

# Study finds you get what you pay for with online Q & A sites

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A new study by University of Minnesota computer science and engineering researchers revealed that the answer quality provided by online question-and-answer Web sites, such as Yahoo! Answers and Google Answers, depends on two factors -- how much you pay and how many people contribute to your answer.

The results of the study are reported in the academic research paper titled “Predictors of Answer Quality in Online Q&A Sites.” The paper was published in the Association for Computing Machinery’s 2008 Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems (CHI 2008) proceedings, and presented at the conference in Florence, Italy, April 8.

The University of Minnesota study posed 126 questions across a variety of Q&A sites and found that paying \$10 or more to get your question answered at the now-closed Google Answers site yielded the highest-quality answers as judged by a panel of evaluators. These answers were long and detailed, with many links to source material.

Surprisingly the Web site Yahoo! Answers, which provides answers for free, performed as well as Google Answers when the fee was low (\$3) and outperformed reference librarians and an “ask-an-expert” site. Researchers attributed this success to the large online community that contributes to that site’s answers.

University of Minnesota researchers involved in the study include computer science and engineering professor Joseph Konstan and

graduate student Max Harper. Their study examined a variety of questions eliciting facts, opinions and advice on topics spanning entertainment, technology and business. Examples of some of the questions posted are:

-- Which actress has the first female line in a talking movie" I found on Wikipedia that Al Jolson had the male line, but I can't find any record of which female had the first line.

-- What is the best technique for making BBQ spare ribs" I'll cook it if you can find me a recipe that's really worth the time and effort.

Of the findings, Konstan said, "Solutions that simply direct questions to a single individual don't achieve results as well as those that open the question and answers to a larger community."

To view this paper visit: [www.grouplens.org/node/243](http://www.grouplens.org/node/243) .

Source: University of Minnesota

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