Web-Blocking Internet Sites: A Summary of Findings

By Anne G. Lipow, Library Consultant 12 October 2000

Background

At the request of Attorney Chris Hansen of ACLU, I examined 204 Web sites that had been blocked by one or more Web-blocking software packages. My assignment was to evaluate the sites from the standpoint of their appropriateness for library collections or for referral by a reference librarian serving an information seeker. I did not receive any remuneration for this work. I have never before testified as an expert witness.

My credentials

From 1961, when I received a Masters degree in library science from the University of California, Berkeley, to 1992, I worked as a practicing librarian in a variety of capacities (collection development, reference, systems, technical services, and special services). Since 1992, I have performed consulting services to libraries throughout the world of all types (public, academic, medical, law, corporate, and school), assisting libraries in moving through fast-paced change and in redesigning their services to meet users' new information needs enabled by the emerging technologies. Recent and current clients include the Peninsula Library System (a public libraries consortium in California, the University of Arizona Libraries, the Library of Congress, and the Medical Library Association, AIMA (an Australian training organization for librarians, and Vancouver (Canada) Public Library. I have taught courses in library public service skills at Diablo Valley Colle ge in California. I was the 1994 recipient of the American Library Association Mudge-Bowker award for outstanding achievements in the area of reference work—primarily for my "Rethinking Reference Services" institutes which were credited with helping libraries move in new directions. I am a frequent invited speaker and the author of numerous publications. A description of my work, including a list of presentations and articles, is attached.

Methodology

Using a CD supplied by the ACLU, I accessed the homepages of each of the 204 sites, and from there, linked to the sites' internal pages. I understand that the sites I reviewed are contained on a CD attached to the expert report of Ben Edelman.

I assigned the letter X to some sites, and either A, B, or C, or D to every site--the letters representing the following rankings:

X Assigned only to those entries in which I couldn't access the site's internal links via the CD files, so got the information via the site online.

All entries were assigned one of the following letters:

- A If text: Authoritative, quality information. If it were in paper, a librarian would select it for the library's collection. The site could be a link on a library's Web page of reference resources. No objectionable content. If art or photos: similar to what would be in a public library collection.
- B Reasonable, quality source for a few people. A library might not choose it for its collection, whether print or electronic, because of the low relevance to its community. However, a reference librarian would cite this Web resource if it was relevant to the client's question. No objectionable content.
- C A library might not choose it for its collection because of one or more of the following reasons: low content; can't determine authority of author; many misspellings; library may well have quality material on same topic, information was out of date. However, there are many instances in which a reference librarian would refer someone to this site, e.g., patron was doing a comp rehensive research analysis of a topic; nothing else was readily available and librarian, explicit about the site not meeting standards of quality and authority, left it up to the patron to decide if the information was good enough for their purposes. No objectionable content.

D Inappropriate for kids

Findings

Of the 204 sites I examined, 200 sites fell into rankings A, B, or C, and ranged from being highly informative resources with reliable information or artistic accomplishment such as can be found in public or academic libraries to those that did not meet libraries' collection standards, but would certainly be useful information that a reference librarian would want to pass on to an information seeker for whom the site's content was relevant.

One of the greatest benefits of the Internet is the accessibility to its vast resources on limitless topics available to anyone with access to an Internet connection. Much that might be excluded from a library's selection of Web resources because they don't meet the library's criteria for "reliable" information would still be useful to many searchers who might be grateful to get some information rather than none or to a researcher wanting to leave no stone unturned. All sites in my sample of 204 met this minimal standard of "useful information for someone" and, except for one site in this sample (see first paragraph in this section), all of them should be accessible to children.

Examples of category A sites, i.e., sites that would be found on a library's Web site of reference resources or, if the same content were in print would be found in a library's collection, are:

Willis-Knighton Cancer Center, Department of Radiation Oncology (http://cancerftr.wkmc.com), which is a recently accredited Cancer research and treatment institution and is part of a larger consortium of prestigious medical facilities.

Search Engines is the guide to searching at Internet search ... (http://www.alphasearch.org Current Web Version) An outstanding one-stop-shop search engines resource. Listed in the distinguished, authoritative "Librarians' Index to the Internet" under Best Subject Indexes. **Examples of category B sites**, i.e., informative sites that would probably not be in most libraries' print or Web-linked collections because of their relevance to too few people or to only a geographic-specific region, but that would be used in the context of a one-on-one reference transaction to provide quality information, are:

Much Love Home Page (http://muchlove.org) A Southern California non-profit animal rescue organization, dedicated to the well being of animals. Informative about care of animals and rescue efforts of this organization.

Southern Alberta Fly Fishing Outfitters (http://www.albertaflyfish.com) Commercial site that describes--in text, photos, and maps--the sport and the rivers on which they offer packaged trips.

