ALTERNATIVES TO FILTERS

With so many problems associated with the use of Internet content filters, librarians, understandably, want to find a feasible alternative. This chapter presents various options to consider.

Though this report series is called Library Technology Reports, many, if not most of the filter alternatives presented are not technology-based. As Peter G. Neumann and Lauren Weinstein noted, "Freedom of speech issues are particularly thorny, and seemingly among the first to be sublimated by commercial interests and seekers of simplistic answers…We must seek constructive alternatives, most likely non-technical in nature" (Neumann, 1999). As was mentioned earlier, despite our desire for an easily, technological silver bullet—some device that screens objectionable content without infringing on First Amendment rights—there is no such thing.

This search by librarians for a simple, mechanical solution is understandable, for the marketing culture teaches that some product, pill, or machine can be found or made to solve whatever problem occurs. As columnist Robert Reno said, we should "never, ever underestimate the power of technology to oversell itself" (Reno, 2000). Internet content filtering technology may be one such technology that has been oversold to the public. For analyzing all the complex information, data, images, and sounds that make up the Internet, no technology exists today (and may never be possible) that can perform the complicated tasks of the human brain. Short of this brainpower, consider the following alternatives.

Privacy Screens

The use of computer monitor privacy screens as an alternative is offered first because it is one of the quickest and most effective devices available to limit unintended viewing of offensive material. Many of the complaints librarians receive about offensive material stem from one patron's inadvertent glancing at another patron's computer monitor screen. Keeping passers-by from seeing another patron's screen with mechanical filters goes a long way toward solving many problems.

As James Huff has written eloquently in American Libraries (Huff, 1999), computer monitors have transformed a previously private activity—reading—into a public activity—broadcasting. As he puts it, "people who access material online [in the library] are doing two things simultaneously: They are accessing the material and also displaying it where others may see it. Access is an intellectual freedom issue, while displaying the material to others is a matter of behavior."

If the person viewing the material had been reading an old-fashioned print and paper book, no complaint would have been lodged because no one would have known about the material causing offense. Now that reading has become a public event, at least to the extent that it can be seen by those within foot-traffic range, it has become a source of problems for librarians. This is especially true for youth and teenage viewing and reading. What young boys used to do sequestered in the library shelves (find books with "dirty" pictures) they are now doing in the public reference room. As Huff categorizes it, they are broadcasting along with reading.

Privacy screens on public area computers provide one solution to this broadcasting feature.

The use of privacy screens was encouraged in a legal opinion concerning library filtering, Mainstream Loundon v. Board of Trustees (24 F Supp. 2d 553 (E.D. Va. 1998). In this case, "a better solution [than filters] for accommodating the sensibilities of other patrons is to install privacy screens that shield patrons from having one patron's Internet choices imposed upon them" (as quoted in Peck, 2000). One of the reasons the judge struck down the library's filtering policies was that "the library had not even considered less restrictive means, including privacy screens…" (as quoted in Jenner & Block Memorandum, 2000).

Computer monitor screens are also recommended as a protection for libraries from sexual harassment charges by library employees. Library legal expert Robert S. Peck recommends, "To be safe from liability…steps to accommodate a complaining employee are advisable, such as the installation of privacy screens that would reduce a complaining employee's exposure to offensive material and reduce the chances that such material could pervasively affect the library environment" (Peck, 2000).

Privacy screens also offer another advantage to users: privacy. Medical information, job searches, consumer credit troubles are just a few of the many research topics users would prefer to keep to themselves without sharing their searches with everyone walking by.

Libraries Using Alternative

"Many libraries have experimented successfully with privacy screens," says James Huff. (Huff, 1999). One library found them to be so popular they were stolen the first day they were installed, which some may take to be a positive sign about this alternative. The Monroe County Public Library is one of several libraries that report using them. The Arapahoe Library District in Littleton, Colo., tried them, but reported they interfered with group computer use (Schneider, 1997).

Price and Sources

Computer monitor privacy screen filters are readily available through office supply catalogs, computer supply sources, and library supply catalogs. Among the manufacturers of privacy screens are Rubbermaid, 3M, and Fellowes. Privacy screens are available either as flat screens or contoured around the computer monitor. Recently privacy filters have been produced for notebook computers, along with standard monitors.

View some samples of privacy screens at www.mmm.com, www.rubbermaid.com, and www.fellowes.com.

Prices for privacy screen filters range from $129 to $199 per monitor. For libraries with many public workstations, this would be a sizable expense; however, it may be a small price to pay for reduced patron complaining about others' offensive material.

Advantages

One of the major advantages of this alternative is that it reduces exposure to offensive material without compromising intellectual freedom. It also helps protect library employees from inadvertent exposure to graphic sexual images. This could help reduce employee claims that the library is subjecting them to a "hostile work environment" in violation of federal sexual harassment protections (Peck, 2000).

Other advantages include that they are readily available, easy to install, and require minimal maintenance.

Disadvantages

One of the biggest shortcomings of privacy screen filters is that they are still clumsy and expensive for libraries with several public workstations (Huff, 1999). Some libraries report problems securing the screens to the monitors, getting dirt and smudges on the screens, and making viewing difficult (Schneider, 1997).

Privacy screens, of course, do not offer any protection to keep children from viewing harmful material; indeed, they may contribute to, and even increase, children's accessing of material adults believe they should not be viewing. One librarian suggested anecdotal evidence that the addition of privacy screens may increase adult viewing of inappropriate material, once they realize the privacy they have been afforded.

Future Improvements Needed

"What we really need," writes James Huff, is "a device that is cheap and could become a standard part of all public workstations, much as a mouse is now, and that would provide the option of private viewing of the display, in a the same way that headphones provide the options of private listening" (Huff, 1999). Such a device could be embedding into the computer monitor or software. Much as users can now instantly change the font or color being displayed, such a feature would allow patrons to instantly transform the display format to "privacy mode" if they were viewing something they would rather keep hidden from public view. Similar to "boss buttons" that allow employees to kill the solitaire game when the boss comes in, such a feature would help patrons keep their private search behavior to themselves.

Another emerging technology that may solve the privacy problem for computer users is headgear with monitors embedded in the headgear. Though currently used for video games, once these devices are adapted for general computer use, reading would return to a private rather than public activity (Beaubrun, J., personal communication, Jan. 11, 2001).

Computer Positioning

There are ways to position computers, and most importantly the monitors, that enhance patron privacy. As with privacy screens, this type of alternative keeps inadvertent viewing of offensive material from unsuspecting eyes. As Karen G. Schneider said, "Librarians often discuss strategically arranging computers to allow patrons more privacy and to prevent passers-by from being forced to see what users are viewing" (Schneider, 1997).

Most libraries try to provide privacy with their computer positioning, but in some libraries the opposite tack is taken; computers are kept in the open to deter inappropriate viewing. More on this option is discussed in the sections dealing with tap-on-the-shoulder policies and law enforcement. This section addresses computer positioning strategies intended to increase privacy.

Privacy can be enhanced through many techniques. Some libraries attempt to provide users privacy by segregating computers with full

Internet access in a separate room. Others purchase individual carrels that provide users with private screening. Monitors can be arranged so only those seated in front of the computer are able to see the screen. Some wooden computer workstations come with an option for different-sized side panels separating the individual units. Selecting the tallest option provides an attractive divider from the next user.

