

Internet Filters in Libraries: What do you do?

By *Mark Arend*

With the recent decision by the U.S. Supreme Court upholding the Children's Internet Protection Act (CIPA) many libraries are wondering what they need to do.

Libraries who receive funding through the E-rate or LSTA programs which is used to pay for Internet access or for purchasing PCs that access the Internet are required to filter *all* computers connected to the Internet, including staff computers. If you do not use these funds for these purposes you are not required to filter. However, even if your library has not itself used these funds for these purposes your library system may have done so on your behalf. Your director may need to check with your System office to see if this is the case.

Even if your library is not required to filter you may decide that filtering some or all of your Internet terminals is appropriate for your library. Before making this decision you need to study the issue and make an informed decision.

In your decision you need to consider these factors:

- ♦ CIPA requires blocking images. No filter currently on the market is capable of doing this.
- ♦ All filters underblock. They cannot block all illegal, objectionable or pornographic pages.
- ♦ All filters overblock. They block legal and unobjectionable pages
- ♦ A major factor in the Supreme Court's decision to uphold CIPA was the ability of libraries to unblock filters for adults on request. Refusal or inability to do so may place the library at risk of legalaction by the patron.



“The role of libraries is to bring people and information together. The reason we went all the way to the Supreme Court is that there is information on the Internet that people want. We feel there are other, better ways to protect people, and we will continue to work toward those ways.”

—*Judith Krug*,
American Library Association

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An article of this length cannot give more than an overview of this issue. The URLs here will give you more information. Your System office can also help answer your questions.

Links to information about filters and filtering

- ♦ *Plain Facts About Internet Filtering Software.* A report from the Public Library Association.
http://www.pla.org/publications/technotes/technotes_filtering.html
- ♦ *Effectiveness of Internet Filtering Software Products* A report prepared by Australia's Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO).
<http://www.aba.gov.au/internet/research/filtering/filtereffectiveness.pdf>
- ♦ *Filtering Software: The Religious Connection.* A report reviewing the relationship between eight filtering software companies and conservative religious organizations.
<http://responsiblenetizen.org/documents/religious2.html>

Links to information about CIPA

- ♦ Information on CIPA from the DPI
<http://www.dpi.state.wi.us/dlcl/pld/cipafaq.html>
- ♦ The American Library Association's CIPA page
www.ala.org/cipa
- ♦ *Coping with CIPA: A Censorware Special* by Walt Crawford
<http://cites.boisestate.edu/civ3i9.pdf>
- ♦ Findlaw analysis of the CIPA decision
<http://writ.news.findlaw.com/hilden/20030701.html>



Top 10 reasons for trustees to attend the Wisconsin Library Association Conference

We all recognize the need for library directors and staff to attend conferences and other training, but attending conferences is important for trustees as well. Here are our top ten reasons for you—the library trustee—to attend this fall's WLA Conference:

- 10** It's a great opportunity to network with other trustees
- 9** You can pick up some nice loot in the exhibit hall
- 8** It's a good excuse to get away from home for a couple days
- 7** You can find out what the latest library trends are
- 6** The delicious hotel food
- 5** You can spend some 'quality time' with your director
- 4** There are some great programs planned for trustees
- 3** Christmas is coming and Milwaukee has some great stores
- 2** The Conference Planning Committee has lined up some great speakers

And the number **1** reason to attend WLA this fall: ***It's fun!***



WLA Annual Conference "Libraries @ the Heart"

October 28-31, 2003

**Four Points Sheraton
Milwaukee, Wisconsin**

<http://www.wla.lib.wi.us/conferences/2003/>

Attendance at Board Meetings

By David Miller

It is an honor to serve on any public library board - regardless of the size of the library. The library serves your community and you have the responsibility to represent that community's interests on the board. So it is always disappointing to hear that a library trustee has an ongoing problem attending board and committee meetings.

This is always a very awkward situation for board members to deal with, since they may be personal friends with the offending trustee, or the trustee might be a "mover and shaker" in the community. In either case, the other board members usually don't want to risk offending the person.

So let me speak for them in directly talking to those of you who can't find the one to two hours it takes each month to attend board meetings. If you are legitimately too busy to make most of the meetings, resign from the board. It's that simple. The resignation will end the tension that the other board members have felt over the recent months. In fact, your fellow board members will respect you more for being honest and saying you don't have time to serve. That's a lot better than repeatedly saying "I really want to start attending meetings," but never following through on that pledge. Most attendance problems are based in the reason you agreed to serve on the board in the first place.

Did you want:

- ♦ An "obituary board" so you'll have one more board membership to list in your own obituary?
- ♦ A "resume builder" so you can impress the next person who interviews you for a job?
- ♦ A "status board" so you and your spouse get invited to more high-profile social events?
- ♦ A political favor for contributing to the campaign of the appointing authority?
- ♦ To continue a family tradition of serving on the board?



If any of these reasons are why you agreed to serve, please resign. You've already got what you wanted when you agreed "to serve." You can now list on your obituary or resume that you were on the library board.

The decision to resign now gets more complicated if you joined the library board for any of the following reasons:

- ♦ You feel your professional expertise can help the library.
- ♦ You think you can best represent your geographic part of the library district.
- ♦ You believe the library board can benefit from your perspective (a parent of young library patrons, a senior citizen, former library employee, etc.).
- ♦ You are convinced that you can make a positive difference in the direction of the library.

Is this you? Reevaluate your priorities and find ways to attend more meetings.

If there is a standing time conflict with your board meeting, ask your fellow board members if the time or day of the board meeting could be changed. If that time conflict cannot be resolved, consider resigning from the board while offering to serve in a limited capacity that still lets the library benefit from your expertise or perspective. For instance, you may be able to serve on the budget or building committees that meet at different times.

For some boards if a board member misses four or more monthly meetings in a year he or she is removed from the board. Another possibility is a "three misses and you're out" policy. Most boards are very understanding if the trustee has a serious illness that prevents him or her from attending a couple of meetings. But when no illness is involved the question becomes: How long should your fellow board members be forced to pick up the slack caused by their peer's spotty attendance record?

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Hopefully the expectations of trustees attending meetings were made clear at the time you were first asked to consider joining the board. Some years are more demanding on trustees' time than others - years when a board has to hire a new director, or when tight budgets require several special meetings to deal with the issue.

And there are some times when changes occur in board leadership and you might be asked to take on more responsibility than you have time to give. The "easy answer" is for you to be honest and say: "I don't have the time to do justice to the task." Again, your fellow board members will respect such honesty.

Possibly the saddest thing about a trustee who seldom attends meetings is that there usually are two or three library supporters who would love to be an active member of the board...if only a vacancy would occur.

David Miller is a past president of the State Library of Ohio Board, the Ohio Library Trustees Association and the Wood County (Ohio) District Public Library Board. He is editor of the Sentinel-Tribune newspaper in Bowling Green, Ohio.

Article reprinted from the RURAL LIBRARY SERVICES NEWSLETTER Vol. 14, Issue 3

TRUSTEE SOAPBOX

Do you have a question, comment or topic to suggest for a future TrusteeTale? Send an Email to:

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trustee tale is written and distributed



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