

# Go Ask Alice! Over the Years

- 1993 — GAA! is born and accessible on Columbia's campus intranet
- 1994 — GAA! goes global on the Internet
- 1996 — 1000<sup>th</sup> Q&A published
- 1997 — Syndication program begins
- 1997 — GAA! cited in U.S. Supreme Court case supporting free speech on the Internet
- 1998 — The Go Ask Alice! Book of Answers is published
- 1998 — HEDIR Award
- 1998 — First website makeover
- 2001 — Get Alice! In Your Box e-mail newsletter is launched
- 2002 — GAA! partners with MTV to address sexual health
- 2004 — Website gets another makeover (10 year anniversary)
- 2006 — Formal Q&A review and update process begins
- 2007 — GAA! wins NASPA Grand Gold Award
- 2007 — ACHA Best Practices in College Health Award
- 2009 — GAA! averages 17 million hits per week and has over 42,000 subscribers to weekly email



## Why is Go Ask Alice! a Necessary Resource?

**People search online for health information.**

"Many students reported that the internet was their primary general information source. Information sources were defined ...in terms of previous experience of the source, saliency of the available information, and credibility of the source (defined in terms of expertise, trustworthiness and empathy)."

Source: Gray, et. al., 2005, *Social Science & Medicine*

**Online health information needs to be reliable, believable, and accurate.**

At Columbia, 75 to 80% of students search online for their health information, although only 23% of students find online health information to be believable.

Source: Columbia University ACHA-NCHA, Spring 2006

"Furthermore, through counseling-center Web pages, students can link to self-help Web sites such as Go Ask Alice!, U-Lifeline, and Counseling Center Village. These sites offer comprehensive information about eating disorders, relationships, suicide, roommate conflicts, stress management, and other various self-help techniques."

Source: Sanchez-Page, 2006, *Counseling Psychologist*

A study & poster presentation from Stanford University stated "practitioners should be aware of myths on 'reputable health websites' and actively debunk them..."

