

REPORT TO THE LIBRARY BOARD
MEETING DATE: NOVEMBER 21, 2007

Session:	Public Session
Subject:	Internet Policy Review Project: Final Report
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Presented By:	Anne Becker, Margaret Mitchell
Purpose of Report:	For Decision: Approval <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

Recommendation

It is recommended that the London Public Library Board:

- *Approve the recommended guidelines to govern the levels of filtering, based on the findings of the Internet Policy Review, as recommended in this report.*
- *Approve the revised Internet Usage Policy, based on these guidelines (See Appendix B, blue).*
- *Receive this report.*

Issue / Opportunity

The purpose of this report is to present the findings of the Internet Policy Review Project and to present recommendations based on these findings regarding the levels of filtering of internet workstations at the London Public Library. The report will also provide analysis of specific project measurements as well as additional information from a review of usage data from the Netsweeper software.

BACKGROUND

The Internet Policy Review project was approved by the Library Board at its May 2007 meeting. The purpose of the project was to examine and evaluate the balance of filtered and unfiltered Internet computers in the Library to determine a level of filtering that would optimize:

- An individual's experience in the library in terms of unintentional exposure to visual images not appropriate in a general public setting.
- The ability to use the Internet as an effective research tool.
- The Library's ability to provide a broad spectrum of information reflecting all sides of an issue, as consistent with our collections management policy.
- The due diligence that the Library can undertake in order to mitigate risk of exposure to such images for its customers and itself.

The project time period was June 1st 2007 to October 31st 2007. A project outline was distributed at the April 2007 Board meeting. Extensive background information was provided to the Board in September 2007.

During the course of the project:

- Specific workstations were configured and signed at all locations as filtered and unfiltered.
- Feedback mechanisms were established in all locations to ensure that comments, denied URL's, etc. were captured and reviewed.
- Categories for filtering were adjusted to be consistent with the objective of the study.
- IT staff developed expertise with the Netsweeper software in order to generate over 75 reports, covering all locations and computer configurations for the Sept-October assessment period.
- Employees were asked to provide feedback on a regular basis and were encouraged to participate in an anonymous survey at the conclusion of the test period.
- Other libraries were consulted on current practices.
- Netsweeper advised us on various aspects of the software.
- Public feedback was received through the community forum, blogs, letters, emails, etc.

REVIEW AND ANALYSIS

Netsweeper Data

Data from the Netsweeper system is obtained by the Library identifying the IP addresses of specific types of workstations and then developing unique scheduled reports based on our workstations and our reporting requirements in terms of locations, workstations and time lines. These reports are developed and generated by LPL staff and housed on the Netsweeper server for a specified period of time. During the course of the project, staff has become very familiar with the software and its capacity for report generation.

Data prior to the beginning of the study in June is not comparative as it was generated on only Children's and Teen's workstations and a few limited functional workstations such as ERC's. Accordingly, data has been drawn from the system for September and October 2007. The reports provide a thorough overview of internet activity on both filtered and unfiltered workstations.

For the purposes of this study, we selected 31 categories (Appendix A, pink) defined by Netsweeper and grouped as adult, entertainment, info and miscellaneous. These were representative of the kinds of information-seeking that customers would undertake as well as access to chat lines, email and blogs. Other groups and categories were of a more technical nature and were not applicable in a library environment.

i) Overview of Internet Use

Netsweeper's categorization process enables us to gain insight into the overall Internet use on our workstations. In this section of the report we are reviewing overall system-wide data for filtered and unfiltered workstations and Central Library data. Chart 1A identifies the Top 10 categories that were accessed by our users on workstations system-wide. Chart 1B identifies the Top 10 categories for the Central Library.

