

# *Before we begin....*

Take a few moments to think some information need or question that's been gnawing at your brain...

....something you've tried to research already but just haven't had any luck.....

... it doesn't have to be professional or academic, could be personal or a piece of trivia you're after...

... write it down.



# Cold Emailing as a Research Tool

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# My story....

Doing my History MA Thesis on interactions between Egyptian civilians and Australian soldiers during WW1

My supervisor was giving me plenty of advice on Egyptian historiography. But both us had zero background in Australian history



# Questions like....

- What sorts of books would Australian boys grow reading in the 1890s?
- When did Australian settlers begin referring to Aborigines as 'blacks' ?
- What are the 'it' books on the history of Australian Labour movement?





So I cold emailed a couple dozen  
Australian historians...



# It was extremely effective...

- I had about a 50% response rate (about 20% were actually useful)
- Received archive and source recommendations
- Had my questions forwarded to other experts they knew
- Especially effective at answering “**What are the ‘it’ books in [obscure subtopic]**” type questions
- Had errors / assumptions corrected....

# Questions like....

- What sorts of books would Australian boys grow reading in the 1890s?

*Oh they didn't read all that much. Check out Robert Dixon's work.*

- When did Australian settlers begin referring to Aborigines as 'blacks' ?

*That's difficult, scholars aren't really sure. Shiro Konishi has some good insights.*

- What are the 'it' books on the history of Australian Labour movement?

*Oh, check out Russel Ward's The Australian Legend!*





# Yet this isn't common...

Cold emailing external experts for research aid isn't something people really think to do...

... Neither do reference librarians all that much....

*\* It is common for Legal and Medical librarians to make professional referrals*



# But why not?

Job searchers, marketers,  
and surveyors have long  
known cold contacting can  
be useful....

... and reference librarians are the ideal  
vehicle to equip patrons with this research  
method....

# But why not?

*" The [reference] librarian is responsible for... referring the patron to other sources including those not available through the local library."*

- RUSA Reference  
Guidelines

# But why not?

Reference librarians are an ideal vehicles for connecting patrons to this tactic....

- We have great searching skills
- People come to us when they're struggling
- Especially helpful for grad students/ more advanced researchers

# Drawbacks

- Potentially slow
- Unpredictable response rate
- Contributes to spam-culture
- Not intuitive



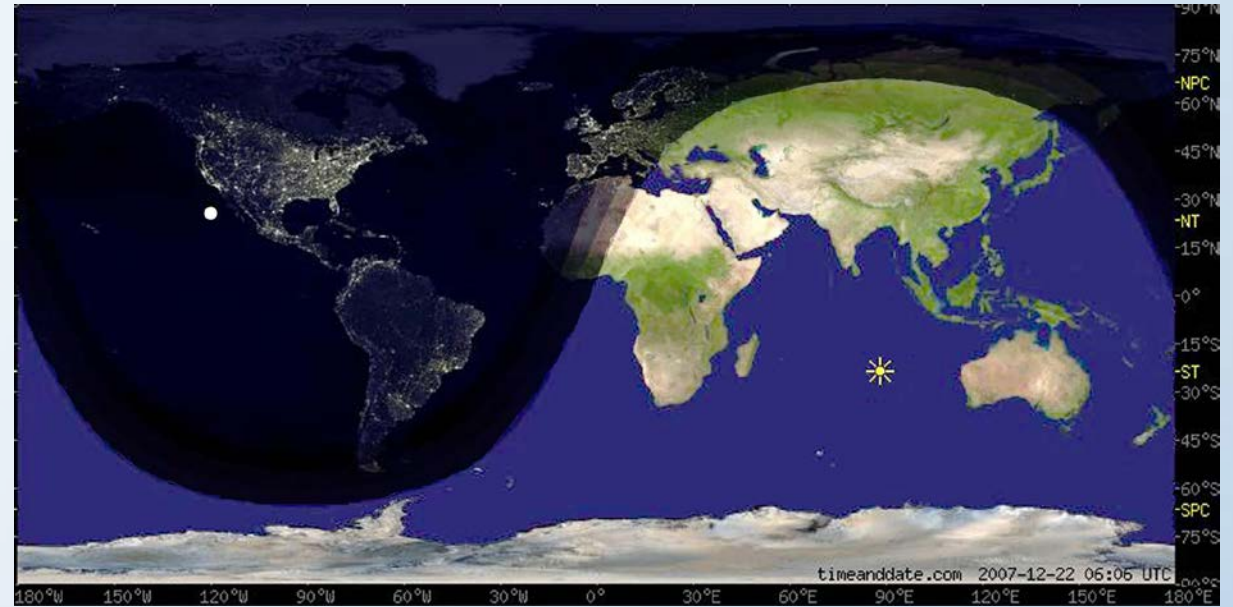
# Not for every patron....

