

# WhatsApp at HKUST Library: A New Channel for User Communication

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# Outline

## Background

- HKUST Library communication channels
- HKUST information service desk trends
- Social media trends
- Use of smartphones trends

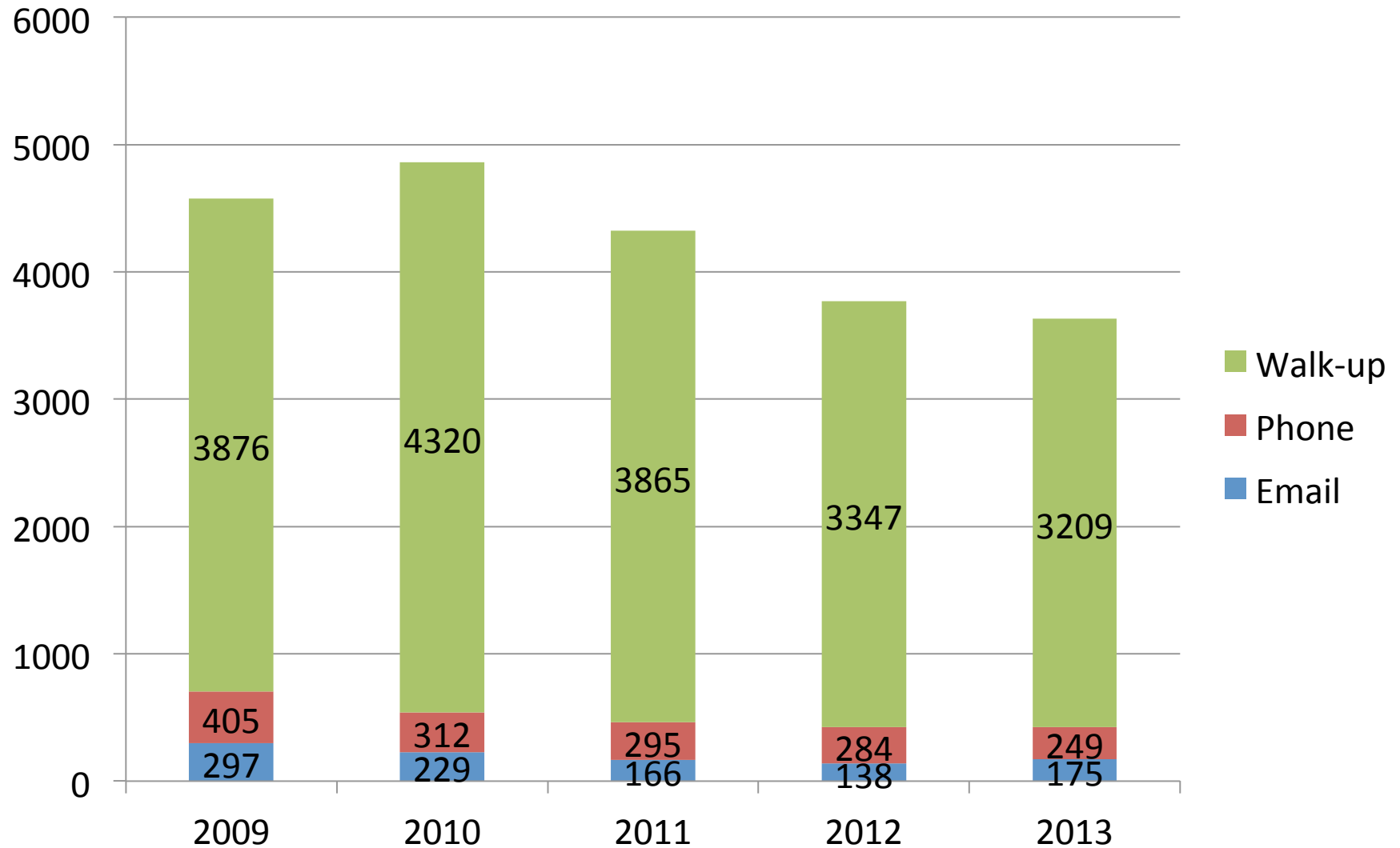
## Project Details

- Goal
- Challenges
- Service soft-launched in January 2014
- Results so far

# 2013 HKUST Library communication channels

- Walk-up to the service points
  - InfoDesk, Circulation Counters, Information and Learning Commons Help Desks
- Phone
- Email
- Online “Ask a Librarian” form
- Other Online Channels
  - Library website, news blog, Facebook, YouTube, RSS feeds, etc.

# Questions at Library Information Desk -Trends



# VR, DR, & Social Media Trends

- “Digital Reference” has been around for years
  - IM; “ask a librarian forms”, various chat software
- HKUST had considered chat, text, & IM in past
  - Concerns about whether IM worth time & effort
  - SMS = \$\$\$\$\$
  - HKUST’s Blog, SmartCAT, Facebook, etc. get little interaction from users
- Free WiFi texting recently growing popular

# Smartphones Now Ubiquitous in Hong Kong

- Hong Kong's smartphone penetration = 87%<sup>1</sup>
- 90% of students have Smartphones<sup>2</sup>
  - Most popular uses: phone calls, SMS & WhatsApp
- Students seem to use smartphones everywhere
- WhatsApp tone ringing frequently in Library

1. Nielsen Corporation. (2013, September 17<sup>th</sup> ). *The Asian Mobile User Decoded*. Retrieved from <http://www.nielsen.com/us/en/newswire/2013/the-asian-mobile-consumer-decoded0.html>
2. Luo, Qi. (2013, November 5<sup>th</sup> ). Students Getting Smarter as Phone Use Rises. *The Standard, Local*, p. 12. Retrieved from Wisers.