CHART 1A

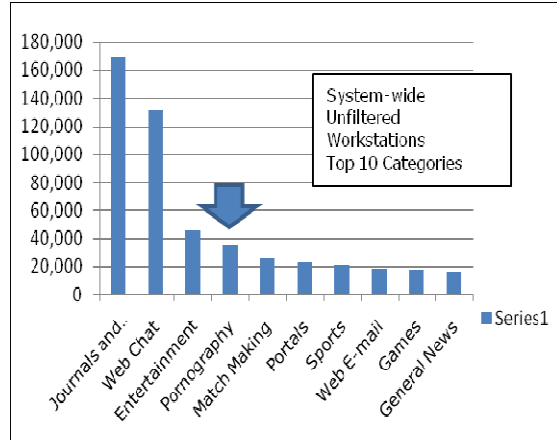
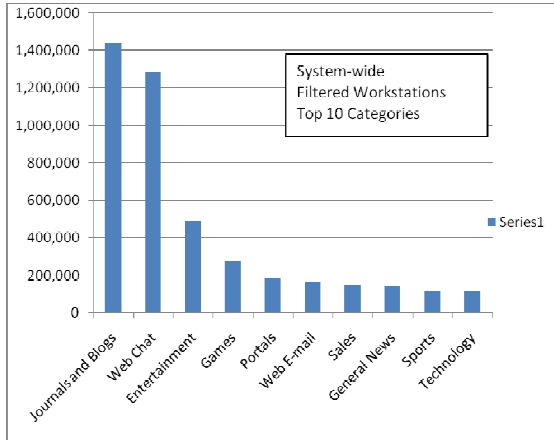
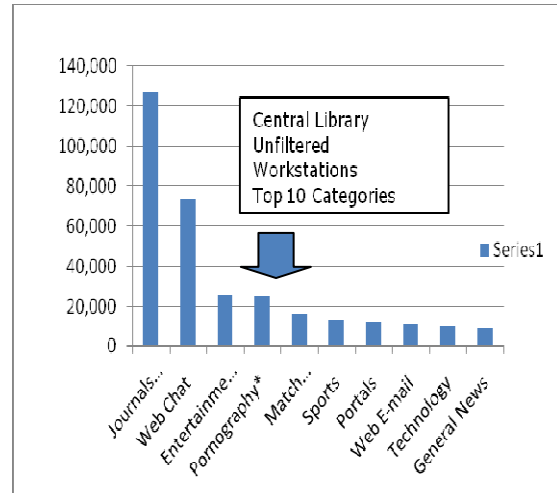
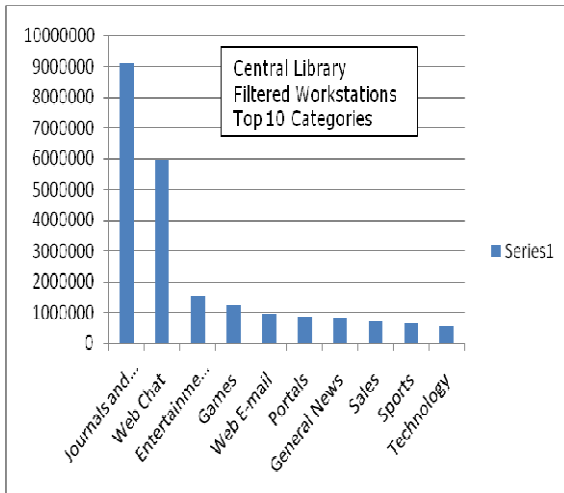
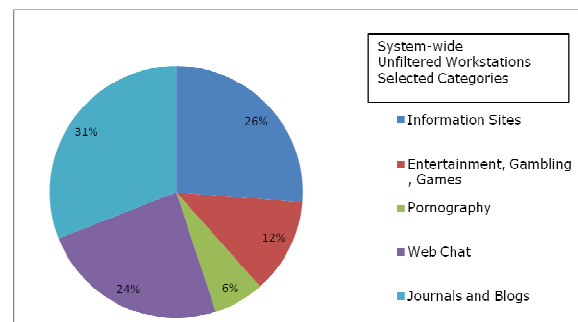
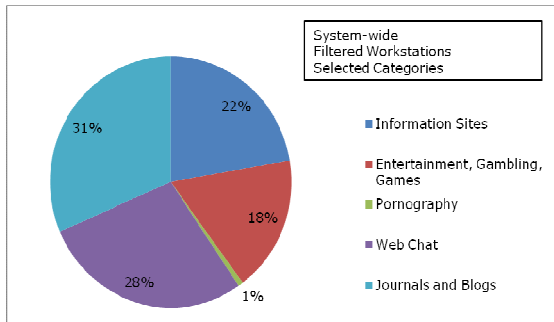


