, **Keith Cottam**. **Cottam**, then the Social Sciences librarian at **Brigham Young University** believed in the value of hiring social science students to work at the reference desk. The second reason for thinking about reference work was the opportunity to read a recent **OCLC** report, *Seeking Synchronicity: Revelations and Recommendations for Virtual Reference* by **Lynn Silipigni Connaway** and **Marie L. Radford**. <http://www.oclc.org/reports/synchronicity/default.htm>

The **OCLC** Report makes a number of very interesting points (many more than the following but these are the ones which interest me the most):

1. When we talk about VRS, virtual reference service, in today's highly personal **Facebook** environment, for VRS to be successful we should probably redefine it as a virtual relationship building service.

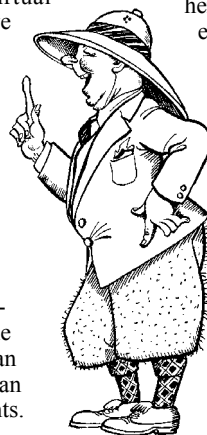
2. While it is true that the ability to do quick Web searches has largely taken the place of the ready reference services previously provided by reference librarians, the research done for the **OCLC** report demonstrates that such services are still needed and used.

3. The need for the reference interview lives on. If the VRS staff member doesn't understand the question, she/he can't provide a timely/correct answer.

4. Different generations of users view VRS differently. Baby boomers can be put off by the technology and as a result generally are ignorant of VRS. Millennials, on the other hand, want the speed of the Internet and dislike the slowness than can accompany the VRS interview and service provision process.

5. For VRS, marketing matters a great deal. In the digital haystack, finding the VRS needle is difficult if not impossible, and unless it is actively promoted it will die through disuse.

Based upon my own experience, I think there is a great deal of truth to the points made in the report. While lacking virtual reference service experience, I have always been convinced that for real communication to happen between two people, both have to sense that what they are saying is of interest to the other person in the conversation. This is as true of the librarian and patron relationship as it is of all other human relationships. My first library boss **Cottam** understood this and so he had confidence that a research-oriented political science student at the desk could do as well or better than a MLS card-carrying vanilla librarian when working with similar students.



Of course, the more I knew about political science and beyond, the faster the answers flowed, and so getting paid to skim reference books which could help my own research and that of my fellow students was a double pleasure. Subsequently, when I worked and supervised subject specialist librarians at three other universities, the value of this truth, hire smart librarians who were actually interested in the information needs of the patrons they served, cannot be underestimated.

I found the information about ready-reference service and the Web intriguing. Today my 11-year-old granddaughter complained to me that her parents couldn't explain things like why World War I began. That she could make this complaint reflected several things: most people just want to know things; if they don't understand something they find it easiest to ask those within arm's length, friends or parents or teachers, to give them the answer. Librarians are simply too far away to be of much help. Being foggy about who it was that got assassinated in the Baltic States and how that led to America entering the war, I pulled my **iPhone** out, **Googled** the question, and within a minute or so knew enough from **Wikipedia** to answer her question. Yet, not all questions are so easily answered, and so being able to instantly communicate with a human being on the Web for additional help sounds good.

The information about the importance of the reference interview brought a smile to my lips. When I was a graduate student at the **University of Washington** and a weekend undergraduate library reference librarian, I usually answered my own questions but when I didn't know the answer I would go to the graduate **Suzzallo Library** reference counter to be served by a range of real professionals. Once, however, I posed a question

to a fresh-from-library-school librarian who seemed to have memorized innumerable questions designed to insure that he 100% understood my information needs. At his request we stepped away from the desk so he could complete his interrogation without interruption. After what seemed to be 10 or 15 minutes I wanted to strangle him, at least, or draw and quarter him if horses could be found. By way of contrast, the beauty of the **Google** box is we can plop down whatever we know and then sift through the piles of stuff (of course seldom going to more than the second page of links) to find the answer to our question. Yet, when the box fails, again the possibility of communicating with someone who knows something is intriguing. Lest someone think I am casting doubt on the excellent **University of Washington**

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