Source: Tolani & Yen, 2009

## User and Media Response to Go Ask Alice!

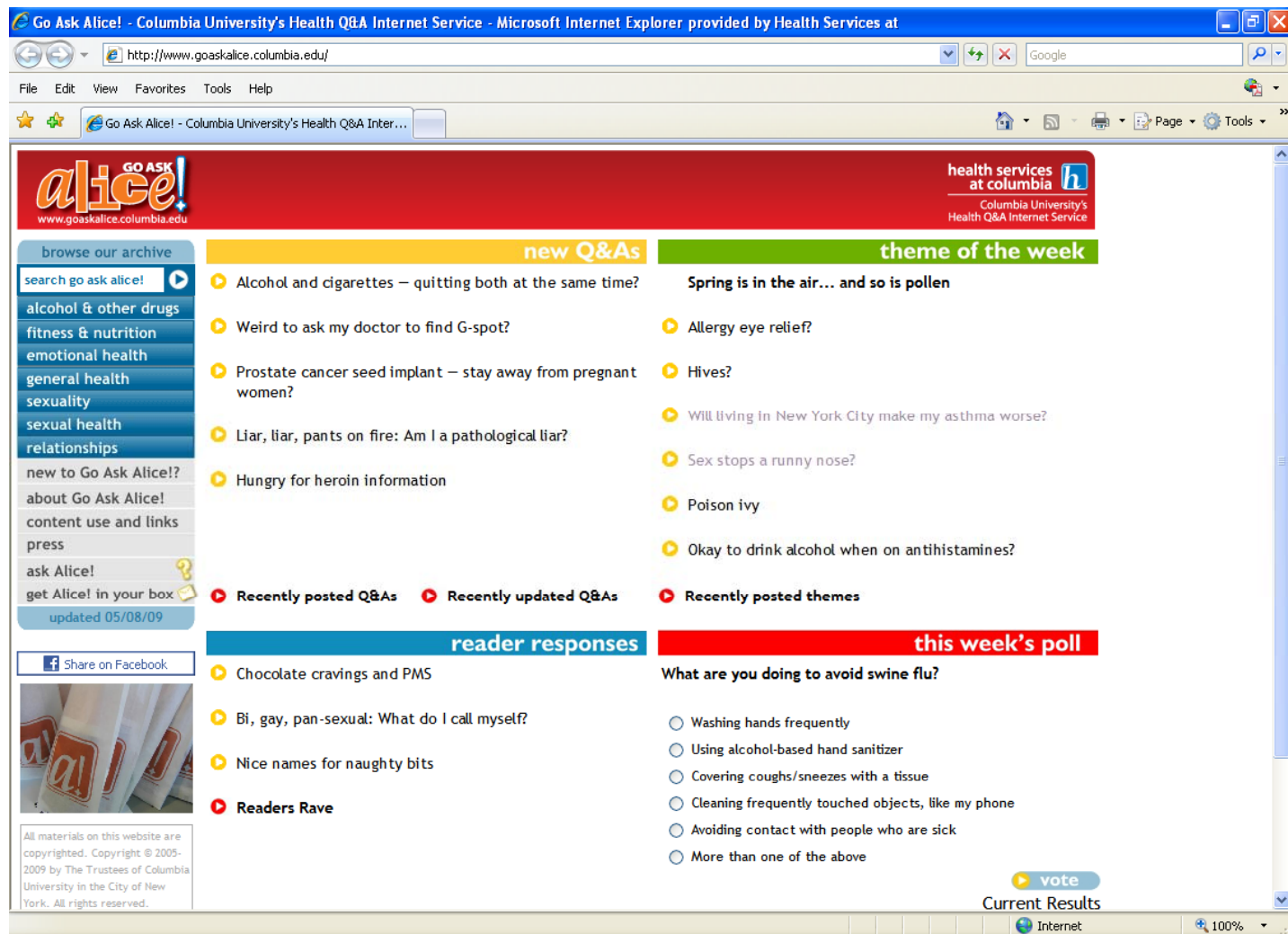
- Students participating in focus groups at Columbia
  - like the site because it "feels like talking to a friend... you would not normally talk in that way to a health professional."
  - like the Q&A format, which they think makes the content seem more personal, comforting, and fun.
- "Ask your most awkward questions with complete privacy. The answers are frank, comprehensive, and scrupulously researched." *Rolling Stone*
- "I have been trying for months to get a straight answer about low HDL levels. Your explanation was clear and actually gave information about what to eat to raise HDL levels. Thank you so much — I'll be coming back." *GAA! user comment*

**"Yen's research suggests ... that the most reliable sites are: Go Ask Alice, a question-and-answer service maintained by Columbia University..."**

Source: Stanford University News Release available at [http://med.stanford.edu/news\\_release/s/2009/april/teen-sex.html](http://med.stanford.edu/news_release/s/2009/april/teen-sex.html)

# Evolution and management of an online, high-traffic health Q&A resource: Go Ask Alice! from 1993 to 2009

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## MISSION

Go Ask Alice! works to provide readers with reliable, accurate, accessible, culturally competent information and a range of thoughtful perspectives so that they can make responsible decisions concerning their health and well-being.

## What Makes Go Ask Alice! Run?

### Curious readers!

**Questions from readers** (500 or more per week), which require medically accurate, informative, non-judgmental responses that encourage critical thinking, responsible decision-making, and engagement with personal health.

### 10+ staff, 100+ hours

**Over ten professional and student staff members** who spend some or all of their work time reading, researching, writing, editing, reviewing, and/or updating GAA! questions and answers. This amounts to about 100 hours of staff time per week, or 2.5 FTEs.