# 2013 – Thoughts & Goals

## 2013 Spring

- WhatsApp thoughts
  - Free with WiFi connection throughout HKUST
  - Most smartphone users also have internet connection via providers off campus
  - Easy to install & use!
  - Very common among HK people (even non-techies)
  - No need to download widget or do anything special

Goal: Start to use WhatsApp for InfoDesk Services

## Summer → Fall 2013

- Ref & Systems colleagues began to talk and plan

# Service Model Drives Decisions

- Keep it simple
- Keep it inexpensive
- It's just another communication channel
  - WhatsApp Service is just another medium for Information (Reference) service – like phone, email, or walk-up
  - Best (at least initially) handled like other forms of questions – via the shift-work at the InfoDesk
  - Only one staff responsible at a time (whoever is on the InfoDesk shift)



# Challenges

Just buying a mobile phone not best solution

- InfoDesk shift work (2-6 hour shifts)
- Security (misplaced, lost, or stolen)
- Battery Charging
- Small keyboard & thumb dexterity
- Want easy way for staff to input Chinese

Why not try and set-up answering WhatsApp (& WeChat) via desktop computer

# Technical Challenges

Emulating Android mobile screens and inputs on desktop computer

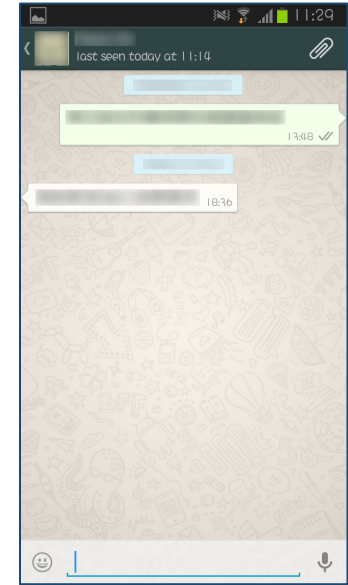
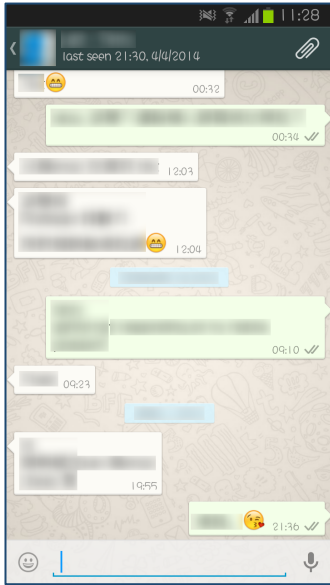
- ☹ Google's Android emulator: mainly for developers
- ☹ Genymotion: display issues
- 😊 **BlueStacks App Player**: OK speed; few display issues ✓ adopted

Emulator on PC does not have physical SIM card, but WhatsApp requires communication via the mobile phone number during installation