Have they....

- Been unable to find a viable static resource?
- Settled on a query that is both specific and articulate ?
- The patience to wait at least 48 hours for an answer ?
- A query the librarian is ill-equipped to answer ?

# Finding an expert ?

- Authors of papers your patron already likes?
- Directories of profs and grad students
- Other professionals ?
- Use your search skills!  
Same principles as static research!



*\*If your patron is in a hurry, you can suggest targeting people in time-zones where it is currently business hours*



# Writing Cold Emails

- Introduce yourself & your purpose
- Actually have something articulated they can be answered (no word vomit)
- Personalize it- as much as possible
- Be polite & mildly flattering
- Be **BRIEF** !!!



To

smartperson@random.edu

Cc Bcc

A Question about [Your information need]

Dear [address them by name],

I am a [your position] conducting research on [your general research topic]. I was having trouble finding an appropriate source to help explain [your information need].

Given your impressive expertise on [identify their specific research focuses] and how you came up with such great insights in [identify a specific publication/project of theirs], I was wondering if you might be able to help determine [restate your specific query]. I would really appreciate any insights you might be able to offer!

Respectfully,  
[your name]

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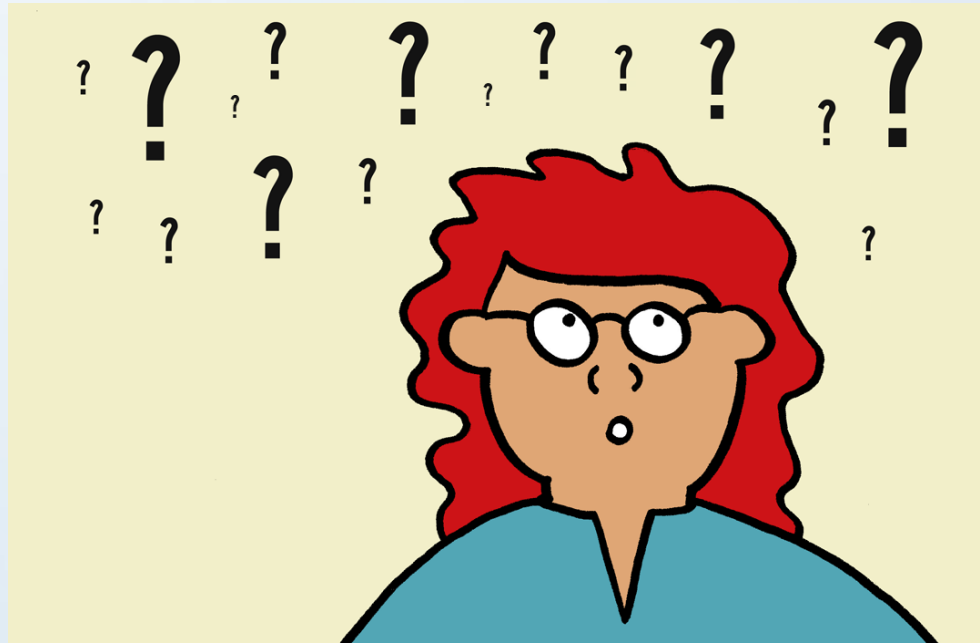
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Send

Discard



What's this got to do with Social Justice though?





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# It's an Equalizing Force

A Yale agriculture student can drop in the offices of world renowned agriculture profs, browse in a well-equipped library, talk to a skilled subject librarian.....

... an agriculture student at Southeastern Kenya University doesn't....

... but either could cold email an Iowa State prof or Monsanto lab tech to ask about what the coolest new trends in legume soil optimization are...

# *Activity time!*

1. Partner up !
2. Take a look at the information need (ask a follow-up questions if necessary)
3. Use your super-librarian-search powers; take a few minutes searching online for the email address of an expert that might help elucidate.