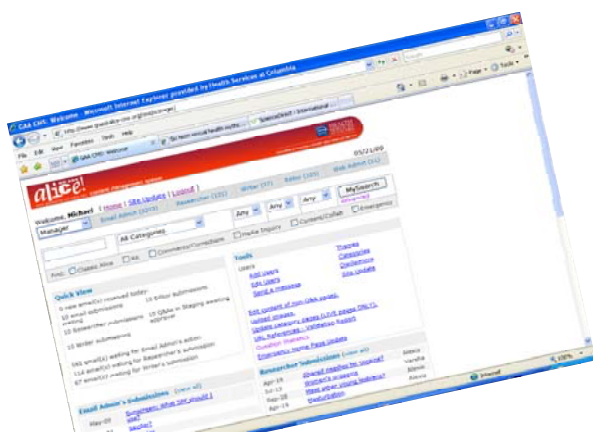
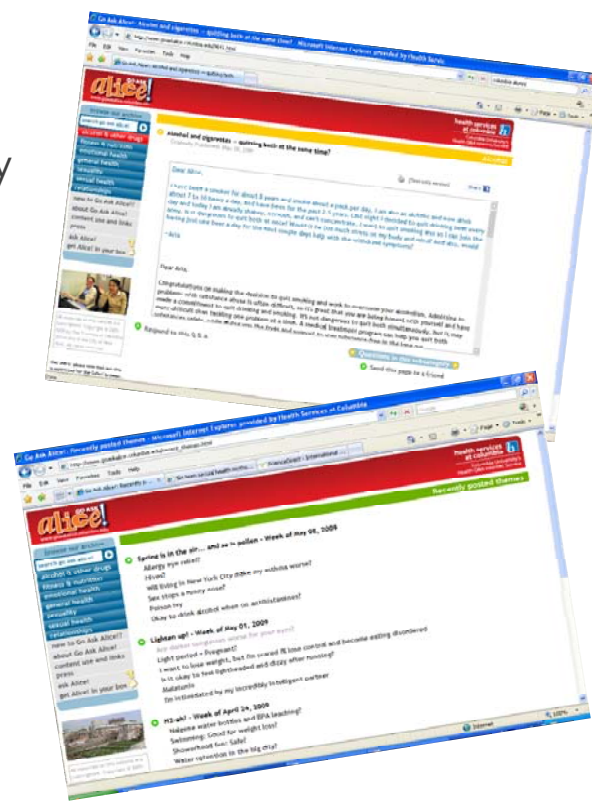
Go Ask Alice! also requires:

- A home (server, host, and URLs)
- A customized, web-based content management system (CMS) that allows staff to edit and publish new and updated questions
- A keeper (maintenance person and consultant who is available to provide regular website upkeep and build special enhancements that improve efficiency and/or user experience)
- An online email newsletter management system for sending weekly emails to 42,000+ subscribers

### Technology

# Go Ask Alice! Outputs


- 5 new and/or significantly updated Q&As each Friday
- Weekly theme Q&As and bi-weekly poll — themes and polls tie into current events, national health observances, pop culture, and breaking health news
- Emergency preparedness plan — GAA! helps communicate recommendations, critical information, resources, and support to Columbia students and the Internet during an emergency
- Q&A review and update plan — every Q&A is reviewed at least every 3 years (or as information changes) to ensure health content is up-to-date



## Challenges and Controversies

- GAA! is not an individual response site; cannot respond directly to readers who submit questions
- Managing the volume of questions — read and consider responding to all submitted questions, but publish less than 1% of questions submitted
- Preserving balance of issues on published site
- Managing liability concerns
- Allocating resources and staff time
- Technology changing faster than ability to respond with limited resources
- Some people like Go Ask Alice!, some people don't:
  - Supreme court cites GAA! in case supporting free speech on the Internet
  - American Library Association (ALA) endorses GAA! for publishing medically accurate, respectful, non-judgmental information about sex
  - "Dr. Laura" publicly fights against the ALA recommendation and numerous libraries block access to the site

## Ways you can use Go Ask Alice!

- Link directly to Go Ask Alice! from your organizational or personal website. Simply create a standard text link to [www.goaskalice.columbia.edu](http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu) within your content, no permission needed.
- Become a Fan or Post Go Ask Alice! Q&As to your Facebook account to share with your networks. When on GAA!, look for the  button above each Q&A or on the homepage to share the question with your friends, colleagues, students, and others in your network.
- License Go Ask Alice! content for use in your newsletters, textbooks, and other print materials. Speak with an Alice! staff member for more details and information on pricing.



## Contact Us!

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