

Grassroots Virtual Reference Collaboration

The Ohio/Oregon Model

Definitions

Partners & Other Organizations

KnowItNow24x7 (KIN24x7): Ohio's statewide virtual reference (VR) service. Started as regional Northeast Ohio service, 2001; statewide in 2004. Administered by Cleveland Public Library.

L-net: Oregon's statewide VR service. Began as pilot project *Answerland* in 2003, went 24/7 in 2004. Administered by Multnomah County Library, Portland.

AfterDark: After-hours VR service; Coordinated by the Northeast Ohio Regional Library System

Ignite Realtime: Community of users and developers of Jive Software's open source projects

SourceN: Software developer providing development and support of SparkRef/Openfire platform. Based in San Jose, CA.

Technology

SparkRef: The IM client used by both Ohio and Oregon librarians to chat with patrons. Based on Spark, an open source, cross-platform IM client from Ignite Realtime.

Openfire: The cross-platform, open-source XMPP server used to provide the back-end of the virtual reference services. Also from Ignite Realtime. Hosted by Cleveland Public Library.

Fastpath: SparkRef component allowing patron to connect to a librarian through webchat.

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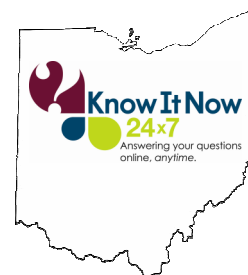
Partnership

KnowItNow24x7 and L-net's virtual reference partnership has provided cost-savings benefits for both services. They share costs for software development and support as well as after-hours coverage, currently provided by AfterDark. They have also explored question-sharing options between the services.

The services are looking for other partners that share their vision of virtual reference. Potential partners have the opportunity to draw on the expertise of both services as well as contribute their own.

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SparkRef/Openfire Platform

One of the primary outcomes of the partnership has been the SparkRef/Openfire software platform. Ownership of the platform does not require the partners to pay subscription or licensing fees to a vendor, and it allows them to direct their own development. SparkRef/Openfire provides both a "plug-n-play" option and a readily-customizable platform with each partner having a unique web portal and the ability to continue to offer services designed to enhance their own local priorities.

Please tell us about your question

Please enter your name:

Please enter your email address:

Please enter your question:

Please choose your grade level:

Timeline

The idea of collaboration between L-net and KIN24x7 came originally from conversations between the State Librarians of Ohio and Oregon. With each state's virtual reference (VR) services looking for more efficient and cost-effective platforms, the pooling of funds and expertise seemed a natural course.

2007

June: Talks held among Cleveland Public Library (Ohio) and Multnomah County Library (Oregon) staff along with Oregon State Librarian on possible collaboration; Meeting held with Jive Software

2008

January: Exploratory phone calls with SourceN

June: CPL and MCL enter into intergovernmental agreement to collaborate on VR services.

September: L-net and KIN24x7 switch to use of the Spark/Openfire platform.

2009

January: L-net Local offers Chat Widgets for Oregon libraries; KIN24x7 offers instant messaging via AOL, Yahoo!, and MSN

August: KIN24x7 offers "local queue" option

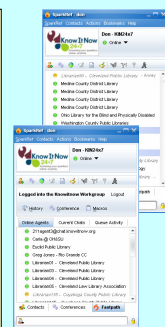
November: New round of developments from SourceN implemented including elements for both patrons and librarians; Client renamed *SparkRef*

2010

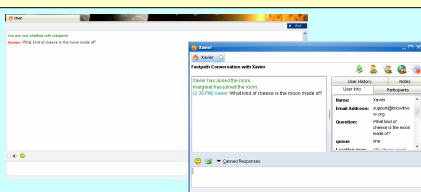
KIN24x7 and L-net begin exploring ways in which text messaging can be incorporated into SparkRef/Openfire.

SparkRef/Openfire Details & Screenshots

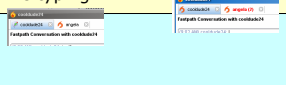
SparkRef client has multiple tabs like **Fastpath** (at right, in front) and **Contacts**. Transcripts are available directly through the SparkRef client by clicking **History**.



The chat screens of both the librarian (front, below) and patron provide a clean, easily-navigated interface. The librarian has access to metadata about the session within their screen.



One of the more popular features of the software is the ability for both librarian and patron to see when the other is typing.



Many templates have already been created to generate standard reports and transcripts from Openfire in a variety of formats. More complex reports can also be created as the need and desire arise.

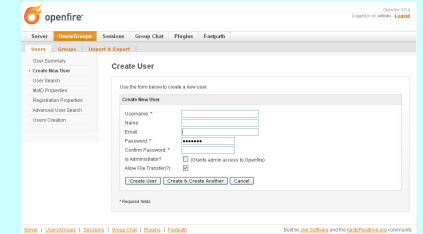
April 2010 Library Totals

Installation Name	April	Completed	Disconnected	Followup	Transcribed	Transit	PA	PA	Total
Public Library Transcripts	18	20	0	2	14	7	143		143

Public Library version: 20100321 11:00:07

Public Library version: 20100321 11:00:07

Public Library version: 20100321 11:00:07



Partners are able to access and add to their users, create queues, and perform other basic functions through Openfire's web-based administrative interface (above).