- Resolved

The emulation PC is housed in Library Server Room

- InfoDesk staff connect to this PC via Remote Desktop Connection



Mobile phone number  
**5918-5097**



Mobile phone number  
**9876-5432**



Remote  
Desktop  
Connection



**Jerry**



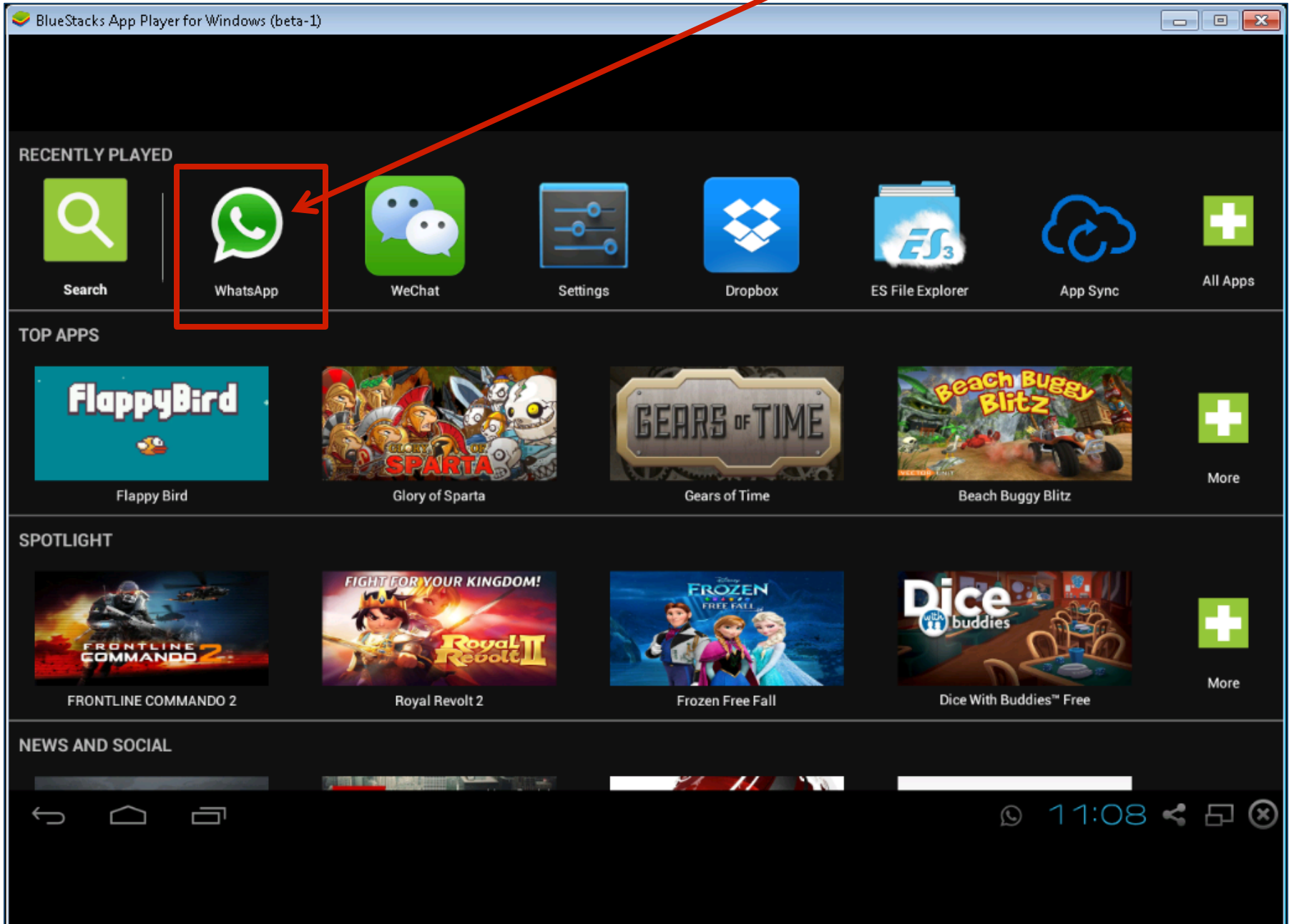
**InfoDesk**

**Office**



# BlueStacks Player for Windows

Click this icon to launch WhatsApp





Librarian at InfoDesk  
checks WhatsApp on PC



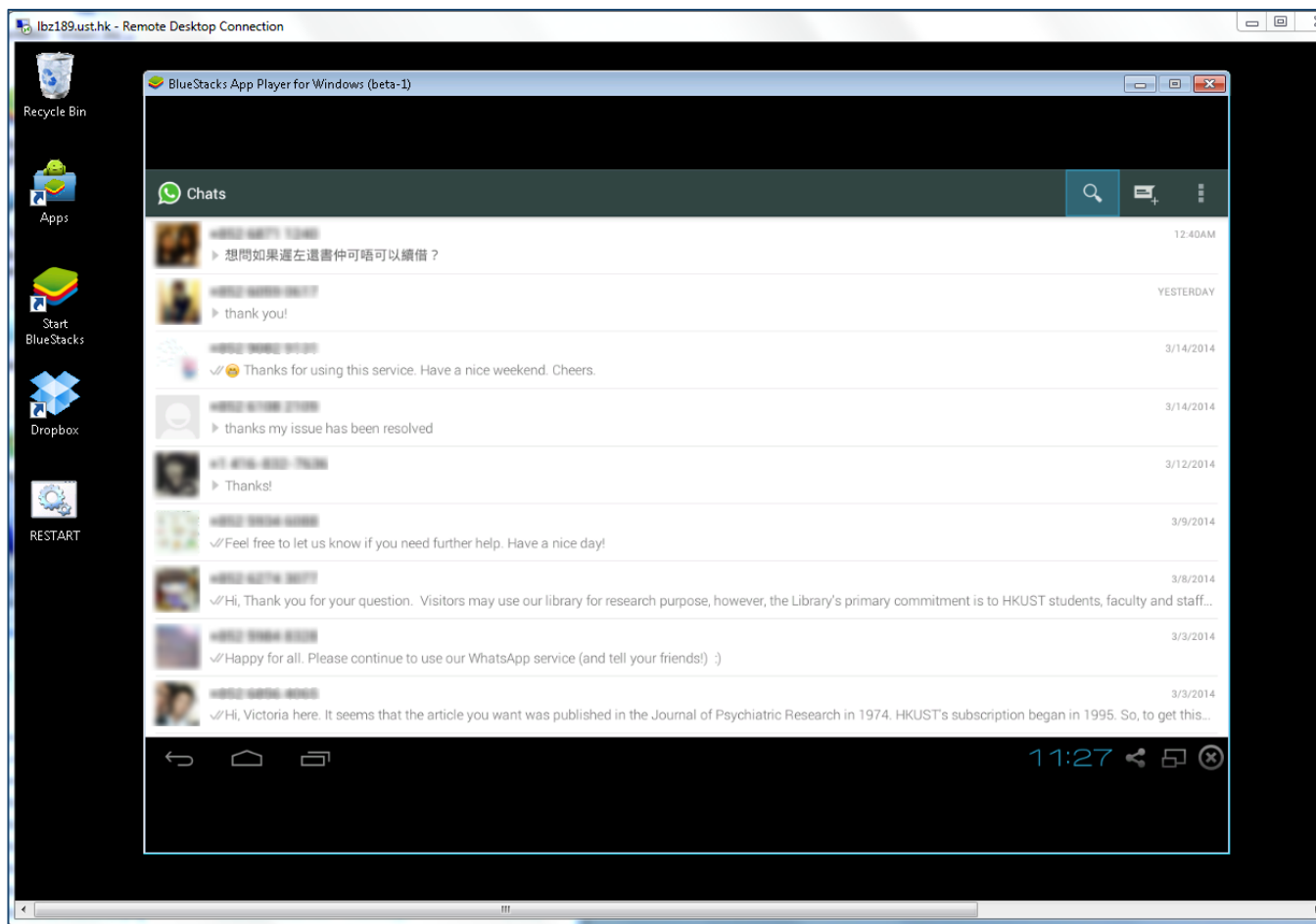
WhatsApp : 5918-5097



Patron chats to librarian  
via WhatsApp

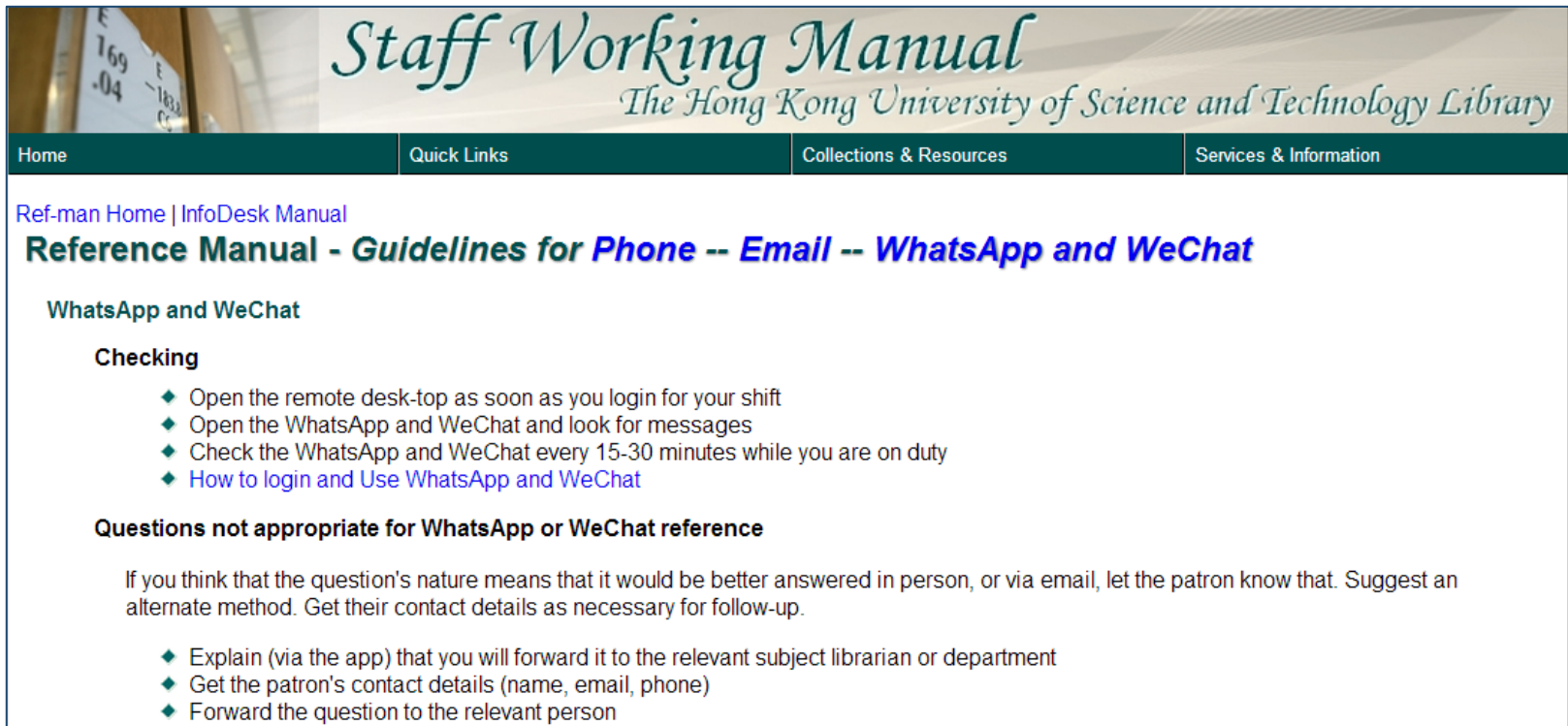


WhatsApp : 5918-5097



# Human Challenges– Service Guidelines

- Similar to phone & email:
  - If you can answer quickly & easily via this medium, do so
  - If not, refer to others or suggest other mediums



The screenshot shows the 'Staff Working Manual' for 'The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library'. The page has a dark green header with navigation links: Home, Quick Links, Collections & Resources, and Services & Information. Below the header, there are links for 'Ref-man Home' and 'InfoDesk Manual'. The main title is 'Reference Manual - Guidelines for Phone -- Email -- WhatsApp and WeChat'. The section 'WhatsApp and WeChat' is highlighted. Under 'Checking', there are four bullet points: 'Open the remote desk-top as soon as you login for your shift', 'Open the WhatsApp and WeChat and look for messages', 'Check the WhatsApp and WeChat every 15-30 minutes while you are on duty', and 'How to login and Use WhatsApp and WeChat'. Under 'Questions not appropriate for WhatsApp or WeChat reference', there is a paragraph stating: 'If you think that the question's nature means that it would be better answered in person, or via email, let the patron know that. Suggest an alternate method. Get their contact details as necessary for follow-up.' followed by three bullet points: 'Explain (via the app) that you will forward it to the relevant subject librarian or department', 'Get the patron's contact details (name, email, phone)', and 'Forward the question to the relevant person'.

*Staff Working Manual*  