Recessing the monitor both provides privacy and places the user in what some experts believe is the best ergonomic position. Lowering the monitor below eye level, rather than at or above eye level, has shown to relieve neck, back, wrist, and eyestrain. This configuration is also beneficial for classroom instruction since no monitor obstructs the student's view of the instructor.

Libraries Using Alternative

Many new library computer instruction labs are being equipped with recessed monitor arrangements, but this type of furniture is less prevalent in public areas. Because reference rooms already exist and are not constructed anew, they do not require the purchase of new furniture to house the computers, which are usually just plunked down on standard tables. The new computer lab at the Johnson and Wales College Library in Miami is an example of a lab that successfully employs recessed monitors. Barry University in Miami Shores, Florida uses clustered wooden carrels with tall divider panels to provide increased privacy.

Price and Sources

Repositioning computers by rearranging tables or carrels can be one of the least expensive alternatives. For libraries that must purchase new furniture to enhance privacy, the price can be high. Recessed-monitor types of units range from about $399 for a single unit to $800 to 900 per unit for a modular classroom arrangement.

Libraries can obtain recessed computer workstation furniture through most office, computer, or library supply catalogs. Among the producers of ergonomic workstations are Nova, ErgoScape, Achieva/Grolen, and Paravision. Workstations can be obtained as standalone units, in multistation rows or as stand-up units. Most recessed computer furniture comes with flip-top viewing mechanisms, wrist pads, retractable keyboards, and adjustable monitors and is available in many colors and wood textures.

View samples at www.novadesk.com.

Advantages

For libraries that can re-arrange furniture to enhance privacy, cost is one of the biggest advantages. For libraries using recessed monitors, correct ergonomics is another advantage. An added bonus is that these arrangements tend to be more esthetically pleasing than the standard computer-box-on-the-table setup. Having been specially designed for computers, recessed monitor furniture usually allows for hidden wires. Many units fold down the monitor when not in use, allowing for added workspace when not being used as a computer.

Disadvantages

Recessed monitors are not conducive to group computer use. They are also expensive. As with privacy screen filters, this alternative does not protect children from accessing inappropriate material and may actually

enable them to do so more easily. (See above.) Some patrons find recessed monitors and strategically positioned furniture annoying and uncomfortable.

David Burt, President of Filtering Facts, a group that favors the use of library filters, claims that this alternative "creates peep show booths for children, except there's no slot for quarters because taxpayers have already paid the quarter" (www.filteringfacts.org, August 16, 1999, as quoted in Peck, 2000).

Future Improvements Needed

For this option to be seriously considered by most libraries, the price of recessed-monitor furniture would need to come down dramatically.

A major redesign of computer monitor screens in the future would also affect this option. As discussed in the Future section, miniaturization is already reducing the size of computers to palm-size devices. The next wave of technology may eliminate the need to position tabletop monitors by replacing them with smaller—and more private—reading devices.

Acceptable Use Policies

This alternative to filters is listed near the beginning because of its importance for libraries. Many experts believe the adoption of a comprehensive library Internet acceptable use policy is the first tool a library should employ to ensure appropriate Internet use by adults and children in a library setting. Several bills proposed by Congress would require that all libraries offering Internet access adopt such statements.

Acceptable use policies establish rules regarding the types of materials that may be accessed, along with enforcement means in the event of the violation of the established rules. The COPA Commission (2000) listed acceptable use polices as their second major recommendation, after public education campaigns. The Commission found the widespread adoption of these policies by libraries "are a non-technological technology or method for protecting children online" (COPA Commission, 2000).

ALA "strongly encourages all libraries to adopt and implement a written Internet use policy…" (ALA Toolkit, 2000). As described in ALA's document "Guidelines and Considerations for Developing a Public Library Internet Use Policy" (see Appendix), libraries should adopt a comprehensive written Internet policy that "among other things, sets forth reasonable time, place, and manner restrictions [and] expressly prohibits any use of library equipment to access material that is obscene, child pornography or "harmful to minors" (consistent with any applicable state or local law)" (Peck, 2000).

Ideally, policies should be simple and avoid jargon. Before the policy is adopted several constituencies should discuss and debate them (ALA Toolkit, 2000). Some librarians say the deliberations that surround the policy's adoption are the real benefit to emerge from pursuing this option. Frequently discussions within these forums explore the complexities involved in Internet use, enlightening participants about how difficult it is to define, regulate, and enforce certain kinds of Internet use.

Once adopted, the library's legal counsel should review them, and once approved, the library should widely publicized them. Allen C. Benson recommends "this can be accomplished by publishing disclaimers on home

pages, offering Internet advisories, and posting notices on computer monitors" (Benson, 1997).

Prices and Sources

Price is not a problem with this option, other than the expense involved in staff's time spent crafting and discussing policies.

Because they are such a key component of library Internet use, ALA and several other sources provide a wealth of information on drafting and implementing effective policy statements. The ALA publication Libraries and the Internet Toolkit provides detailed information on creating such documents, along with sample policies. Another source to consult when crafting an Internet policy, and one that a library may want to incorporate into the final policy, is the ALA statement "Access to Electronic Information, Services and Networks."

Available online at www.ala.org/Internettoolkit.

Many libraries publish their policies in print and online, and they are encouraged to send copies to ALA. Two excellent sample policies, duplicated in the Internet Toolkit publication, are from the Long Beach Public Library and the Milwaukee Public Library. ALA can provide additional sample policies, as well.

Another excellent resource on acceptable use policies is Mark Smith's Internet Policy Handbook for Libraries (Smith, 1999). Along with a detailed discussion of the policy development process, the book provides samples of public, academic, and school library policies. Academic librarians may want to consult the acceptable use standards section of the National Association of College and University Attorneys publication Computer Access: Selected Legal Issues Affecting Higher Education (Sermersheim, 1998).

Advantages

Since this alternative has no product cost, the low price is a great advantage. There is no technology to learn or support. Policies come with no moving parts that will fall off or break. As mentioned earlier, getting all interested parties together to discuss a policy can be a tremendous advantage to the library.

Disadvantages

Despite all the advantages to this alternative, some libraries find the adoption of a comprehensive policy is not enough to deal with inappropriate Internet use, especially among children. As reported in testimony submitted to the COPA Commission, the Greenville County Library found that, even combined with privacy desks and a formal 'tap on the shoulder policy,' "the current Internet Use policy is a failure…" (Greenville, no date).

When done properly, the adoption of an Internet use policy is—and should be—time-consuming, since all interested parties are encouraged to participate in its adoption.

Future Improvements Needed

Since Internet use in libraries is ever-changing, Internet acceptable use policies must be constantly changing as well. A mechanism to update and revise the policy should be included in the comprehensive policy statement.

Family Contracts

Though this alternative primarily involves home computer use, rather than institutional use, it is included in this report because family contracts could be modified for use within a library setting (as discussed below). Family contracts are similar to library Internet acceptable use policies in that they both delineate allowable and prohibited computer uses. Where acceptable use policies describe allowable Internet use in the library, family contracts are usually directed at home use.

A family contract is an agreement within a family for "online rules of the road" concerning family members' use of the Internet. Family contracts can stipulate rules concerning the types of sites that may be accessed, prohibitions against giving out private information, rules about chatrooms, purchasing restrictions, and so on.

