

# Question Box

An Open Mind  
Project



## Overview

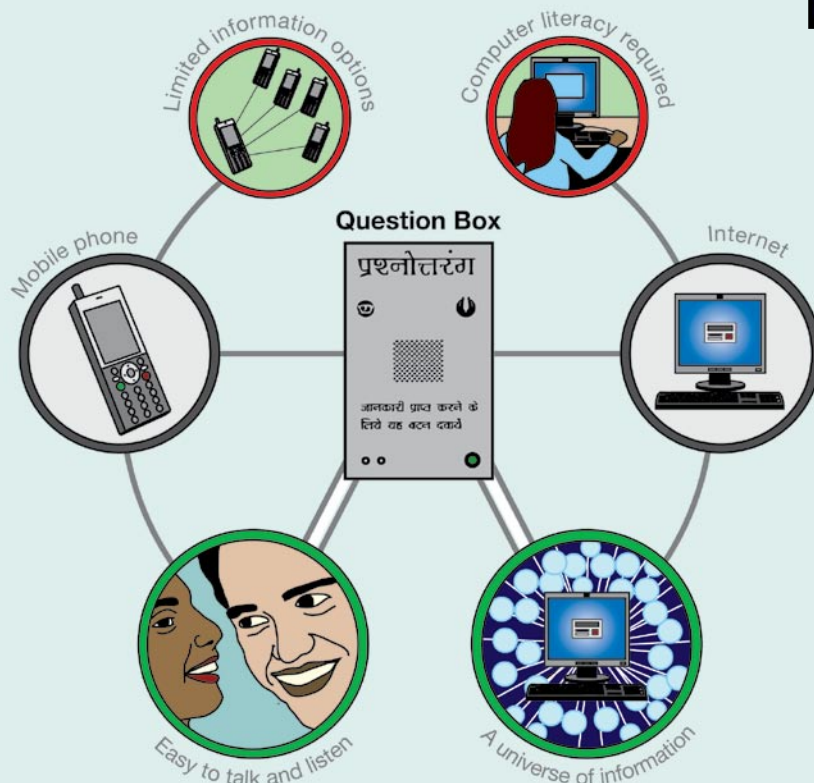
Question Box Project is a solution that brings the power of the Internet to those who will likely not have access any time soon, perhaps even in their lifetime.

Question Boxes are phone-based hotlines manned by a live Operator that allow users to ask most any question searchable on the Internet. This simple and innovative system relies on verbal communication rather than written, is very easy to use, and by its presentation offers a very low barrier to exploration and access.

Question Boxes are designed to be appropriate, simple technology. They are metal, intercom-like boxes with a green power button, a microphone and a speaker. Users push the button and are connected via phone to the Operator. The users ask questions and the Operator searches for the answer.

The inside of the Question Box is simply an altered regular or mobile telephone, running off existing, infrastructure. The Operator is connected via telephone, and uses a normal computer to search the Internet for answers and to maintain a log of all calls. On occasion, s/he uses a calculator. The Operator in the pilots was a young woman working from home who had computer training.

Question Box was conceptualized by Open Mind, a US nonprofit. TNI, a research arm of NIIT Delhi, has handled pilot project implementation.



Question Box takes advantage of the enormous informational resources of the Internet and the enormous accessibility and reach of telephone networks. It brings Internet information via a call-on-demand human intermediated service.

Less than 5% of Indians are active Internet users, sharing only 9 million Internet subscriptions as of late 2007.

In contrast, mobile phone access and usage is exploding across India and the rest of the developing world. Indians are adding over 8 million new mobile subscriptions monthly.

People worldwide can and do transition from face-to-face communications to intermediated communication. However, mobile phones are limited by the number of people one knows to call.