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library

Home Quick Links Collections & Resources Services & Information

[Ref-man Home](#) | [InfoDesk Manual](#)

**Reference Manual - Guidelines for Phone -- Email -- WhatsApp and WeChat**

**WhatsApp and WeChat**

**Checking**

- ◆ Open the remote desk-top as soon as you login for your shift
- ◆ Open the WhatsApp and WeChat and look for messages
- ◆ Check the WhatsApp and WeChat every 15-30 minutes while you are on duty
- ◆ [How to login and Use WhatsApp and WeChat](#)

**Questions not appropriate for WhatsApp or WeChat reference**

If you think that the question's nature means that it would be better answered in person, or via email, let the patron know that. Suggest an alternate method. Get their contact details as necessary for follow-up.

- ◆ Explain (via the app) that you will forward it to the relevant subject librarian or department
- ◆ Get the patron's contact details (name, email, phone)
- ◆ Forward the question to the relevant person

# Human Challenges - Training

## November - > December 2013

1. Systems colleagues wrote basic instructions
2. Systems initial briefing & training Ref staff (mid-November 2013)
3. Ref colleagues wrote up service guidelines & posted those & the system instructions on staff manual (mid-December 2013)
4. Ref staff & staff from other depts. who serve at InfoDesk met for Q&A & discussion (mid-December 2013)

January 2014 – soft-launched service

# Human Interaction – Staff Acceptance

Some trepidation at first

What helped?

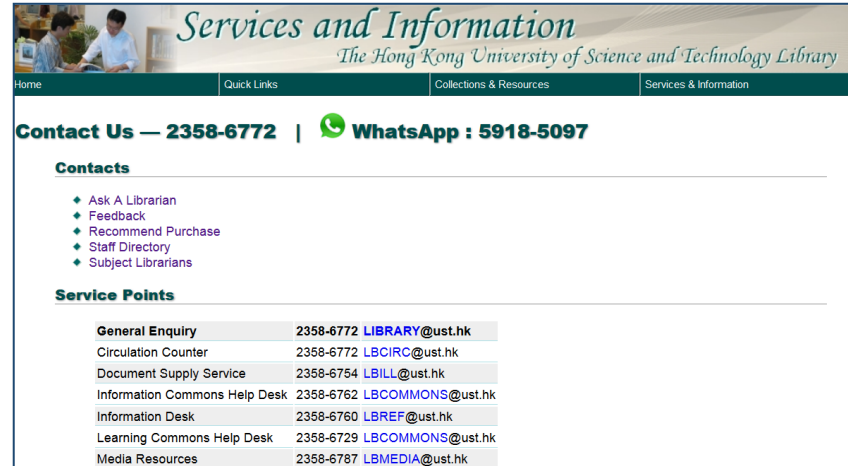
- Soft-launch in January - knowing initial uptake would be low (between semesters)
- Reminder that it was just another form of what we have been doing for decades
- Reassurance that one could call on other colleagues to help
- Positive reaction from patrons after start of new semester (Feb 2014)



# WhatsApp Promotion

February 2014

- Facebook posting
- Email announcement
- Library Newsletter article
- Physical signs at Circulation Desk & InfoDesk
- Added to all general contact pages on Library Web pages & Libguides



*Services and Information*  
The Hong Kong University of Science and Technology Library