As described in the industry-sponsored Web site GetNetWise, a family contract "goes a long way toward helping kids have constructive experiences on the Net." The Web site explains that "some families print and post the contract by the computer, others elect to have both parents and children sign the document."

www.getnetwise.com

Libraries Using Alternative

Because family contracts are meant for home use, no libraries are known to make use of them within a library setting.

Prices and Sources

As with the adoption of an acceptable use policy, there is no price associated with this alternative, other than the time spent preparing and discussing the document.

Cyberangels, SafeKids.com, and Smart Parent.com provide examples of good family contracts. The text of the sample family contract of the Children's Partnership is provided at the GetNetWise site.

Advantages

As with library acceptable use policies, family contracts help engender discussion among family members about what should and should not be done through Internet communication. Some families report the conversation about this topic is as helpful, if not more helpful, than the document ultimately produced.

Disadvantages

When I described this alternative to one group of parents, several people broke into laughter upon hearing this proposed solution. "As if that is going to work," chortled one burly father. "It will probably have the opposite reaction," cautioned another. "After you spell out what the kids should and should not do, they will do exactly the opposite."

The voluntary aspect of this alternative—relying on the honesty of children—might make this alternative of limited value. Though it could be used effectively in some families, its effectiveness could not be expected to be universal.

As far as libraries are concerned, family contracts, as currently constituted, do not lend themselves to institutional use but could be altered to do so in the future.

Future Improvements Needed

Though the contract would be cumbersome to administer, libraries could play a part in implementing family contracts for children covered by such contracts when the children are using the library. A system could be implemented whereby families would need to present their family Internet contracts to gain access to library computer stations. The children's Internet use would then be limited to the provisions of the contract.

Many libraries are implementing, or considering the installation of patron access control and smart cards systems (see that section). In the future family contracts could be integrated into these systems.

Public Education

Public Education is the number one recommendation of the COPA Commission to protect children accessing the Internet online. Public libraries must be "essential components of this effort" (COPA Commission, 2000). To assist in this effort the Commission recommends, among other activities, that block grants be made to states to create and distribute materials appropriate for Internet safety for schools and libraries.

Likewise, ALA believes "the best protection for children is to teach them to use technology properly and to make good choices. The key here is education" (ALA Toolkit, 2000). To meet this goal, ALA has produced an effective educational tool entitled Librarian's Guide to Cyberspace, including safety tips, an overview of the Internet, and sites compiled by kids.

An online version is available at www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/guide.html.

Libraries Using Alternative

Huge numbers of libraries offer instructional programs on how to search safely online. As an example of the types of programs available, consider the following:

The Canton (Mich.) Public Library requires children and parents to attend a half-hour "Cyber Orientation Session," with a list of "Cyber Rules" before the children receive a sticker for computer access. The Nashville Public Library offers classes designed for parents and children to work in pairs to learn safe Internet access. The Worthington (Ohio) Public Library is part of a community-based online safety campaign, and the Queens Borough Public Library provides Internet instruction in different languages (ALA Toolkit, 2000).

Prices and Sources

Sources of information about these programs are readily available through ALA. Because these programs are staff-intensive they do require a substantial commitment of staff resources.

Advantages

Public education programs represent the essence of good librarianship. They are excellent public relations tools and help bring parents and children

together. Most experts believe educating children about what to do and not do online is really the best, and only, effective method for child safety.

Disadvantages

Public education can only go so far in its efforts to keep children safe online. Many critics say, though public education efforts can be expanded and improved, education can't eradicate the problem filters are intended to solve.

Future of Alternative

As the number-one recommendation of the COPA Commission, public education campaigns in libraries are sure to increase. If the block grants suggested by the Commission are implemented, model programs will be developed across the country.

Parental Consent Forms

[I]t's hard to think of a better Internet protection device" than parents being responsible for their children's Internet use, says Mick O'Leary in Online Magazine (O'Leary, 2000). ALA encourages libraries to encourage parental involvement in library online access. "Parents have the right to determine the level of access they believe is appropriate for their own child," writes the ALA in the points to consider in the debate over filters (ALA Toolkit, 2000).

The importance of parental consent is underscored by Neumann and Weinstein (1999): "Responsible parenting is not merely plopping kids down in front of a computer screen and depending on inherently defective filtering technology touted as allowing them to be educated while protecting them. Parents need to reassert guidance roles that they often abdicate."

Alternatives that incorporate parental consent have the support of groups who want to limit children's access to the Internet, as well as those in favor of First Amendment protections. Because this option is so popular, many libraries have begun requiring children to present parental permission slips before they can use the Internet. Others are looking into so-called smart-card devices encoded with parental authority (see that section).

Libraries Using Alternative

More than half the public libraries in California require a "parental signed consent form prior to allowing a child to use an Internet workstation," according to a survey reported in Library Journal (Rogers and Oder, 2000). At the Canton (Mich.) Public Library, parents and children must sign a "Cyber Kid Agreement" that explains the library's policy on children's Internet access, as well as attending a half-hour Cyber Orientation Session. One university library has a policy requiring a parental signature for anyone under the age of 18 to access the Internet (Trammell, R., personal e-mail communication, Dec. 21, 2000).

One library in Las Vegas used to require permission from parents for children to access the Internet computer, but they replaced this requirement with a filter, which they claim "now allows all kids access." One source explained, "It is censorship. We know that. But the benefits is we're giving more children more access to more material than we were before, when they were required to get permission from their parents…" (as quoted in "Filtering a good compromise," no date).

Prices and Sources

The only costs associated with permission slips are the administrative costs associated with implementing such a procedure. Since it can be staff-intensive, this could be a sizable investment.

Advantages

"Families are the first line of defense in raising and protecting children" online, claims the COPA Commission's Final Report (COPA, 2000). Parental consent forms are one of the most effective means to ensure this family involvement. Consent forms move filtering decisions from the library or community level to the individual parents, avoiding controversies at the local level. Parental consent forms are easy to administer and consistent with most existing library policies, which usually state parents are ultimately responsible for their children's choice of reading material. As a related benefit, parental consent forms encourage families' involvement with their children's online activity, another stated goal of the COPA Commission. (COPA, 2000).

Disadvantages

Along with the staff time and administrative costs involved in securing and enforcing parental consent forms, this alternative has legal impediments. When asked if libraries can legally require parental permission for children's Internet, library law expert Robert S. Peck responded that this solution "is constitutionally problematic and could conceivably subject a library to liability when a child uses a library terminal without a parent's permission" (Peck, 2000).

One of the problems with this option is that "children have substantial First Amendment rights," Peck wrote, "For purposes of the constitutional analysis, it would not matter that the student might obtain a permission slip, return home for a parent's signature, and then turn the slip in at the library to use an unfiltered terminal. Such delay and requiring permission to exercise First Amendment rights cannot be mandated by a public institution" (Peck, 2000).

Peck also sees problems with this option from the parent's point of view. Peck explains the danger this way, "A library that undertook such a program [of parental permission] would also stand in danger of being regarded as having entered a form of contract with the parents of the community that it would not permit minors to make unfiltered access of the Internet without the parents' written permission. When a child, as will inevitably happen, makes unfiltered use of library equipment to his or her parent's dismay, the parent might be able to sue on a legal theory of promissory estoppel for the library's breach of promise that children would not be permitted such access without parental permission."