CHART 1B



Social networking through email, chat lines, journals and blogs represents a large percentage of the top ten uses. Generally the same usage is seen on both filtered and unfiltered workstations, with the exception of pornography which is the fourth highest category among the top ten categories. Chart 2 provides further information on the breakdown of major usages: social networking, journals and blogs and information seeking (with specific categories within this usage identified).

CHART 2



ii) Filtered versus Unfiltered

Appendix A (Pink) includes a chart that indicates the overall usage of different categories that Netsweeper uses to classify URL's in areas such as information seeking, social networking and communications. In a comparison of filtered and unfiltered workstations, there is very little difference between the uses on the workstations, with the exception of pornography.

In the Central Library, during the month of October, the number of unfiltered internet workstations was increased from four to eight to see if an increase would have an impact on the usage. (Anecdotally, it is noted that a member of the public expressed disappointment as this change was being made, concerned with the potential increase in use of the workstations to access pornography.) In comparing the access to URL's categorized as Pornography, the number of accesses was virtually the same on the four (October 1-16) as it was on the eight workstations (October 17-31). One conclusion might be that the new unfiltered workstations were not "discovered" immediately. It could also be an indication that a threshold for the Central Library could be up to eight workstations, without seriously increasing the exposure to sexually explicit images. In both cases, access to Pornography was approximately 7% of the selected 31 categories.

iii) Pornography and Extreme Violence

The difference in the number of accesses or attempted accesses to URL's in the pornography category is significant between filtered and unfiltered workstations. Pornography access on system-wide unfiltered workstations represents approximately 14.5% of the URL's in the 31 selected categories of information seeking. On system-wide filtered workstations, attempted access to pornography categorized URL's represents approximately 1.5 % of the same selection. Central is a significant factor in the overall results. Approximately 17% of the URL's in the 31 selected categories of information seeking on unfiltered Central workstations are pornography-categorized URL's, while it is 2% on filtered Central workstations.

Extreme violence, the second category currently denied on filtered workstations, is not significant in its usage anywhere in the system.

iv) Sexual Education Sites

Of particular concern is the potential for over-blocking *sex education sites*. Netsweeper's *Template System* ensures that the System is educated on words, phrases and other items on a web page that determines its categorization. Once educated, the Template double-checks the validity of sex education sites against the pornography database to ensure that the system doesn't over-block or produce false positives.

A review of the Netsweeper data (Appendix A, pink) indicates that a very small number of LPL customers tried to access these sites. Sexual Education categorized sites were accessed less than 1% of the 28 categories.

NETSWEEPER PERFORMANCE AND RELIABILITY

Netsweeper claims that their software has a very high accuracy rate when filtering pornographic websites. It maintains an accuracy rate of nearly 100% in the pornography category with incredibly high accuracy in all other categories. Accolades include the first filtering company to pass BECTA certification in the United Kingdom where Netsweeper filters internet workstations in

schools used by nearly 1.5 million children. (See <http://about.becta.org.uk/>) Netsweeper also meets all requirements for CIPA compliance in the United States where the software is deployed in hundreds of Library Systems including the City of Pittsburg and the State of West Virginia among others. (See <http://www.fcc.gov/cgb/consumerfacts/cipa.html>)

In addition to a high accuracy rate, Netsweeper also provides manual safeguards whereby a customer or employee can submit a web request to have a site reviewed if it is thought to have been mis-categorized.

BLOCKED SITES AND NETSWEEPER RESPONSE

During the course of the review, staff and public were encouraged to submit blocked sites for category reconsideration by Netsweeper. Only a small number of URL's were identified by customers and staff and submitted to Netsweeper. This may have been due to either the content of the site or that the public was not aware that they could consult with staff regarding blocked sites or were uncomfortable in doing so.

