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Technically Speaking

Lemonade from Lemons

by Andrew K. Pace

One of the truisms of systems librarianship is that technical solutions are almost always easier than political or policy solutions. Let me give you an example: It is relatively simple to devise a patron look-up system for credentialing reciprocal borrowers between campuses; it is hard to work out the policy details of who can lend to whom, for how long, and with what penalty if the book is not returned. Take this example, increase the technical and political complexity by 100, and you have CIPA—the Children's Internet Protection Act.

The nutshell

Essentially, CIPA forces libraries to place internet filters on computers to which minors have access to be eligible for federal funds. To be fair in my sweeping generalizations, the opposition to this plan complains of two major flaws: First, adults often have access to the same computers as children and do not need the same "protection"; and more importantly, filtering casts a wide net, blocking much legitimate content and missing just as much more objectionable content with regularity.

ALA has wisely split CIPA information into three categories: scholarly information (legislative history), the Association's political position on the subject, and implementation. Every once in a while, technologists have to leave the political battles to someone else, leave the story to the

journalists and historians, and just get the technical part done (especially when there's a court order in play!). CIPA—with a June 30, 2004, deadline to have filters in place in order to secure funding—has moved to the third stage for many libraries.

A filtering software or hardware vendor looking to score a quick buck will look at the situation and provide a solution that satisfies the basic problem without regard for policy or implementation flaws. A smart vendor looks at the complaints, and offers a solution that addresses the problem and satisfies critics.

A solution

I already had the Queens Borough Public Library in New York on my watch list for its innovative, attractive, and inviting web design. When I heard how the library had approached CIPA compliance, the decision to highlight its accomplishments was easy.

Not content to find a solution that simply filtered content, QBPL took a more serious look at existing technical solutions already in place and maximized their impact. With hundreds of computers in over 60 locations, the library was intent, as Interim Director Tom Galante expressed it, "to implement a leading-edge solution to meet both the requirements of CIPA while also addressing important issues to librarians regarding First Amendment rights, over-blocking, under-blocking, and librarian control of content."

One key to the solution was the integration of three different hardware and software solutions. Integration was implemented between the 8e6 Technologies Enterprise Filters, Comprise Technologies SAM library desktop management software, and Sirsi's DRA Classic Integrated Library Information System.

8e6 Technologies provides a fil-

tering solution that is based on site blocking, not keyword blocking—which is famous for over-blocking content. Library users conduct web searches and receive all search results, completely unfiltered; links are only blocked if the site's URL is included in the QBPL's custom 8e6 database. If the patron believes that the site has been blocked in error, a button from the "this site is blocked" page opens an online form that requests review of the site by a Queens librarian. If the site does not contain material "harmful to minors" as defined by CIPA, the librarian unblocks the site permanently in the QBPL's unique 8e6 database. Queens librarians control the content within the 8e6 database and as the QBPL database matures, over- and under-blocking is dramatically reduced.

Interoperability allows versatility

Another key is that all library customers age 17 or older can turn the filter on or off without any library staff intervention. "We wanted to support self-service to the patron to whatever extent possible," noted Assistant Director Joanne King. QBPL implemented the SAM desktop management software for access management so that all library customers first log on to the library's computers to access the library's online resources. SAM is integrated with the Sirsi DRA Classic system to verify the age of the patron, thus determining whether or not to offer the filter on/off option. Customers under age 17 cannot turn the filter off, in accordance with CIPA.

The SAM software also allows the libraries to extend the solution to include PC reservations, time management, and print cost recovery. Librarians can mediate access for walk-up patrons without library credentials, or those who want to use computers without signing in with



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their personal information. Leveraging existing Sirsi patron accounts obviated the need for separate cards or card-reading hardware. Moreover, the 8e6 solution could be used to implement the library's longstanding prohibition on gaming and chat sites.

Serving a diverse and multiethnic population with little outcry for library filtering, QBPL has successfully implemented an innovative solution and clearly gotten more from its technical solutions than it could have imagined. More amazingly, library staff have done so with virtually no complaints from patrons. Hats off to Queens Borough Public Library.

For a detailed list of CIPA-compliance software suppliers, see libraryfiltering.org. While the list of vendors is not complete, the site categorizes operations to help in evaluating and comparing solutions.

QUICK CLICKS

Contracts and agreements

- **Auto-Graphics sales of AGen:**
The Tennessee Board of Regents

has chosen AGen portal as an ASP service for 15 of its academic campuses, including 13 community college campuses and two university libraries.

- **Ex Libris sales of Aleph 500:**

The British Library, with over 30 million records in 12 catalogs, has upgraded to Aleph 500, with an integrated online catalog.

- **Isacsoft sales of PortFolio/Zones:**

Paris City Council in France, the first major sale since the company's buyout of Bibliomondo.

- **Sirsi sales of Unicorn:**

Forsyth County Public Library in Winston-Salem, North Carolina, including SingleSearch and Sirsi Voice Automation, replacing Sirsi DRA Classic.

Announcements

Industry veteran Robert Walton has been appointed to the Dynix board of directors. Walton most recently served on the board at Ex Libris USA, and was executive vice president and CFO for Innovative

Interfaces from 1992 to 1999. Walton will maintain his position as VP for finance and business at Wooster College in Ohio.

Innovative Interfaces has appointed Gene Shimshock as vice president of marketing, a new position for the company. Before joining Innovative in 2003, Shimshock was a senior marketer for Information Access, now part of Gale Group.

Acquisitions and alliances

VTLS has signed a partnership agreement with TDNet for the provision of TDNet's link-resolver module as an option component in the VECTORS iPortal.

OCLC and Yahoo have announced a pilot project that incorporates a "library search" within the Yahoo toolbar for web browsers. The co-branded toolbar includes searches of the 2 million most popular records in OCLC's WorldCat. The co-branded version of the toolbar is available through OCLC's website at www.oclc.org/toolbar/. ♦

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