Home Quick Links Collections & Resources Services & Information

**Contact Us — 2358-6772 | WhatsApp : 5918-5097**

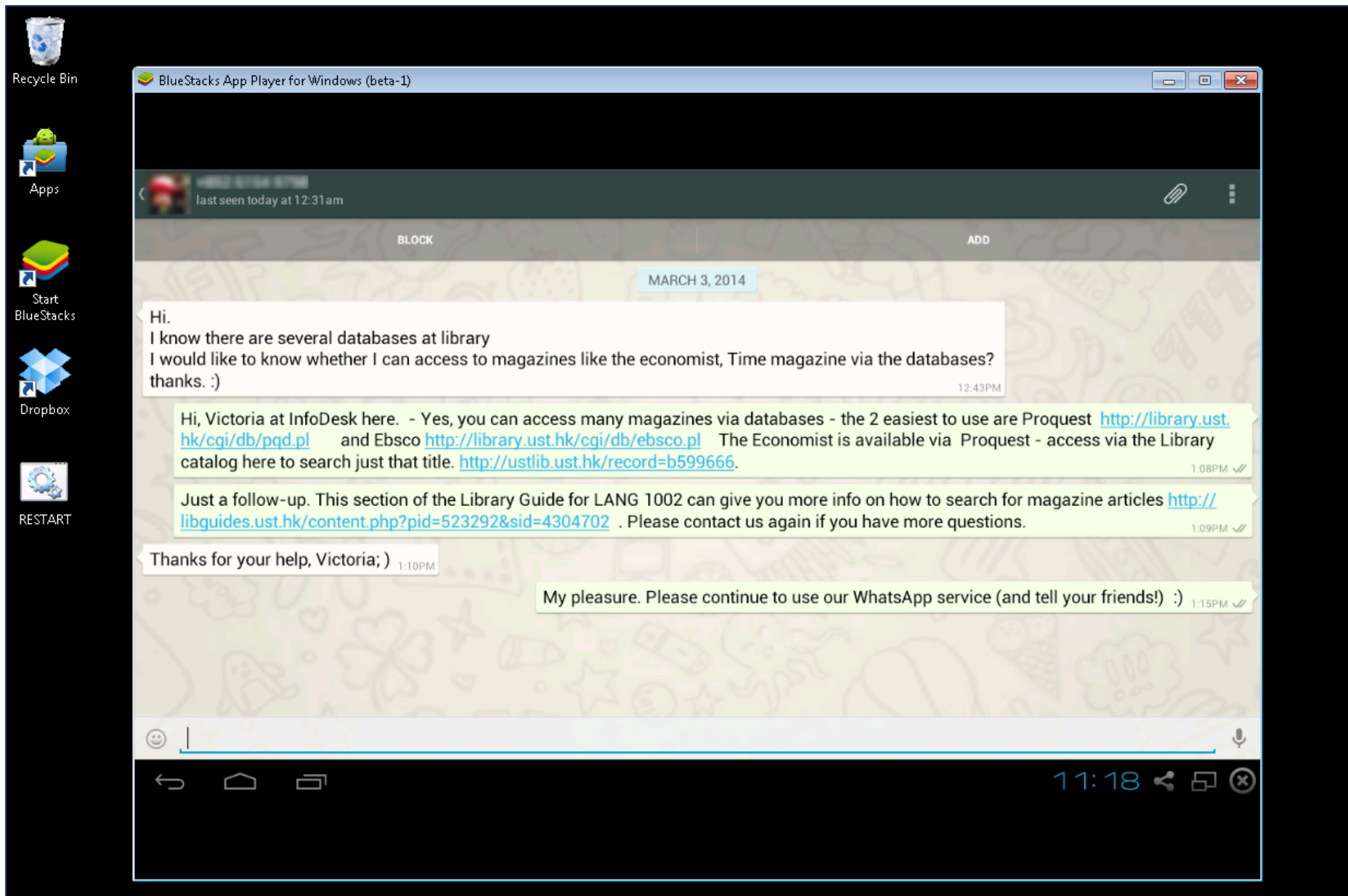
**Contacts**

- ♦ Ask A Librarian
- ♦ Feedback
- ♦ Recommend Purchase
- ♦ Staff Directory
- ♦ Subject Librarians

**Service Points**

General Enquiry	2358-6772	<a href="mailto:LIBRARY@ust.hk">LIBRARY@ust.hk</a>
Circulation Counter	2358-6772	<a href="mailto:LBCIRC@ust.hk">LBCIRC@ust.hk</a>
Document Supply Service	2358-6754	<a href="mailto:LBILL@ust.hk">LBILL@ust.hk</a>
Information Commons Help Desk	2358-6762	<a href="mailto:LBCOMMONS@ust.hk">LBCOMMONS@ust.hk</a>
Information Desk	2358-6760	<a href="mailto:LBREF@ust.hk">LBREF@ust.hk</a>
Learning Commons Help Desk	2358-6729	<a href="mailto:LBCOMMONS@ust.hk">LBCOMMONS@ust.hk</a>
Media Resources	2358-6787	<a href="mailto:LBMEDIA@ust.hk">LBMEDIA@ust.hk</a>