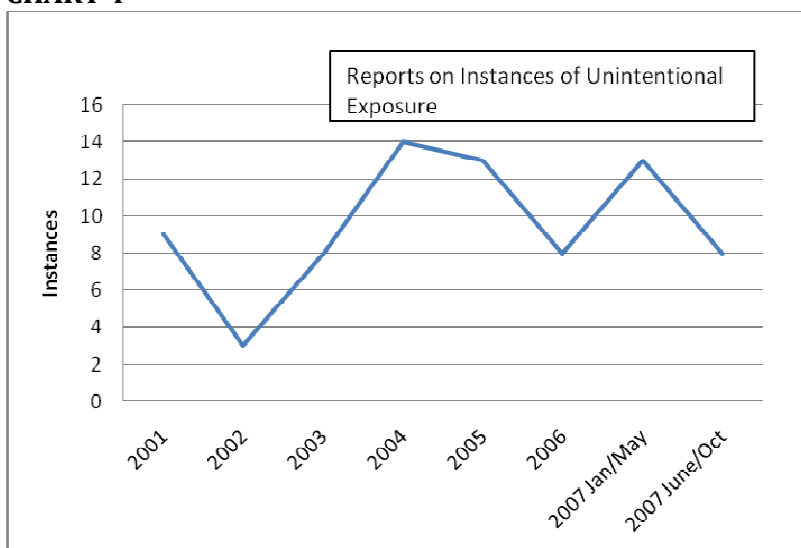
Appendix C (green) provides a summary of URL inquiries to and responses from Netsweeper.

The library project team discussed with Netsweeper ways of modifying messaging to ensure that a customer, when confronted with a 'denied' message, has options such as sending a direct anonymous message to Netsweeper (Net Alert) or being invited to consult with staff. Both options will be implemented pending the outcome of this review.

INSTANCES OF UNINTENTIONAL VIEWING OF SEXUALLY EXPLICIT IMAGES

For the purposes of this review, the Library undertook to review all instances where a customer or staff complained of unintentionally being exposed to sexually explicit images when being near a workstation. The data is not statistically valid as instances were not systematically collected until February 2007. Chart 4 provides a summary of the instances. Throughout the study period, staff was regularly encouraged to provide feedback on exposure.

CHART 4



CURRENT LEVEL OF FILTERING IN LOCATIONS

Workstations in all locations with specific functions **are filtered** as follows:

- Functional workstations are filtered to focus on functions:
 - Employment Resource Centre
 - Job Bank/Email
 - Training Rooms
- Workstations in Children's areas as per current Internet Policy
- Workstations in the Teen Annex and Homework Centre areas as an extension of the current policy regarding children's workstations

Workstations that are Functional but **are not filtered** are:

- Research
- French Language at Central
- Adaptive Technology

The remaining Internet workstations, which are the focus of the current Internet Policy Review, are a mixture of filtered and unfiltered at a ratio of approximately 14% unfiltered to 86% filtered.

In setting the initial trial level of unfiltered workstations in all locations, we considered the following factors:

- Number of workstations in a location;
- Ability to isolate unfiltered workstations due to space and design constraints.

In the Pond Mills Branch, due to the concerns raised by the public and as a further project study, the decision was made to provide no unfiltered workstations and only 2 monitored unfiltered Research workstations. No complaints were received by staff regarding access to unfiltered workstations. Categories accessed were similar in pattern to system-wide filtered access workstations.

During the course of the project, we have not received any complaints about a lack of unfiltered workstations from any location. Experience demonstrates that customers' Internet use needs are satisfied with the existing levels of filtered to unfiltered workstations.

