

Controlling the Internet

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How can libraries provide Internet access and still maintain the control necessary to prevent abuse?

Nearly all libraries that offer Internet access have some kind of Internet use policy, but their policies may differ greatly. Some are highly regulated, some lenient, and some change from day to day to cover situations as they occur. A few academic libraries have use policies that are set by their computing facilities. Actual Internet use policy statements may be found on several web sites listed below:

Useful Resources for Public Libraries

<http://www.molo.lib.oh.us/wnew/refer.htm>

Acceptable Use Policies (*includes templates*)

<http://recall.lib.indiana.edu/~webbook/aups.htm>

K-12 Acceptable Use Policies (*includes templates*)

<http://www.erehwon.com/k12aups/>

Examples of School Acceptable Use Policies

<http://www.trc.org/aup.htm>

Security is a big issue in controlling the Internet. Some software programs (such as *Fortress*) keep people from accessing certain areas. Certain areas can be manually closed to patrons or disabled to thwart hackers. However, it is a challenge to some people to defeat any kind of security measures.

Patron time-limits are usually included in policy statements. Many libraries limit use to one hour or half-an-hour per day. Reservations are taken in advance at some libraries, either days in advance or on the same day. A few libraries actually check-out keyboards to patrons. Other libraries have procedures that a staff member must enter a password before a patron can use the Internet. Some libraries allow people to just sit down and surf.

Community standards may dictate that some libraries use filtering software. Some libraries have found that filtering software does not work.

Privacy is an Internet policy issue. There are privacy screens that allow only the user to see the screen. This prevents several people from crowding around a terminal or possible objections from nearby patrons. However, privacy screens have drawbacks. Some control is lost, and some librarians feel that much can be learned by watching someone more knowledgeable demonstrate at a workstation.

Printing policies vary from library to library. Costs are generally ten cents a page, but color copies can range up to fifty cents a page. One library gives five free sheets to each patron. Patrons who need more, go to the reference desk to buy it. Downloading is permitted in some libraries on the patron's own discs or on discs sold at the reference desk.

Internet training for patrons (Internet 101) may require a lot of staff time. Many training sessions are well attended, but they are difficult to offer because of the time involved and the need to limit the size. Tutorials are helpful. Many colleges offer training to freshmen, but as the Internet becomes more familiar, less training is necessary.

Libraries usually do not offer patrons e-mail or access to chatrooms. Some libraries have patron age limitations in their Internet use policy statement. Parental permission may be either required, or an option.

Problems encountered in controlling the Internet include equipment failure, vandalism (especially of keyboards), pornography, stolen equipment, and hackers. Noise *may* be a problem, but sound cards don't seem to be a necessary feature. Some reference librarians are finding that they are not staffed to provide all the services that Internet use requires.

Internet stations may in time become more commonplace and less of a novelty, however, there are so many options at this time that policies are a necessity at most libraries that need to control the Internet.

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