

## Ask Us 24/7 Story Angles / Talking Points

There is a trend for companies to provide chat services for their products, such as the customer support links used on the websites for eBay and Nordstrom that allow you to chat live with a customer service rep. Ask Us 24/7 could be seen as part of this trend toward more "real time" service.

A chapter of The World is Flat by Thomas Friedman discusses outsourcing that is done within the United States, such as how some McDonald's locations use a central "call center" to handle their drive-through orders remotely. Ask Us 24/7 uses a similar type of "outsourcing." Our libraries are located throughout New York State and each one staffs the service for a few hours a week, so the odds are that you will not be chatting with a librarian from your own library. But each librarian has access to profiles of all the other libraries, and since they are all skilled researchers, they should be able to help you just as well as your neighborhood librarian. We are also part of a national cooperative made up of libraries in other states who serve as backup.

You don't want your children chatting online with strangers...*unless* they are authoritative strangers on a library website who can help with research.

How is this different from Google? Unlike a search engine, Ask Us 24/7:

- Connects the user with a live librarian, a reference professional who does the searching for you.
- Gives you answers that are relevant and in context.
- Can refer your question to experts for further follow-up.
- Ask Us 24/7 isn't a search engine—it's a live "research engine."

Libraries, because they provide free services, can be even more of a benefit during tough economic times. Many people are unaware of the fact that their local public and college libraries subscribe to databases that they can access for free at home. Google Scholar can sometimes work, but more often than not it sends you to a page asking you to pay for the article. [A local paper can be used as an example – a student looking for an article may not find it on the paper's website. But while chatting with a librarian, that librarian may find that their library subscribes to the "New York State Newspapers" database, where they can get the article for free.]

Why drive to the library when the library can come to you, at home, any time of day or night?

As libraries face decreasing budgets, their hours may be reduced. But Ask Us 24/7 is open all-day, every day, even when your local library is closed. Need last-minute help at 3am for an assignment due in a few hours? Ask Us 24/7 is here to help!