

Please Talk to Strangers

Spreading Trust in Virtual Reference

*“I’m not supposed to take candy
from strangers, so uh...
tell me about yourself.”*

ALA Annual 2008

Vince Mariner

Ask Here PA Coordinator (Pennsylvania)

Statewide collaborative live chat service

80 libraries contribute staff time

- contribute 5+ hours per week

Separate public/academic queues

Activated September 2006

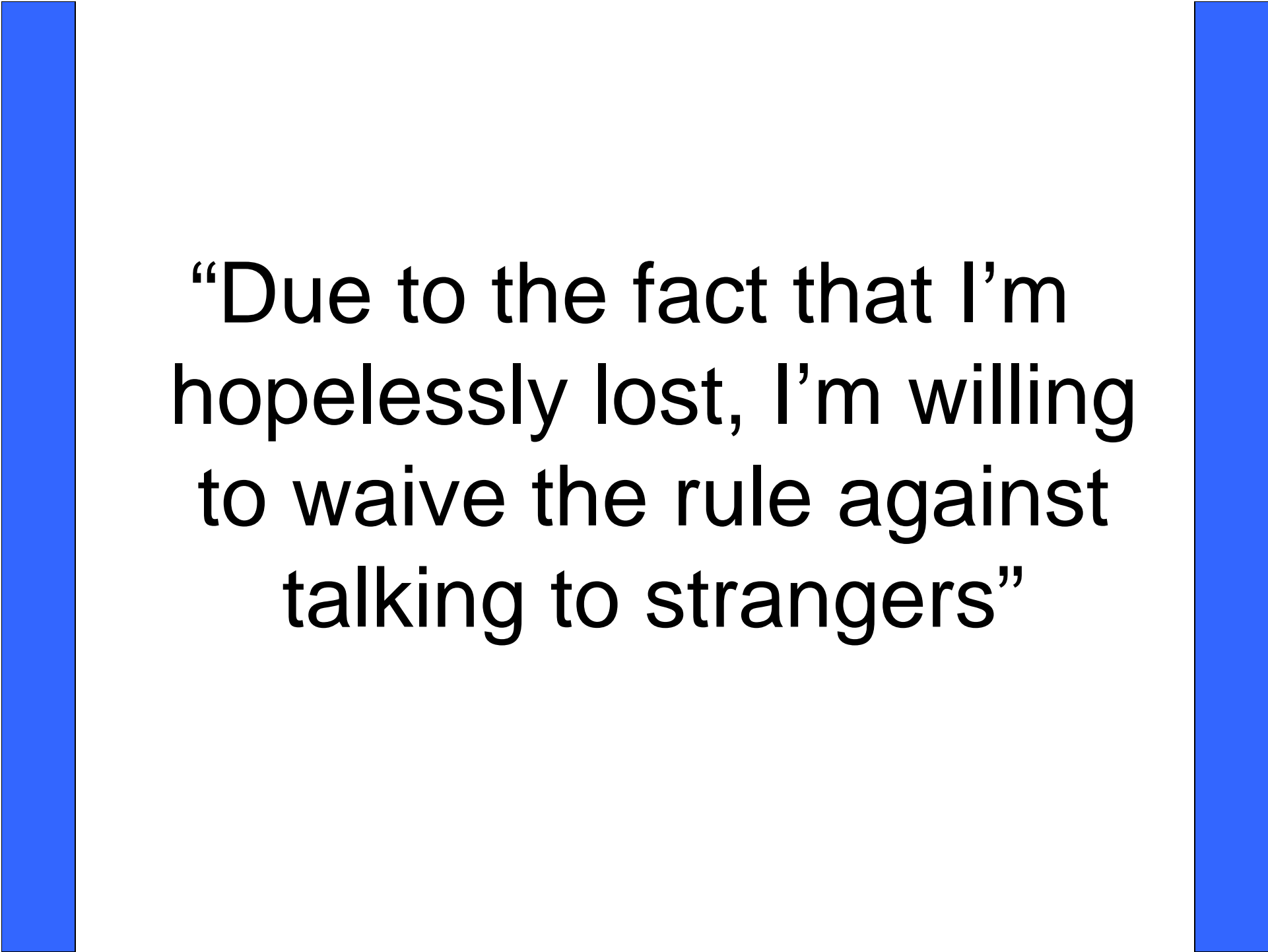
Average over 7,000 sessions per month

QuestionPoint software

- 24/7 Cooperative



- Why do customers trust us?
 - Fear of failure / motivation to succeed
 - Create more time for other things
 - Anonymous
 - General information need (genealogy, legal, medical, etc.)



“Due to the fact that I’m hopelessly lost, I’m willing to waive the rule against talking to strangers”

Challenges building trust with customers in a statewide collaborative service?

- Possible challenges faced by customers:
 - Obtaining local/account related questions
 - Understanding the service
 - Using the service

Challenges building trust with customers in a statewide collaborative service?

- Challenges faced by staff earning trust:
 - Serving customers of other libraries
 - Serving non-like type customers (academics serving K-12 school students)
 - Customers are mostly anonymous
 - Not being able to answer the question

Key is to set expectations, meet them
and try to exceed them

- We are available 24/7
- Provide fast and convenient service
- You are not likely to be served by your local librarian
- We are not (try not to be) a homework help service
- We are not always able to answer the question during the live chat session
- Privacy Policy / Policy of Mutual Respect

How do we build and maintain trust?

- Set Expectations
- Provide outstanding service
 - Best Practices
 - Shared resources
- Shared goals
- Quality Assurance
- Customer surveys

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