The Uneasy Mix: Internet + Libraries

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The Uneasy Mix

- Traditional role of librarians: selection
- At first glance, the Internet makes this role less necessary
- Libraries have less control over what users access
- Users may access material traditionally less available in public and university libraries (pornography, hate literature, etc.)
- Computers are expensive (and many costs are hidden); buying them may decrease funding for other areas of collection
  - e.g., junior high libraries cut in Halifax recently; 5 teacher-librarians and 35 assistants fired
- Rise of fee-based information
- Copyright/intellectual property issues (esp. with electronic journals)

Shallit's Three Laws of New Media

- First Law: Every new medium of expression will be used for sex.
- Second Law: Every new medium of expression will come under attack, usually because of Shallit's First Law.
- Third Law: Protection afforded for democratic rights and freedoms in traditional media will rarely be understood to apply to new media.

Filtering and Libraries

- Some believe easy access to pornography presents a problem to libraries.
  - Hanover librarian Sheila Garrity resigned in April alleging "working in an environment where pornography was being used is objectifying herself and other women"
- Some believe filters (or "censorware") provide a solution to the problem
  - Former candidate John McCain criticized the Greenville, S. Carolina public library for not installing filtering software:

    > "I'm very disturbed that a public library receiving public funds is providing children with unlimited, unfettered access to pornographic material on the Internet," said McCain.

  - In the US, Representative Ernest Istook (R-OK) has introduced legislation that would deny federal funding to schools that do not install filtering software on their Internet connection.
- But filters often create more problems than they solve

Filtering and Libraries

- Current filters are too coarse a tool: they remove much legitimate information
- Sites may be blocked based on analysis of the text or on human ratings
- List of blocked sites is considered proprietary information
- Some software blocks sites based on ideological lines, e.g., sites offering pro-gay views are blocked, but not anti-gay views
- The conservative American Family Association found itself blocked by CyberPatrol under the category "intolerance"
- Sample sites blocked:
  - Religious Society of Friends (Quakers) was blocked by X-Stop
  - American Association of University Women Maryland was blocked by one package
- In December 1998, Boalt Hall Law School Library at UC Berkeley was accused of censorship because Surfwatch software, installed to control Internet relay chat (irc) use, incorrectly blocked a political press release.

The Skala Case

- Matt Skala is a 23-year-old graduate student at the University of Victoria, with an interest in cryptography.
  - — See `http://www.islandnet.com/~mskala/`
- Together with Swede Eddy Jansson, he "reverse-engineered" a net filtering program called Cyber Patrol 4.
- Their report, *The Breaking of Cyber Patrol 4*, is a *tour de force* of a combination of theoretical and practical cryptanalysis.
- Their source code, `cphack`, allows one to determine the list of web sites blocked by Cyber Patrol (which was previously kept secret) and circumvent the program's security
- Mattel, the owner of Cyber Patrol, was *not* amused.
- It quickly threatened Skala and Jansson with an expensive lawsuit, and they caved in, assigning the copyright of their report and program to Mattel.
- Nevertheless, dozens of copies of the code are still available
  - — e.g., see `http://www.openpgp.net/censorship/index2.html`

The Skala Case

- Mattel also obtained court orders to obtain server logs that showed who downloaded the software
- US District Judge Edward Harrington issued an injunction on March 28, 2000. He huffed,

> "...this case involves more than a complex and significant legal issue relating to copyright law. It raises a most profound societal issue, namely, who is to control the educational and intellectual nourishment of young children — the parents or the purveyors of pornography and the merchants of death and violence."

— See `http://www.politechbot.com/cyberpatrol/final-injunction.html`

Governing Use

- What restrictions on Internet use are appropriate in a university environment?
- NYU recently banned the use of Napster (a music file sharing system) because increased traffic was using up too much bandwidth; after the ban traffic on the link decreased from 98% to 60% of capacity.
- UW stopped subscribing to picture newsgroups for similar reasons

Monitoring

- Traditionally librarians have denied requests to view circulation records

  "...such records shall not be made available to any agency of state, federal, or local government except pursuant to such process, order, or subpoena as may be authorized under the authority of, and pursuant to, federal, state, or local law relating to civil, criminal, or administrative discovery procedures or legislative investigative power." – Council of American Library Association.

- McMaster University has monitored web usage (to see what sites are visited) without telling students

Waterloo's Usenet Experience

- December 1988: UW bans `rec.humor.funny` — rescinded October 1991.
- May 1990: UW bans `alt` hierarchy — rescinded October 1991.
- November 1993: UW bans `alt.fan.karla-homolka` — rescinded October 1995.
- February 1994: UW bans
  - `alt.sex.bestiality`
  - `alt.sex.bondage`
  - `alt.sex.stories`
  - `alt.sex.stories.d`
  - `alt.tasteless`

  — rescinded December 1999.

Pornography debate misses the point?

- Of more concern: providing easy access to reliable information
- Selection reappears as more and more important
  - Librarian's index to the Internet,
    See `http://www.lii.org/`
  - TUG libraries reference page,
    See `http://www.tug-libraries.on.ca/referencetools/`