Filtering of Web Materials
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ACTION for Health

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Filtering of Web Materials

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Types

- Content Filtering
  - Key words
  - Graphical data
  - PICS
- Exclusion Lists
  - Blacklisting sites
- Inclusion Lists
  - Whitelisting sites
“Inclusion lists are used infrequently as they are the most restrictive; they appear to be most often used in repressive political regimes and the children’s section of some public libraries.”
Levels

- Client
- Server
- ISP server
Problems

- Underblocking
  - Allowing inappropriate sites
    “8.8% to 60.2% of sexually explicit websites in the Google and MSN indexes [were] not blocked”

- Overblocking
  - Blocking appropriate sites
    “of the clean websites catalogued by Google or MSN … 0.4% to 23.6% [were] blocked by filters”
Problems for Librarian Intermediaries

- Quackery online, esp. in health
  - Filters don’t generally block these
- Porn words close to many others
  - Breast cancer
  - Dick Cheney
- Some filters intentionally block ‘controversial’ material
  - Sexual health (esp. gay materials)
Freedom of Expression

- Constitutional Protection
  - Canada & US

- “Conventional” Protection
  - UK & Australia
Censorship

- Legislation
  - Outlawing obscenity & child porn
  - Mandating use of internet filters

- Voluntary Measures
  - Project Cleanfeed
Libraries and Censorship

- U.S.: majority now use filters, 11% confine to children’s section
- U.K.: Library Association does not endorse use of filters
- Aust: Association does not endorse, but use varies
- Canada: Often used in children’s section but not adult’s
Legal Aspects other than Regulation

- Criminal law
- Injury to patron; liability of intermediary?
- Employment law
Library Guidelines

- Library Associations
  - Against filters

- District Libraries
  - May employ filters
Ethical Aspects

- Access to information – civil liberties
- Protection from crass materials – sick society
- Tender age
- Religious/cultural prohibitions/sensitivities
- Overblocking & underblocking