# A WhatsApp question and answers



## Another WhatsApp question



Recycle Bin



Apps



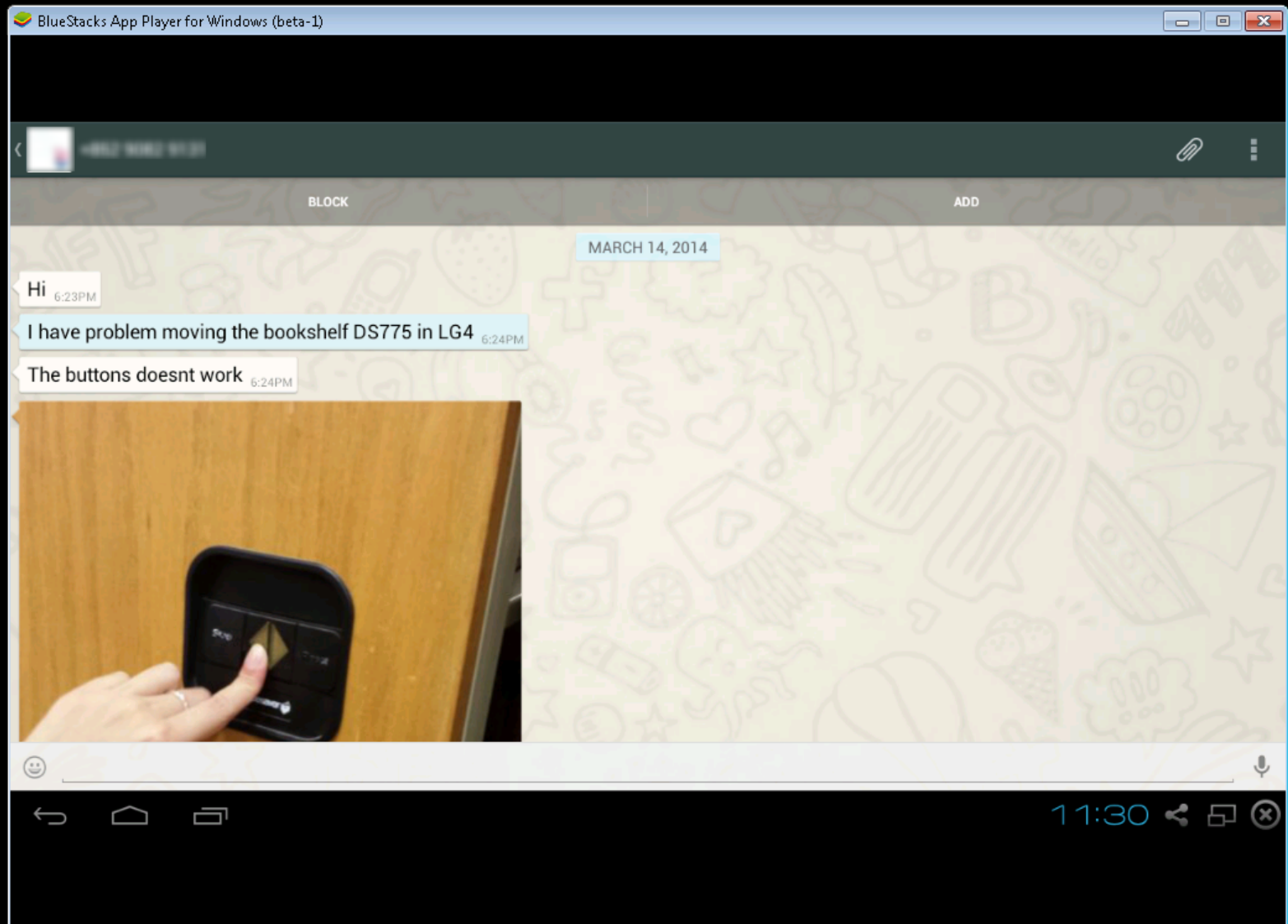
Start  
BlueStacks



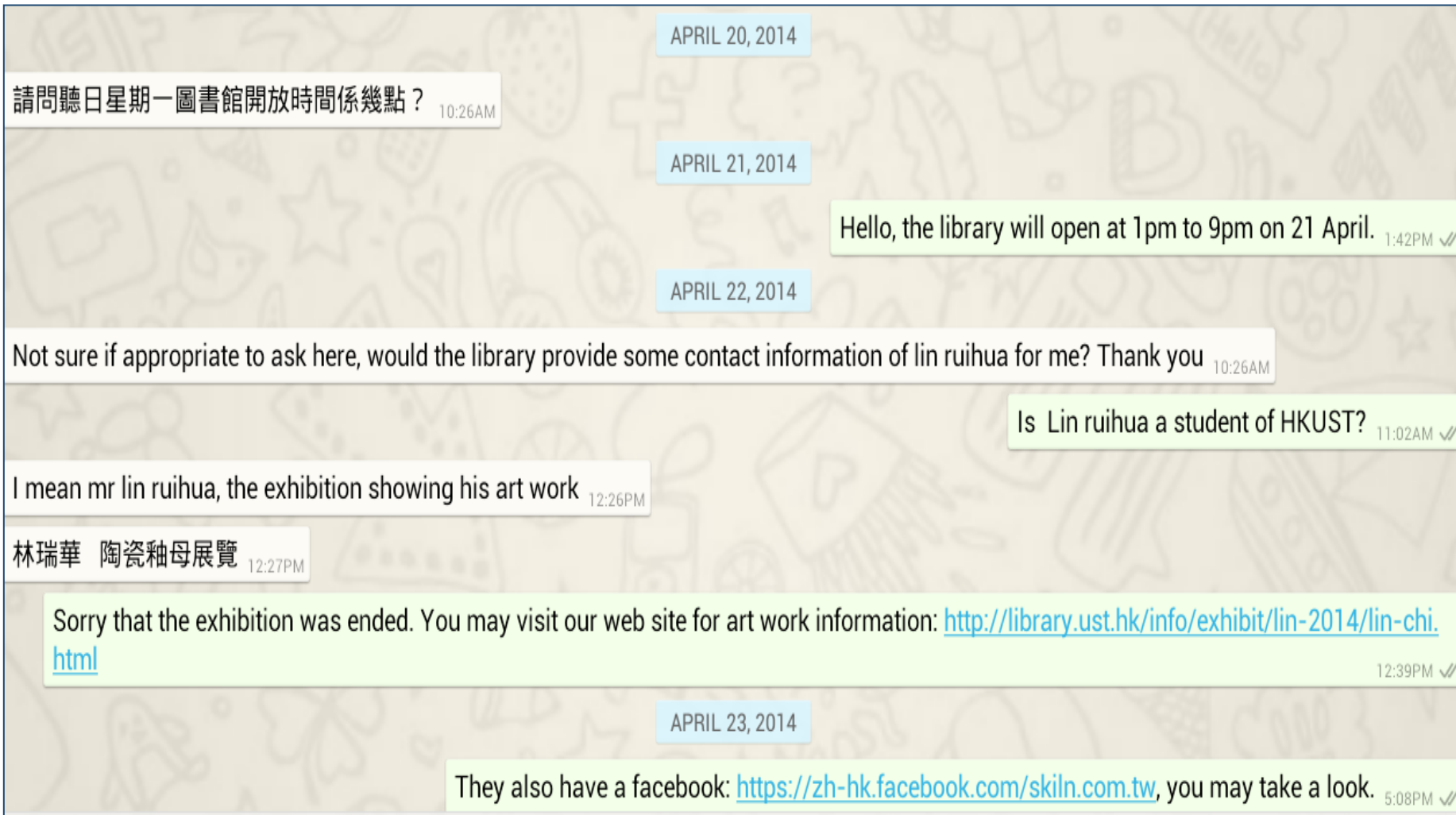
Dropbox



RESTART



# Bilingual -WhatsApp Service



Note: Library was closed on April 20 (Easter Sunday) and therefore the first question could only be answered after Library opened at 1pm on 21 April (Easter Monday).