Peck recommends that, instead of securing permission, libraries should make known to the parents that the library provides unlimited Internet access. "Most libraries require a parent, upon signing their child up for a library card, to take responsibility for the child's reading materials. This disclaimer of responsibility puts parents on notice that the library staff does not act in loco parentis, essentially in the parent's place, while the child is at the library. The disclaimer should be applied equally to Internet usage" (Peck, 2000).

Future Improvements Needed

Because children are accessing the Internet online, there should be some way to easily—and legally—secure permission from parents online. Smart card and patron authentication systems offer one solution, but require the administration of a separate card system. As of this writing, the major library circulation systems do not offer the ability for parents to indicate the level of Internet access they would like to provide to their children. Technologically it should be feasible for a feature to be added to these systems' circulation modules that could extend permission to children based on parental desires.

Patron Authentication and Smart Card Systems

When people think of Internet filters, they are usually referring to a device that restricts Internet content at a certain computer or computers. However, as filtering expert Karen Schneider sees it a "more interesting frontier" for filters, one that is "new turf for most vendors" is the area of user authentication (Schneider, 1997). Through roving profiles and custom configuration—options being added to new releases of computer systems (Beaubrun, J., personal communication, Jan. 11, 2001)—patron authentication systems can tailor computer access on an individual basis based on each user's (or a parent's) preferences.

PRAISE FOR SMART CARDS

One of the first libraries to use this technology through a smart-card system was the Gary Byker Memorial Library of Hudsonville, Mich. As described by Melissa Huisman, library director, the system installed is not a filtering device but an access control system. Unlike most filtering systems that are one-size-fits-all, "the smart card lets each individual decide upon their own level of Internet access. Parents can decide access levels by child, even allowing different levels for different children within the same family" (Huisman, M., personal communication, Dec. 19, 2000).

As implemented in most libraries, smart card and patron access control systems allow users to select their own and their children's access level from a variety of categories and levels of blocking, ranging from no filtering to full blocking that accesses only pre-approved sites. In most systems the library can decide the number of choices they want to make available to users and if they want to provide function blocking, such as chat access, as a patron option.

After the patron makes selections through a paper or online user profile form, the library transfers this information to a smart card or enters it into the patron access system. From then on, whenever the patron accesses the Internet, the computer authenticates patron identity and configures according to the desired restrictions. For patron selections requiring filtering, the system activates a preselected filtering product such as Bess, SurfWatch, Websense or X-Stop.

For systems using a smart card, information on their selections is encoded onto a card, which is swiped in the reader-device installed at each workstation. Another level of security, such as a password, can be required for computer access, in addition to swiping the card. Smart cards can be interfaced with most library circulation systems. Cards can be used as cash-management systems to pay fines, operate photocopiers, print stations, and so on. A photo option is available for libraries that prefer that additional level of security.

For patron access systems without smart cards, a dialogue box appears on the screen where the patron must input their library card number and password (or PIN number). Those systems that operate in conjunction with a library's circulation system will verify the patron against the circulation records and, if necessary, apply any age restrictions in place concerning Internet access. According to Dan Curtin, President of Comprise Technologies' the SAM (Smart Access Manager) Program works with any circulation system that operates with the 3M/SIP standard, including EpixTech's Horizon and Dynix systems, Innovative, and DRA's Classic. (Curtin, D., personal communication, Dec. 26, 2000) As with smart cards, a patron access system can be used as cash-management systems to pay fines, operate photocopiers, print stations, and so on.

Some smart cards and patron access systems offer a time-out option, so librarians are freed from the task of monitoring computer users' time limits. Erasing a user's search history and cache emptying when a user leaves are added options of these systems, though these features are now standard with the latest versions of most operating systems (Beaubrun, J. personal communication, Jan. 11, 2001).

Libraries Using Alternative

Smart cards and patron access systems for Internet access are relatively new in libraries, so the number of libraries using them are few but growing rapidly. Smart card systems will soon be installed in libraries in Texas, New York, South Carolina, and Michigan. The New Jersey Library Association is conducting a statewide investigation of this technology (Rogers and Oder, 1999).

One of the first known smart card systems in the United States was the Hickory (N.C.) Public Library, which used a smart card device to allow patrons Internet access. The Englewood Public Library in Colorado and the aforementioned Gary Byker Memorial Library in Hudsonville, Mich., upgraded the system by adding the option of letting users select their level of Internet access (Long, H., personal communication, Dec. 21, 2000). As a pioneer in this field, Hudsonville's library director Melissa Huisman has received many requests for more information about the system and is happy to provide additional information. Englewood's director, Hank Long, also said he would "be happy to share information, for there is not a simple answer here."

Reversing the system used in most libraries, the Aurora (Colo.) Public Library uses this alternative to unblock the filters mandated on their public access computers (Lawrence, K., personal communication, Jan. 12, 2001). Through anonymous passwords given to adults and to children with parental permission, individual computers can be unfiltered on an individual basis. Library services coordinator Kathy Lawrence has been surprised that only about 12 of their 4,000 personal computer users per month request passwords for full access, their designation for unfiltered access.

Sources and Prices

Many systems currently in use in libraries can be configured to provide customized access by location; however, the following products emphasize their ability to provide library users with Internet access control on a patron-by-patron basis, letting the patron choose their own level of Internet filtering, if any.

Reach Melissa Huisman via e-mail at hudmh@lakeland.lib.mi.us.

Long is one of the few librarians who has experience with two of the major smart card vendors. He can be reached at hlong@englewood.lib.co.us or 303-762-2572.

www.libraryguardian.com

Library Guardian
Swifteye, Inc.
200 Centreport Drive, Suite 200
Greensboro, NC, 27409.
Stephen Boyles, product manager (also the patent-holder and inventor)
888-287-6903 or 336-662-9933

www.comprisetechnologies.com

SAM
Comprise Technologies, Inc.
1026 Route 36
Navesink, NJ 07752
Dan Curtis, president
800-854-6822, 732-291-3600,

www.diebold.com

CS (Card Systems) Gold
Diebold, Inc.
818 Mulberry Rd., SE.
Canton, OH 44707-3256
Mark Reinart, marketing manager
800-300-1434

Webmanager Suite's I-Gear identifies itself as an Internet Content Management System allowing different access to different users.

info@sagebrushcorp.com

Sagebrush Corp.
3601 Minnesota Drive, Suite 550
Minneapolis, MN 55435
Erik Miller, internal product specialist
30-day free trial
800-533-5430

Prices for these systems vary widely because of the combination of additional hardware, reader devices, and annual maintenance fees. For an average library with about 20 public access personal computer workstations, the SAM system would be about $7,500 for the first year, with an annual licensing fee of 18% of that amount charged each subsequent year, according to President Dan Curtin (Curtin, D., personal communication, Dec. 26, 2000). Stephen Boyles, at the Library Guardian, says a system for an individual library with 20 personal computers would average $580 per computer the first year for software and under $100 per computer for the card reader device. The smart cards cost between $0.50 and $1 each. From the second year on the software maintenance would be about $250 per computer (Boyles, S., personal communication, Dec. 19, 2000). Erik Miller said the I-Gear product would be $370 the first year and $200 the second year (Miller, E., personal communication, Dec. 19, 2000). Libraries interested in this technology should contact vendors directly for a quote for their own library because of the wide price range.