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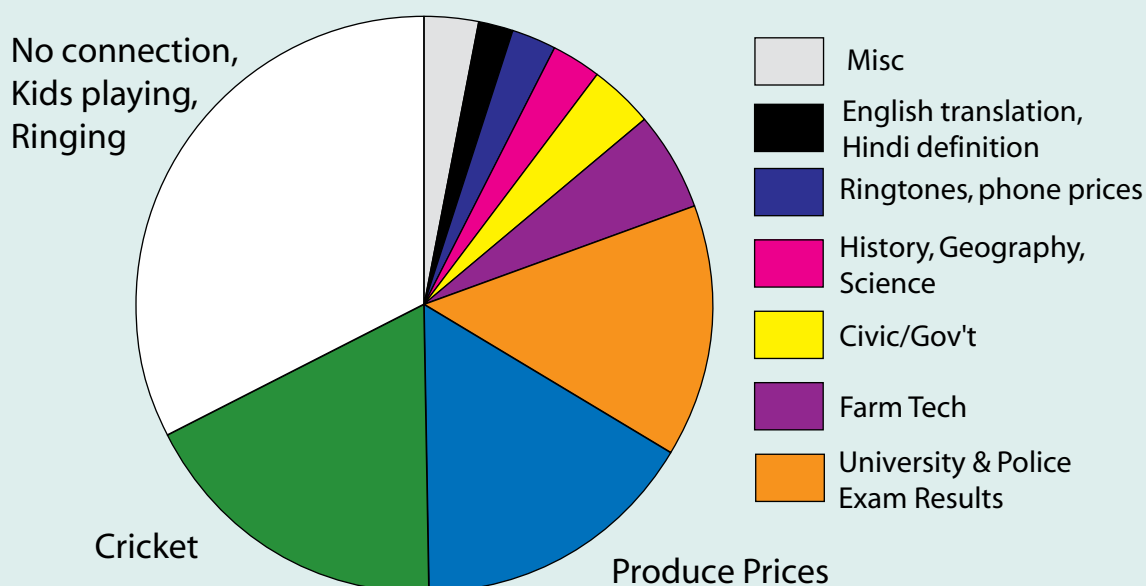
## Data

Users quickly explored Question Box's possibilities. The first users were schoolchildren asking math questions, but quickly farmers, university exam-takers and cricket lovers began taking advantage of the service. Over time, people started asking about codes for free mobile ringtones and vegetable prices in other cities. Most questions were fact-based, although a few people asked the Operator's opinion.

On average, the Operator spent five minutes per query, although during cricket games the time went down to one minute as everyone asked about the match score. While people sometimes rang the Operator and then ran away, no one was reported discourteous.

Most users were 12-30 years old and male. Females tended to be school-age, as the women in the villages avoid public spaces. We look forward to seeing how providing a direct-dial number affects the demographics.

## Question Topics



## Sample Questions

Gender	Age	Used QB before?	What was the question?	Response	Source
F	14	N	Square root of 25	i am giving ans=5	i was not search anywhere.
M	14	N	Lona related to which sports?	i was serching lona sports. and it is related to kabbadi.	<a href="http://www.goindiago.com/sports/kabaddi/kabaddi1.htm">www.goindiago.com/sports/kabaddi/kabaddi1.htm</a>
M	16	Y	He asked me India vs Australia match score.	i replied him ,match score india vs Australia,INDIA=210/5Overs 30	<a href="http://www.action8cricket.com/Watch_Live_Cricket_Score.htm">www.action8cricket.com/Watch_Live_Cricket_Score.htm</a>
F	25	N	She asked me pumpkin price of ghaziabad?	I replied her pumpkin price is 320 rs/quintel.	<a href="http://agmarknet.nic.in/SearchCmmMkt.asp">http://agmarknet.nic.in/SearchCmmMkt.asp</a>
M	30	N	He asked me the information of LLB entrance form of ccs university declared	i was giving the ans no LLB entrance form not declared	<a href="http://ccsum.com/result/result.asp">http://ccsum.com/result/result.asp</a>

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## Way Forward

Question Box Project's top priority is to develop and pilot the next generation of Question Boxes. We are beginning to develop mobile phone based Question Boxes that run on solar power. They need to be engineered and proven to withstand use in challenging environments.

Following hardware development, our next step is to conduct a larger pilot, installing several hundred and possibly thousands of Question Boxes in order to understand:

- The mechanics of a mass hardware deployment and ongoing maintenance
- the economics of running the service at a larger scale
- Research Question Box use in new demographics and contexts
- How to train and coordinate a team of Operators, comparing call center vs. home-based options
- Develop a backend system to collect data in a centralized location, track hours, monitor call quality, etc.
- Experiment with willingness to pay



## Contact

Open Mind

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