# Users Like the WhatsApp Service

FEBRUARY 21, 2014

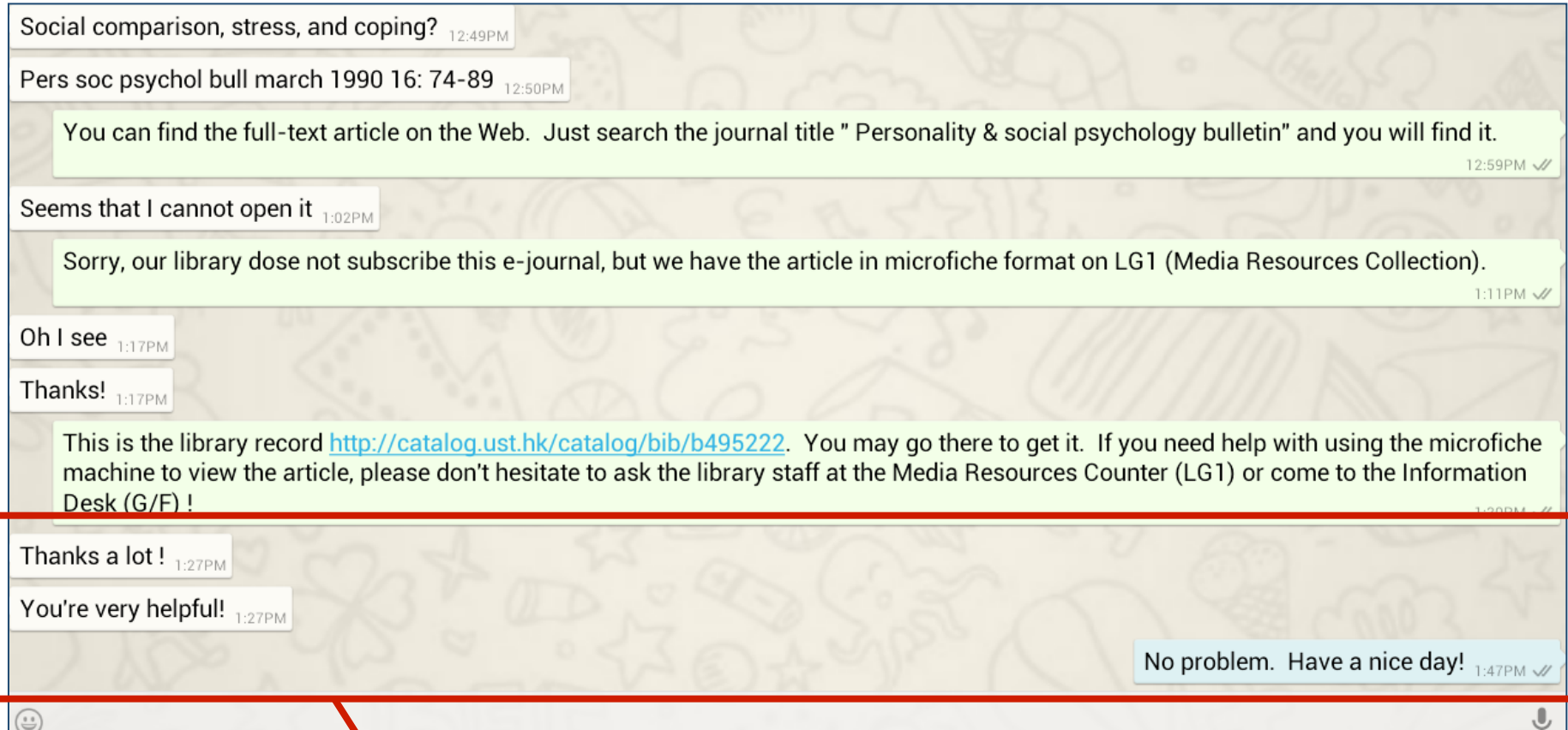
Hi Library helper, may I ask whether the "Subsidy scheme for acquiring dissertations and these

Yes, each RPG has a quota of three theses or dissertations in one calendar year, and there or borrowed.

I got it. Much appreciated your prompt reply. This whatsapp service is awesome 😊 11:30AM

I got it. Much appreciated your prompt reply. This whatsapp service is awesome

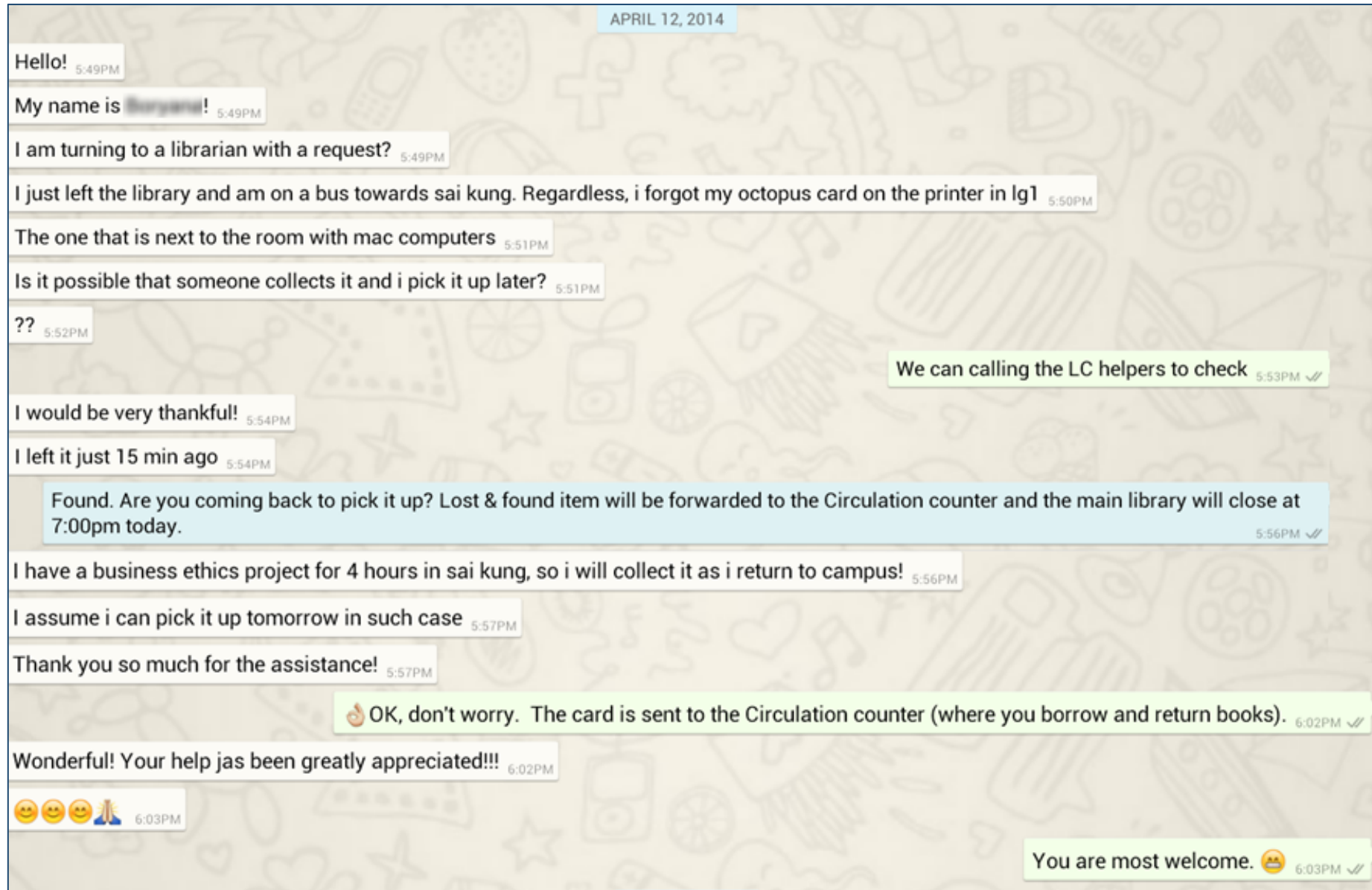
# Users Like the WhatsApp Service



Thanks a lot! You're very helpful!