POSITIONING OF WORKSTATIONS

As part of the Library's ongoing due diligence, supervisors undertook a review, in August, of the current placement of workstations in locations. With the exception of two locations (one recommended minor shifting, Landon, and the second, Masonville, is undergoing renovations) all locations reported that computers were placed to optimize the effectiveness of the following placement factors:

- Amount of walk-by traffic directly passing behind the screens (as privacy screens are not effective when viewing the screens from directly behind).
- Proximity to or in view of staff for service support.
- General management and behaviour monitoring.
- Computers located in both the adult and those in and adjacent to children's/teen areas.

COMMUNITY FEEDBACK

One of the project's indicators was to measure the effect of filters on the individual Library experience through a public feedback process and to gauge public opinion generally on the subject. The public forum was a key part of the project, in order to ensure the new balance of filtering is appropriate to uphold both access to information and to maintain a welcoming public environment

Many steps were taken to ensure a transparent public process for the project:

- Prior to the initiation of the test, we shared information on the project with community partners and posted information related to the project on our public website.
- Public feedback forms were available in all branch locations and supported by signage explaining the rationale for and parameters of the project.
- LPL administrators were available to address any and all public complaints and issues raised by community partners.
- LPL has been available for media interviews at every opportunity.
- Two community forums were held on Thursday September 13, 1pm-3pm and 6pm-8pm and eleven participants presented submissions to the Board, representing various viewpoints on the topic.
- We actively solicited public feedback, by inserting public feedback forms in each of our locations and via our online public forum at <http://lplforum.wordpress.com/>.

As a result of the transparent and extensive community feedback process, London Public Library heard from a considerable cross-section of people and groups, with various viewpoints. Overwhelmingly, community feedback demonstrated a desire to retain the filtering software on the adult computers to block sexually explicit images. Recent letters and feedback are included in Appendix D (yellow).

During the public consultation process, several themes emerged consistently related to the Internet Filtering project. Some themes were misconceptions or perceptions, others were suggestions for improvement. In previous board reports we have responded to these themes in order to provide a practical context. A complete summary is provided in Appendix E (mauve).

STAFF FEEDBACK

Staff feedback was solicited in early November to provide the employees' perspective on the effects of the filtering levels on the customer's experience in the Library and their own confidence and comfort in working with the public on internet workstations.

A total of 104 staff completed an anonymous online survey that solicited feedback about their experiences and impressions since the Library began the Internet Policy Review Project in June 2007.

The majority of staff who responded to the survey (54%) felt that the customer experience for Internet users at London Public Library has improved, with most citing inclusivity, social norms and protection of children as reasons for this improvement. However, 40% of respondents had not received any type of customer feedback about the filtering project. Responding staff were in favour of filtering, from both a professional and personal perspective: 61% felt that their workplace was improved and 66% saw internet filtering as 'good', indicating that they did not see

a conflict between their professional obligations as library workers and perceived censorship by the software. Quantitative results from the survey are in Appendix F (tan).

Conclusions

Our conclusions from the study are:

1. There is no significant difference between the customer's ability to access information sites on filtered or unfiltered workstations. The search patterns appear to be almost the same.
2. The Internet workstations, whether filtered or unfiltered, are used primarily for social networking, journals and blogs, with traditional information categories used about 25 -30%. This reflects the evolution of the Internet and is consistent with the changing roles of public libraries and the demands for social space, alternate means of information seeking and personal interaction.
3. Extreme violence as a category is rarely accessed and should be discontinued as a denied category. Extreme sexual violence will be captured under Pornography.
4. A significantly higher level of activity in accessing or attempting to access URL's classified under Pornography occurs on unfiltered workstations.
5. While it is not possible to verify the 100% accuracy rate for pornography classification claimed by Netsweeper, there are options to query URL's that are denied. The vendor's response to these queries indicates a reasonable review process that can change the categorization. Additionally, staff will continue to monitor the review process of the vendor.
6. The vast majority of our customers and members of the community are consistently supportive of the level of filtering we have provided during the study. Opposition to filtering is limited and is primarily voiced from the Faculty of Information and Media Studies.
7. The current balance of filtered to unfiltered workstations, with a few amendments to ensure equal access, meets the needs of the community and the Library's responsibility to support intellectual freedom by providing unrestricted access. It minimizes the risk of unintentional exposure to sexually explicit images. No customer has complained about not being able to access an unfiltered workstation.
8. Workstations in all locations are positioned as well as possible to minimize exposure to screen images, based on established guidelines and considering the constraints of floor size and configuration. There is considerable expertise within the Library on space planning and design as proven through our extensive building projects. Screen blockers are used on all public workstations.
9. Systems are in place to ensure monitoring of the filtering levels. This includes but is not limited to: the reporting capacity of Netsweeper, Inc.; public feedback forms; NetAlert for denied sites; standard vendor consultation and review processes.
10. Library staff is supportive of the filtering levels provided during the review. Overall, they felt that our responsibility to provide a broad range of information was not impeded and that the