Advantages

"This system has solved a lot of headaches and the stress levels have gone down a lot," Melissa Huisman says. She cites among the biggest advantages the fact that filtering decisions have moved from the library to the individual patrons and parents. Giving parents responsibility for their children and allowing them choices for each of their children is one of the biggest plusses. This solution also is not tied to a specific terminal, enabling

all computers to be used at once. The automatic time-out feature is another advantage she noted. Kathy Lawrence, whose library provides anonymous passwords to unblock filters, cites among the system's advantages the ability to "easily and anonymously give patrons full access, with no hassle and complete freedom of information."

Disadvantages

The administrative burden and added time to complete a user profile form can be disadvantages to this system. There is also added time constraints on parents, who must complete profile forms for each child. Huisman notes the decrease in teenage use of the Internet, which she cites as a disadvantage, though they were the source of the problem in the first place.

The COPA Commission found that the implementation of an ID-based system for selective Internet content access could have "an adverse impact on First Amendment values" because requiring identification has a chilling effect on access" (COPA Commission, 2000).

Libraries may also suffer legal ramifications for restricting information access according to age. (See the "Disadvantages of Parental Consent" section for a full description.)

Future Improvements Needed

Though compatible with circulation systems, smart cards and patron access systems still require two separate systems. For this alternative to become truly workable—and for there to be only one database—either the filter vendors will need to add sophisticated authentication services to them (ones that are "truly robust enough for library systems" says Karen Schneider (Schneider, 1997)), or the major circulation system vendors will need to add a filtering-capability tied into user authentication.

Whitelists and Content Managers

Content managers are in some ways the opposite of filtering. Rather than restricting users from accessing inappropriate sites, these methods are intended to encourage users to find and use appropriate sites. One could think of this more as the carrot-dangling approach, rather than the stick-hitting method of filtering. Many libraries are using content managers without even knowing they are doing so. The provision of children-friendly sites prepared by Youth Services Librarian and loaded as the first point-of-contact at children's workstations is an example of a content managing device. This alternative is also known as the provision of a "whitelist."

ALA supports the creation of these lists of positive resources. The Trustees and Children's Division publication Children and the Internet: Guidelines for Developing Public Library Policy, recommends that libraries "develop Web sites for children and young adults that link to material especially recommended for them" (ALA, 2000 Toolkit, p. 4).

In some libraries, the whitelist of approved sites is presented in conjunction with the browser being set to kiosk mode, which means the screen shows no URL (Uniform Resource Locator) bar where the user types a Web site address. Though some clever users, especially teens, may be circumvent this system and make their way beyond the confines of the so called walled

garden of content, most users, especially younger children, should be able to locate the information they need within the Web sites provided.

Computers can also be preset to child-friendly search engines such as KidsClick! or AskJeeves for Kids (ALA Toolkit, 2000, p. 4), which would enhance the probability that the user would be satisfied within the bounds of these resource managers.

www.ajkids.com

Libraries Using Alternative

Many—if not most—libraries are using some form of whitelist for children. One example is the Johnson County (Kan.) Library that produces a "Super Sites of the Month" flyer as part of its Kids' Page, including children-friendly sites recommended by library staff (ALA Toolkit, 2000).

At the Broward County (Fla.) Library, all public access computers in the children's areas default to ALA's 700+ Great Sites (see below) and are configured in kiosk mode so no URL bar appears (Lee, Marlene, personal communication, Jan. 5, 2001).

Price and Sources

The only cost involved in producing whitelists is staff time, which can be substantial, depending upon the extent of the list produced. Since Web sites change so often, ongoing updating is necessary, so the time commitment must be ongoing.

ALA produces one of the best whitelists available to librarians, ALA's 700+ Great Sites for Kids and the People Who Care About Them. Produced by children's librarians, this comprehensive resource of links to all sorts of information is organized by topic and category. An abbreviated listing of 50 of the best Web sites for children is available through ALA's brochure The Librarians' Guide to Cyberspace for Parents and Kids.

www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites

www.ala.org/parentspage/greatsites/guide.html

The Library Channel, also known as TLC, is popular in libraries. This product offers links to pre-approved links organized into pre-arranged areas (Schneider, 1997, p. 125).

For information, contact TLC at www.vimpact.net, Vimpact, Inc. 612 N. Park St., Columbus, OH, 43215 (614-224-7383)

Webmanager Suite's I-Gear bills itself as an Internet Content Management System, but also provides customized computer configuration. (See "Patron Authentication" for more information on this company.)

Elementary school principal Susan Brooks recommends the following content management tools for teachers and parents:

Safe Harbor (**www.acer.com/aac/**) Acer America, 408-432-6200

BASCOM Internet Communication Server (**www.bascom.com**) Bascom, 888-92-BASCOM

KidDesk Internet Safe (**www.edmark.com**) Edmark, 800-691-2986

Safe2Learn (**www.eschoolhouse.com**) Electric Schoolhouse, 800-569-5537, (Brooks, 1999)

The filtering information Web site GetNetWise.com provides lists of approved Web sites. The library's own users and staff may be another source of good Web sites. The ALA Toolkit recommends that libraries "encourage users—both parents and children—to recommend sites" and suggests people could vote on their favorite Web site and print them on flyers or bookmarks.

Advantages

Providing lists of appropriate sites comes naturally for librarians and is essentially another form of library material selection. Helping children and adults find and use appropriate online resources is simply an extension of what librarians have always done—and done well. Another advantage to this alternative is that First Amendment protections are not compromised and no censorship is involved. The only technology involved is the locating and loading of appropriate sites, but nothing must be purchased in addition to standard Web site software.

Disadvantages

As mentioned earlier, whitelists do not keep children from accessing inappropriate sites. Frequent updating is also needed since Web sites change so often.

Future Improvements Needed

As discussed under Parental Consent and Smart Card section, it is technologically possible to tie parental consent forms to approved content managers; however, currently no automatic tie-in with most library circulation systems is available . Merging these functions, and perhaps combining them with an age authentication system, would be a needed future improvement.

Outgoing Data Blockers

Rather than filtering Internet content coming into a computer, another alternative some libraries may want to investigate is restricting information from going out of a computer. This can be accomplished in two ways. Either the computer can be set to kiosk mode, which disables and hides the URL (Uniform Resource Locator) bar, preventing typing of a URL, or a mechanical block can be used. Many of the tools that block outgoing information were designed for home use to prevent children from revealing personal information to strangers. According to the filtering-products Web site GetNetWise, along with blocking outgoing data such as name, gender, address, and phone numbers, these tools can help supervise behavior in chat room, e-mail and forms submitted over the web.

Though popular for home use, outgoing data blockers have not found much of an audience in libraries. Since the majority of complaints in libraries stem from incoming sites, that has been the direction most attention has been focused on. Many libraries do report problems with chatroom and e-mail use, though, so an outgoing data blocker may be an avenue worth exploring.