# Users Like the WhatsApp Service



# Patron Response Stats

InfoDesk Reference Statistics February 4, 2014 - > April 29, 2014

Question Format	Question Count	Percentage
Email	23	2.6 %
WhatsApp	60	6.8 %
Phone	71	8 %
Walk-Up	729	82.6 %
<b>Totals</b>	<b>883</b>	<b>100 %</b>

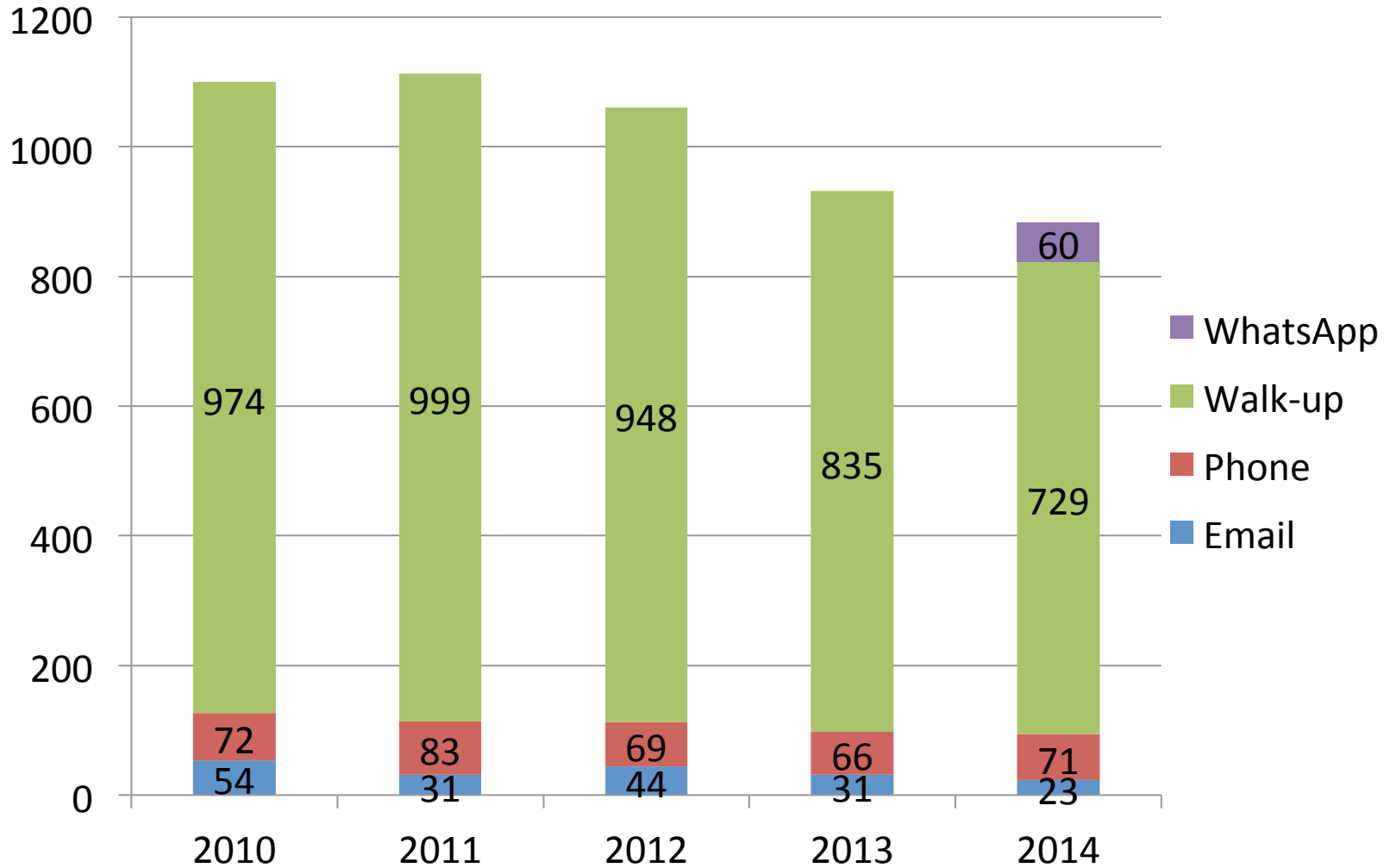
Comparable to chat reference in other HK Libraries:

FY 2012-13<sup>1</sup>: Lingnan = 132 chat sessions & HKBU = 226

1. Chan, Chris. 2013, November 29. Chatting up a storm: collaborating on Chat Reference. JULAC Libraries Forum. Retrieved from [http://www.julac.org/?uamfiletype=attachment&uamgetfile=http://www.julac.org/wp-content/uploads/JForum2013\\_LSC\\_collaborating\\_on\\_chat\\_reference.pdf](http://www.julac.org/?uamfiletype=attachment&uamgetfile=http://www.julac.org/wp-content/uploads/JForum2013_LSC_collaborating_on_chat_reference.pdf)



# Patron Response : Feb 4. → April 30 stats – Past 5 years



Fall 2014 will give better idea – usually fall semester = ~ 2/3 of all InfoDesk questions

# Wrap Up – Thoughts for Future

How may this impact academic libraries' communications with stake holders?

- Helps users by being very convenient (users always have their smartphones with them, in the Library, at home, on a bus, etc.)
- May help users know they can turn to the information services for all questions, big & small
- May help library to promote other services (e.g. research consultation, ILL, etc.)

# Q&A



Aldridge, Mark. (2003). Question Mark Cloud. Retrieved from Wikimedia Commons  
[http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Question\\_Mark\\_Cloud.jpg](http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:Question_Mark_Cloud.jpg)

# Thanks



Infrogmation (2007). *Thank you messages from our Lady of Guadalupe Grotto.*  
Retrieved from <http://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:GuadalupeNOLA15Oct07ThanksHearts.jpg>