filtering levels had improved the customer experience in the Library. They felt more comfortable and confident in dealing with issues in the Internet environment.

11. The concern regarding access to Sexual Education sites is mitigated by the accuracy levels of Netsweeper in differentiating between these and pornography sites. Sexual Education is minimally accessed which suggests the further study in this area, a future joint project by the Faculty of Information and Media Studies and the London Public Library would be useful in understanding how we can better serve our customers in this area.
12. The Library supports the CLA Statement of Intellectual Freedom by continuing to provide unrestricted access to the Internet in all locations.

Recommendations

Our recommendations are developed and based on the conclusions of the study. We are not recommending a percentage or absolute number of filtered versus unfiltered Internet workstations as this would be difficult to administer in the ever changing environment of the Internet, its offerings, our workstation configurations, the needs of the community, and our physical facilities. Rather we are recommending policy principles by which the operational decisions will be made in order to ensure the overall objective of providing access to information while mitigating the risk of unintentional exposure to images inappropriate in public environment.

It is recommended that the Library Board:

- Filter selected public workstations, including WI-FI access, solely, to mitigate the unintentional exposure of its customers to sexually explicit images that are not appropriate in a general public setting, in order to provide a welcoming environment for all people.
- Maintain a balance of filtered to unfiltered computers in all locations in order to enable unrestricted access to information and resources on the Internet.
- Remove the filter for extreme violence URL's as our research demonstrates that there is negligible interest in these sites.
- Provide a minimum of one unfiltered public workstations in each library location.
- Provide a minimum of six unfiltered public workstations in the Central Branch.
- Filter function-specific public workstations to enhance their use by the public e.g. Employment Research Centres, Homework Centre, etc.
- Filter all public workstations primarily designated for use by children and youth.

Next Steps

CUSTOMER SUPPORT IN A FILTERED ENVIRONMENT

In the course of the Review, staff has identified a number of operational changes that can be made in our management of workstations, messages, signage, etc. that will enable our customers and further mitigate exposure to images inappropriate in a public setting.

Upon approval of the recommendations of this Review, as part of our implementation plan, the Library will:

- Ensure that unfiltered workstations are clearly identified.
- Provide Net Alert on filtered workstations, to allow customers to send denied URL's to Netsweeper anonymously for evaluation and provide on-screen messaging encouraging customers to ask for staff assistance.
- On unfiltered workstations, provide on-screen messaging that alerts customers that they are entering a site categorized as Pornography and that the content may be inappropriate, allowing them to continue or change their search and seek assistance from staff, if necessary.

STAFF RESPONSIBILITIES

As under the current policy and procedures, staff will continue to advise customers of appropriate conduct as required and remind them of the consequences of not following the Internet Policy and Rules of Conduct should unacceptable behaviour occur. They will continue to generate incident reports on occurrences that will allow us to identify emerging trends and take proactive action as required.

IMPLEMENTATION & TIME LINES

Implementation of the revised Internet Policy will be January 7, 2008.

The work plan will include the re-configuration of computers in some locations, signage preparation, barrier placement, staff orientation and training on policy changes, messages to key community partners and monitoring processes.

A report on the impact of the policy will be provided after six months, at the June Board meeting, and then annually thereafter as required.