Libraries Using Alternative

The Boise State University Albertsons Library uses the proxy server product WinProxy to combat their patron's use of "the limited number of Internet workstations" for chat, e-mail, and game playing. This proxy server checks all Web accesses against a blacklist that "contains only sites that support the three forbidden activities. For example, www.yahoo.com is not blocked, but chat.yahoo.com and mail.yahoo.com are blocked."

www.riverofdata.com
www.riverofdata.com/tools/blocking.htm
www.riverofdata.com/tools/blacklist.htm

A master blacklist of sites that include e-mail, chat, and game sites is now being prepared as a cooperative venture, and several libraries "have contributed to its development," says Daniel W. Lester from Boise State University.

Prices and Sources

www.getnetwise.org

Industry-sponsored Web site GetNetWise lists 42 products that block outgoing information. Librarians are encouraged to consult this database for information about the most appropriate product for their situation. (As mentioned in the Introduction, no one-size-fits-all solution for libraries exists.) Many options are available at the GetNetWise site. For instance, the filtering product CyberAngel claims to prevent children from using e-mail or chatrooms, and the CSM Proxy Server can also permit children to send e-mail only to a pre-approved list of recipients. Prices of these products vary.

Advantages

Blocking outgoing data does not threaten First Amendment freedoms the same way incoming filter blockers do. As library legal expert Robert S. Peck explains, "a public library is legally free to select the level and degree of Internet access it will provide to its patrons" (Peck, 2000), such as limiting chatroom activity.

Disadvantages

As Andrews Angelopoulos noted in an article in Popular Electronics (1999), "kids can be quite clever in getting around things on computers." Getting around the hidden URL bar or mechanical chatroom block could be a piece of cake for some experienced computer users. Some libraries may be reluctant to limit computer use in this way, especially because for people without computers at home, libraries are the number-one point of access (ALA Toolkit, 2000).

Future Improvements Needed

The greatest improvement to outgoing data blocking would be a technology that married blocking with parental consent. Having an on-off switch, depending on a parent's comfort level with this mode of access would be ideal. Smart card and patron authentication technologies (see that section) come closest to offering this option.

Website Rating

Website rating has been proposed as one alternative to content filtering. This rating could be done by the Web site producer (called first-party labeling) or by a third party, much like movie ratings. The Web sites could be categorized using PICS (the Platform for Internet Content), a global industry standard. According to the European Institute for Media in Dusseldorf, rating Internet content has the advantage of "separating the rating and filtering functions" (Campbell, Penny, and Emmauelle Machet, "European Policy on Regulating of Content on the Internet" in Liberating Cyberspace, 1999), enabling users to decide on appropriate content based on a universally accepted rating system.

This rating and labeling option has received much attention, especially in Europe. In September 1999, the Bertelsmann Foundation, a nonprofit group associated with the media company Bertelsmann A.G., proposed an ambitious proposal for rating the Internet in Munich (Mendels, 1999). In 1996 a European Commission convened to investigate child protection on the Internet called on the industry "to form a common platform establishing the use of filtering systems community-wide based on common standards." Content providers "should be encouraged to cooperate in this system by adopting their own Code of Conduct for content published on the Internet, including systematic self-rating of content." (Campbell, Penny, and Emmauelle Machet, "European Policy on Regulating of Content on the Internet" in Liberating Cyberspace, 1999).

In the United States, this alternative has also received widespread attention, but its limitations are also acknowledged. A Internet Content Summit promoted Web self-rating as an alternative to government regulation (Neumann and Weinstein, 1999). The COPA Commission said this alternative is "potentially effective if widely used, [but] this method has not been adopted by many Web publishers. The effectiveness of voluntary first-party labeling is limited because it is dependent in part on widespread adoption" (COPA Commission, 2000). In other words, it would work if everyone does it, but everyone is not doing it, so it's not working.

For libraries the high level of nonrated sites is particularly problematic. James LaRue has stated, "If libraries were to restrict World Wide Web offerings to rated sites, over 93% of Internet content would be eliminated" (Schneider, 1997).

Libraries Using Alternative

Not applicable.

Prices and sources

Not applicable.

Advantages

After studying all the filtering products available, Karen G. Schneider says "for public-access environments such as libraries, PICS, in theory, offers some slight improvements over prevalent filtering software technologies" (Schneider, 1997). If universally accepted, using rating labels would be easy for libraries to integrate into their searching methodologies.

Web self-rating also has the advantage of being low cost for libraries, though it would be an added cost for content providers. There would be no cost if browsers were programmed to look for appropriate labels or ratings.

Disadvantages

Rating and labeling proposals would "raise First Amendment concerns" whether the rating was done by the producer or a third party, according to the COPA Commission (2000). PICS and other self-rating systems "do not resolve the problem of hidden decisions about Internet content," a major fault of this and other filtering solutions, says Karen G. Schneider (1997).

Her final analysis is that "I don't think it's much of an improvement on the current situation" (Schneider, 1997).

Future Improvements Needed

In its final report, the COPA (Commission on Online Child Protection) Commission recommended that rating and labeling of Internet content be looked to as a possible future solution to child protection. The Commission "encourages a broad, national, private sector conversation on the development of next-generation systems for labeling, rating, and identifying content reflecting the convergence of old and new media" (COPA Commission, 2000). The Report continues that "recent advances in metadata may facilitate the implementation of such a rating and labeling system."

Karen Schneider has suggested that, if labeling or rating is going to happen, perhaps librarians could be involved in the application of the labels and ratings. As she envisions it, "I'd create a label targeted specifically at sexually explicit materials, and I'd have a stable of librarians working to identify as much Internet content as possible. The emphasis would be on ensuring libraries could access a wide spectrum of information while excluding the sexually explicit content that librarians find either inappropriate or unwise to offer" (Schneider, 1997).

Location and Time Limiting Devices

Rather than blanket filtering of Internet content, some libraries have opted for limiting different aspects of public computer access. Karen Schneider says some libraries may be resorting to content filters when they really need only one or more features from the filtering product other than content filtering. As she puts it, "It's possible that a filter is the wrong solution for the problem, or you only need a handful of features some of these filters offer" (Schneider, 1997).

In the six-month study of library filters, Schneider reported that some libraries were using filters because they wanted to "prevent patrons from logging in to chat groups during peak hours of use" (Schneider, 1997). Others wanted only to control computer sessions with time-out devices.

Time Limiting Devices

At the time of her writing several years ago, the lack of a time-out feature was a serious problem for libraries. (I discovered my local public library's system was equipped with an automatic time-out session the hard way. Just when I was ready to print my list of long-searched-for citations, the public access computer timed me out, thus erasing all my research. I have subsequently learned this is not unusual in libraries equipped with such devices.) Many library databases and systems are now equipped with automatic time-out sessions. The latest versions of proxy servers can be set for timed computer access (Beaubrun, J., personal communication, Jan. 11, 2001).

Most libraries limit computer use to 30 minutes or one hour. Those that do not use automatic time-out devices limit computer use with a sign-in sheet, registration system, or use the honor system (ALA Toolkit, 2000).

Though plentiful in libraries, time-limiting devices are still needed by many parents for home use. As the industry-sponsored Web site GetNetWise describes it, "If you're concerned your child may be spending too much time online—or you don't want her to use the Internet when you're either asleep or away from home—this type of software offers a solution" (GetNetWise, 2000).

Chat Room Limiting Devices

Another function many libraries may want to prohibit, but have not been able to do so effectively, is chat room access. Accomplishing this limited use restriction is difficult from a practical standpoint. "Many e-mail accounts and chat rooms are accessible from a Web page, and some sites provide free e-mail accounts and links to chat rooms," Peck says (2000).

