



**For Immediate Release**

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## **UMFK instrumental in UMS selection of Virtual Digital Reference System**

**Fort Kent** – The University of Maine at Fort Kent’s Blake Library staff has been instrumental in assisting the University of Maine System in the selection process of a virtual reference library solution for the seven University of Maine campuses located across the state. Docutek VRL*plus* was chosen through a competitive bid process conducted by a committee of library directors and reference librarians from each campus.

The library began using the Docutek software initially to test and compare it to other packages, then more as a beta site, over a year ago.

Sofia Birden, electronic and information resources librarian and Leslie Kelly, assistant director of the library, have been working with the e-referencing program for the past year. The testing was being done along with Susan Lowe, assistant dean of off-campus library services for the University of Maine System.

“Other campuses had the option to also test Docutek’s E-Reference package, and some campuses did test it off and on, but for the most part the majority of testing was completed by the off campus library services and UMFK who continued using the package on a regular basis,” said Birden.

UMFK Blake Library’s Ask-A-Librarian service allows the university and community patrons to obtain help from a librarian, in either a live mode or an email mode.

“Leslie and I recommended Docutek over the other packages due to, but not limited to the help feature for librarians, the search feature for patrons, the database of questions and answers garnered from transcripts that the librarian can edit and the co-browse feature,” said Birden.

“Co-browsing is a feature that allows the patron and librarian to use the browser at the same time. The co-browse feature came up quickly and worked well in most cases when Internet Explorer was used,” said Birden. “This is helpful because the librarian can instruct the patron on how to find a book or article while watching to see if they are taking the proper steps.”

Having an E-Reference package provides advantages to students and community patrons, on and off campus, by being available at a moments notice during the scheduled on-line times. It allows the Blake Library staff the ability to visually show the patron how to find a book, article, or answer on the web, without them having to come into the library.

“We are not encouraging people to not use the library, but sometimes the patrons, even our students on campus, are unable to come in to get our help. We want to take the library to them,” said Birden.

Many times students or community patrons call the librarian for help in using the databases, URSUS (the library on-line catalog), electronic reserves, and e-mail, however they only have one telephone line and have to write down the instructions, hang up, try the instructions out, and call back if the instructions don't work. This is time consuming for the patron and the librarian.

The E-Reference package allows the library to help the patron on-line. The librarian “chats” live with the patron and helps solve the problem right away. This saves valuable time for both parties.

The e-mail mode service allows patrons to send in their questions by e-mail and a reply is usually received within 24 hours. This service is helpful when the live mode is unavailable or the question is a more lengthy research question.

Features of Docutek VRL*plus* that appealed to the University of Maine System selection committee included the co-browser, the overall affordability of the product, the ease of setting-up new accounts, email reference support, the breadth of statistical reporting, the “create-your-own” bookmark feature for students, the ability to create scripted virtual reference replies and the ability to generate session transcripts for reuse.

“We have a good rapport with Docutek already,” said Birden. “We use their Electronic Reserves package, the use of which has grown tremendously this semester, and Docutek has always been an excellent service oriented company.”

More than 31,000 students across the University of Maine System will have access to Docutek VRL*plus*. Many of these students are involved in distance learning programs in which the existence of a virtual reference librarian is becoming a necessity.

Founded in 1995, Docutek is a leader in e-learning collaboration and communications solutions for K-12, higher education and libraries. Docutek is the maker of Docutek ERes, the market leading electronic reserves software, in use on over 300 college campuses worldwide. Docutek's mission is to enhance education by making online learning simple.