If blocking chatroom access was made easier (see future improvements below), Peck says this kind of restriction would be acceptable because "a public library is legally free to select the level and degree of Internet access it will provide to its patrons" (Peck, 2000).

Location Limiting Devices

Along with chat room access and time-out sessions, some libraries are turning to filters to block access only at a select number of computer stations or locations. In the Hudsonville, Michigan filtering controversy one solution proposed was to have "all but one terminal filtered and the open terminal was to have a prominent sign announcing the availability of obscenity" (Rogers and Oder, March, 2000). (The Hudsonville library has since installed a Smart Card system (see that section) instead of resorting to this one-station solution.) A similar "one-terminal" solution was proposed for nearby Holland, Mich. As Library Journal reported, one proponent of full filtering did not favor even this solution. "I don't even want the adults seeing [pornography]. I want if off the computer period," said filtering advocate.

Rather than filtering all but one station, restricting access in the children's area is the most popular location for content blocking in most libraries. According to a California survey of public libraries, half the public libraries in that state "use filters only on children's workstations" (Rogers and Oder, May 1, 2000), and leave the other computers in the library unhampered.

Library law expert Robert S. Peck says this filtering-by-location solution is acceptable as long as minors are allowed to make use of the unfiltered computers. Peck said, "the unimpeded availability of unfiltered access elsewhere in the library" is crucial to blunt "constitutional objections that would otherwise be leveled at filtering restrictions on minors' access to the Internet" (Peck, 2000).

Prices and Sources

The option to limit computer sessions with a preset time is standard equipment with most computer systems. Patron authentication and smart card systems provide this option for time limits free with the system. (See that section.)

Most filtering devices used in libraries, such as Net Nanny, as well the whitelist of recommended sites called Library Channel, are equipped with free location-limiting features.

Advantages

Limiting computer access to a preset time is an effective method to control user access to information without limiting any First Amendment freedoms. Filtering workstations only in a designated area or only on preselected computers can also offer libraries a workable compromise between filtering all computers and filtering none of them.

Disadvantages

As mentioned above, time limits can sneak up unawares on users who end up losing valuable data when they are timed-out. First Amendment freedoms are also limited with the use of filters, even if deployed only in the children's room.

Future Improvements Needed

The latest version of many network operating systems now include time limits and warning notices when the user is about to be logged off, much-needed improvements for library use. Another improvement libraries could use would be the ability for the time-limiting device to detect if other workstations are not being used, in which case no time limits would be invoked. (The next release of Library Guardian's Smart Card system will be equipped with this ability.) A location-limiting device that automatically changes the stations being blocked, according to computer use needed at the moment, would also be an improvement.

Tap-on-the-Shoulder Policies

Many libraries use a tap on the shoulder to interrupt patrons and encourage them to cease viewing what the library employee or other library users find offensive. In some libraries this policy has formally been adopted and is part of their Internet use policy. Sometimes the librarian does the tapping in response to another library user's complaints. Other times, the tapping comes from library employees who do not want to be subjected to material or images they find offensive.

Libraries Using Alternative

One example of the implementation of a formal tap-on-the-shoulder policy can be seen in the Greenville (S.C.) County Library. In February 2000, following the reporting of "Internet-related incidents" to the Board and the "separation from his employment" of the library director, the administration of the library began implementing a tap-on-the-shoulder policy (Greenville, no date). At the same time privacy desks were installed around the majority of Internet-accessible computers at the Main Library. (See that section.) The library eventually installed a filter. (See Disadvantages below.)

The Boulder City Library District uses a tap-on-the-shoulder policy and has found their patrons "didn't fuss about it." They had several incidents of youngsters and one of an adult accessing inappropriate materials. "In each case, we asked the patron to back out of the Web site and focus on something else, " says director Duncan McCoy (as reported in Practical Guide to Internet Filters). He reports satisfaction with this alternative. "[P]orn is not a problem because we've evolved a procedure for dealing with it that seems

to be effective in our community." He concludes, "[I]t's sort of on the level of having to ask patrons to quiet down or check their Slurpie at the desk" (as reported in Schneider, 1997).

Price and Sources

Implementation of this alternative has no price. All you need is one finger, one shoulder and one offending Web site.

Advantages

Up front, the tap-on-the-shoulder policy is one of the least expensive alternatives to filtering Internet content. Since no technology is involved, no installation, maintenance, or technical support is needed. It can also be highly effective, especially with limiting children's inappropriate computer access.

Disadvantages

One of the most serious problems with this alternative is the illegality of its use. Library law expert Robert S. Peck summarized the legal implications of this policy as follows:

> "No patron's objections to the constitutionally protected material that another accesses through the Internet can provide a justification for censoring or otherwise restricting Internet access. To permit otherwise would allow patrons with a particular ideological or other agenda to post themselves near the terminals and exercise a "heckler's veto" over the exercise of First Amendment rights. The Supreme Court condemned such a result in striking down the Communications Decency Act as unconstitutional. A better solution for accommodating the sensibilities of other patrons is to install privacy screens that shield other patrons from having one patron's Internet choices imposed upon them" (Peck, 2000). (See that section.)

For a full discussion of the legal issues involved in library Internet use, see the memorandum from Jenner & Block to ALA entitled "Internet Filtering in Public Libraries."

www.ftrf.org/Internetfilteringmemo.html

Along with the legal problem with this alternative, it may also "invite arbitrary and discriminatory enforcement" (Rogers, March 15, 2000). Therefore, the implementation of this kind of policy, though placating users and library employees who do not want to view objectionable materials, may open libraries up to complaints from those "tapped on the shoulder."

Librarian James Huff says he and many librarians "are appalled by such measures" as tapping on the shoulder. As he put it, "How many libraries would support a policy that prohibited a patron from reading a particular book if another patron objected to his or her reading it?" (Huff, 1999).

One further disadvantage is that this alternative is not always effective. According to their testimony before the COPA Commission, even the tap-on-the-shoulder policy and other measures taken were not adequate for the Greenville library and the library began using content filters (Greenville, no date).

Future Improvements Needed

Because the tap on the shoulder policy is meant to address the inadvertent viewing of offensive material by others, the most significant improvement to this alternative would be a technology that added privacy to the computer user. The previous sections on privacy screens, computer configuration, etc. discuss such privacy-enhancing changes that could provide such improvements.

Law Enforcement, Prosecution of Illegal Content, and Deterrence

With so much attention focused on First Amendment rights, frequently the fact gets lost that, as legal scholar Robert S. Peck puts it, "obscenity and child pornography on the Internet are illegal" (Peck, 2000). Along with resisting Internet filters, "the American Library Association believes all laws pertaining to illegal materials and activity on the Internet should be enforced" (ALA Toolkit, 2000). As discussed in the "Acceptable Use" Section, what is not considered acceptable computer use, including a prohibition against viewing illegal sites, should be spelled out in the library's Internet policy.

When a library has notice that an illegal site exists and could be accessed from its computer terminals, the library "should follow previously established guidelines that provide for the temporary blocking of such sites with quick review and adjudication of the likelihood that such sites contain illegal content" (Peck, 2000).

Libraries must be careful how they proceed with this reporting of illegal sites. The industry-sponsored Web site GetNetWise advises that, when an illegal site is located "you should record the URL (web address) and report only that to law enforcement." The Web site cautions that "downloading or making a copy of child pornography for any reason—even to provide it as evident to law enforcement—is a crime in the United States" (www.getnetwise.org).

Because no national agency deals with all Internet crimes, it may be difficult to locate the proper law enforcement agency. Depending on the subject matter, the proper source may be the U.S. Postal Inspection Service, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco and Firearms, or the Drug Enforcement Administration. GetNetWise provides a locator for the proper agency, based on your location. As the site advises, "Your local police can help you determine your legal rights and responsibilities…" since laws vary from state to state. Libraries may also want to contact their own counsel before proceeding with any legal action.

Libraries Using Alternative

In most libraries deterring the viewing of illegal sites, rather than reporting the existence of sites is the preferred modus operandi. The presence of security guards, which has unfortunately become a necessity in most major libraries, is one excellent way to deter the viewing of illegal sites. In some libraries security guards are basically implementing a tap-on-the-shoulder policy (see that section), and in others having them in the area is enough to deter certain inappropriate activity.

The Chicago Public Library has an experimental program where college students and teachers rove the children's room, offering guidance on good sites and deterring the viewing of pornographic sites. One law library uses

student attendants to make the rounds of their "Information Commons" and their carrels, which are fairly secluded as a means of supervising and influencing user behavior (Trammell, R., personal e-mail communication, Dec. 21, 2000).

Prices and Sources

For libraries using deterrence through rovers—be they security guards or other personnel—the cost of these employees can be high. A policy of enforcement and reporting of illegal sites should include staff training in how to identify and report illegal sites. The provision of this high-level training may be costly if conducted by legal experts, but less-expensive if provided as a public service by law enforcement personnel.

Advantages

If implemented carefully there would be no infringement on First Amendment rights, for it is illegal to access obscenity and child pornography. Using rovers in libraries could also deter other types of inappropriate patron behavior.

Disadvantages

Some librarians are reluctant to add the role of police officer to their overwhelming workload. Karen G. Schneider summed up this objection succinctly: "We are not, nor should we be obliged to enforce laws at the local level…If it's truly illegal, the enforcement agencies should do their jobs" (Schneider, 1997), rather than librarians.

Future Improvements Needed

Recognizing the importance of enforcement, one of the key recommendations of the Commission on Online Child Protection (COPA) Commission was that funds be provided to increase the prosecution of violations of federal and state obscenity laws (COPA Commission, 2000). The Commission recommends the "creation of facilities for easy reporting of problems to the parties who can address them, either online or via telephone. Such hotlines would bring problems to the attention of both relevant government authorities and private sector groups that can act in response to reported problems" (COPA Commission, 2000).

User Monitors

Rather than filtering Internet content before it reaches users, this alternative works on a different principle: monitoring and recording the Web sites that users have accessed. One writer in Popular Electronics states this option was "possibly the scariest…and the one likely to work with older children" (Angelopoulos, 1999).

Most of the user monitoring products were designed for home use "to inform adults about their child's online activity without necessarily limiting access." The effectiveness of this option is easy to see. "Consider the effect that you'd achieve if you let your child know that you can see everything that he or she does. It's probably enough to put any kid on his or her best behavior," says Andrew Angelopoulos (1999).

www.getnetwise/org/toold/index

Some products come with filtering capabilities, along with a monitoring feature, and others are exclusively monitoring devices. Many user monitors come with the option of informing the user that the device has been installed, or not, at their discretion.

Libraries Using Alternative

An ALA official told me, "We don't know of any libraries monitoring their user's Internet use on a regular basis. If they were, they certainly would not tell us about it!"

Prices and Sources

More than 60 products are included as user monitors on the industry-sponsored safety products Web site. Librarians are referred to that site for the best product for their situation. Among those products categorized as monitoring tools by elementary school principal Susan Brooks in Technology & Learning (Brooks, 1999) are:

www.getnetwise.org

www.charlesriver.com
www.persw.com
www.webroot.com

Internet WatchDog, Charles River Media, 800-382-8505
Cyber Snoop 3.0 Pro, Pearl Software, 800-732-7596
WinGuardian, Webroot Software, 303-554-6528

Advantages

Because this alternative does not limit access to Internet content, it doesn't violate First Amendment freedoms; however, the privacy-invasion issues involved are immense. As mentioned earlier, many children would curb their inappropriate web searching if they knew someone was watching them.

Disadvantages

Though user monitoring may be an effective technique for children, the invasion of privacy inferred by this option makes it of serious concern for use in libraries. One user monitoring product, WinGuardian, "very quietly records keystrokes, program and window openings, and can even take time screenshots... [it] buries itself quite nicely in the file structure, lest someone be casually searching for it" (Angelopoulous, 1999). Because of the ability to hide their use, some employers are now employing user monitors to keep tabs on their workers' activity.

Another major disadvantage of this alternative can be found in its name: monitoring assumes someone is doing the monitoring. The last thing most libraries need with their limited staff is to be saddled with additional monitoring of any activity.

Future Improvements Needed

For this alternative to be effective in libraries it would need to somehow enable parents to monitor their children's online activity. An improvement of this technology would allow parents to somehow be electronically informed of their child's library searching activities while in the library or remotely. Armed with this information, parents would then need the capability to limit the child's searching activity, whether they are in the library or from a distance.

Other Alternatives

If none of the alternatives to Internet content filters seem right for your library, but you know you need to do something, you may want to consider one of the following suggestions.

Form a Study Committee

Long a standard tactic of legislatures, a study commission both brings reason to an issue and buys time for emotions to level off. Many libraries have found that the discussions surrounding a library's Acceptable Use Policy (see that section) help people understand the complexity of the Internet filtering debate. A local study committee would provide an opportunity for those charged with investigating the issue to realize no one silver-bullet approach is available (as this report attests).

Test Different Filters

Rather than slapping on any-old filtering device to placate vociferous filtering advocates, a test of the most widely used products could be conducted before making any final decision. As with a study commission, this option buys time for tempers to subside. It also lets the reference librarians and users experience the ramifications of different filtering products so they can make more intelligent choices on whether to proceed in this direction on a permanent basis. Guidelines for conducting a filtering test are provided in Chapter 4 of Karen G. Schneider's Practical Guide to Internet Filters (1997).

Librarian-produced Filters

Many of the most popular filtering services employ people to review and categorize Internet content. (See Types of Filters.) In a "can't beat 'em, join 'em" approach, librarians could become the filtering agent, rather than relying on a third party as they are doing now. Filtering decisions could be made by an individual library, consortium of libraries, or on a grander scale through an OCLC-type arrangement. Though this would be immensely time-consuming, it may in the long run be an effective option for libraries to consider.

No Internet Access

With all the controversy surrounding the issue of filtering Internet content, some libraries may just want to surrender and stop providing Internet access altogether. Although 73% of all public library outlets offer public access to the Internet (ALA Toolkit, 2000), according to library legal expert Robert S. Peck "there is no obligation to provide Internet access" in public libraries. (Peck, 2000). At one point the Loudoun County (Va.) Library suspended all Internet service to its patrons when it was enjoined from enforcing its filtering policy.