Examples of category C sites, i.e., sites that fall outside libraries' collection policies or standards for inclusion on their Website as recommended links, but which would indeed provide welcome information to an information seeker by filling a special need (for example, a desire to be comprehensive; a preference for some information to no information at all:

Many Moons Menstruation Health Links

(http://pacificcoast.net/~manymoons/menstruation.html)

Started by "Abbey", whose credentials I couldn't determine from either the site nor an external source, the site is now a commercial site to sell products. Abbey admits that she is not an expert, so the reliability of her information is questionable. "A lot of people have been writing asking for medical advice, unfortunately we have no training or expertise to offer, just our general interest in the subject area." A library will have authoritative works on this subject.

Manhattan Podiatrist-Recontructive Surgery, Neuroma, Diabetic Feet (http://www.americanfootcare.com)

This is a commercial site promoting the private practice of footcare doctors in New York It contains no information about footcare issues.

I found only one site to contain inappropriate content for kids:

CyberIron Bodybuilding & Powerlifting – Bodybuilding.

The author himself agrees. On the homepage he states: ."Information provided on this site is for entertainment purposes only and is intended for those OVER 18 ONLY! If you're under 18, please do not continue further."

Three sites were inaccessible, either via the CD or directly online:

- HoYkA (http://www.hoyka.com) Only a blank white screen was retrieved.
- Adam Butler Gallery of Photography and Contemporary Art (http://www.adambutler.com) Only a blank black screen was retrieved

• Organic Farming. (http://www.doitnow.com/~smd/agorg.htm) Site can no longer be reached

The numbers in each rank were as follows:

A 49 B 70 C 74 D 1 Unreachable 3 Duplicates or sub-pages of already-ranked sites: 7

Conclusion

Before the burgeoning of information on the Internet, printed material in an academic or special library was inaccessible to the public at large because they didn't have the proper credentials. The Web has made it possible for people not affiliated with a university, or for an expert hobbyist in a subject, to both retrieve information from nearly every type of library and publish their own findings or ideas. That is, if space were not a consideration in libraries, the sites ranked A, B, and C would be selected by a public, academic, or special (medical, law, or corporate) library. The virtual environment of the Web has eliminated the space considerations. Therefore, a searcher should be able to access without a mediator intervening, all of the sites ranked A, B, or C. I can say with confidence that, given the results of blocking software that I have examined, blocking software prevents access to valid sources of information.

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ANNE LIPOW, DIRECTOR

Library Solutions Institute and Press 2137 Oregon St., Berkeley, CA 94705 anne@library-solutions.com 510-841-2636

Anne Grodzins Lipow is founder and director of Library Solutions Institute and Press. She is a frequent consultant, speaker, author, and classroom instructor. Anne has worked with libraries of all types to consider such issues as organizational restructuring to provide new services, redefining jobs in light of changing definitions of "professional work," and space needs for staff and users in the networked environment.

The changing nature of library reference service and the continuing education of librarians are Anne's special areas of expertise. Anne helped the Library of Congress launch its Collaborative Digital Reference Service, a global project, involving public and academic libraries throughout the United States as well as the national libraries of many other countries, to provide 24x7 reference

service (lcweb.loc.gov/rr/digiref). Anne currently serves on the CDRS governing board.

Other clients with whom she has examined various aspects of reference include the Joint Library Project of the San Jose State University Library and San Jose Public Library, Auburn University Libraries, and the National Conference of State Legislative Librarians. Clients whom she has assisted with their staff development needs include California State Library InFoPeople Project, University of Iowa Libraries, and the Australia Library and Information Association. Anne described issues related to the changing nature of reference service in her various articles and presentations.

Among Anne's many publications is the now-classic book *Crossing the Internet Threshold: An Instructional Handbook*, which she co-authored with Roy Tennant and John Ober. She is also a co-editor of *Staff Development: A Practical Guide*, published by the American Library Association. Her chapter describing Library Solutions appears in What Else You Can Do with a Library Degree (Neil-Schuman, 1997).

At Diablo Valley College, she teaches "Delivering Library Services: Issues, Theories, and Techniques."

Anne is the recipient of ALA's Isadore Gilbert Mudge/R.R. Bowker award for "a distinguished contribution to reference librarianship." The award recognizes, among other achievements, her role in organizing "Rethinking Reference" institutes throughout the country.

Formerly, Anne held various positions at the University of California, Berkeley, Library, among them, Director of Instructional Services (1984-1992).

Recent Articles:

"Live Reference on the Web Is Great.... But It Takes Getting Used To." AIMA News, vol. 16 no. 1, 2001.

"'In Your Face' Reference Service." Library Journal, August 1999, pp. 50-52.

"Thinking Out Loud: Who Will Give Reference Service in the Digital Environment?" Reference & User Services Quarterly, winter 1997, pp. 25-29.

Recent Invited Presentations :

"Are You Worried Enough About the Future of Reference?" Ohio Library Council Reference Retreat, 27 September 2000, Mohican State Park, OH

"Advocating Reference in a Season of Ref-dot-coms," Illinois Library Systems Retreat, 1 September 2000, Allerton Conference Center, IL

"Moving the Reference Desk to the 24x7 World on the Web," International Federation of Library Associations, 14 August 2000, Jerusalem, Israel

"Rethinking Reference in the Digital Age," Keynote presentation, Air Force Librarian's Workshop, 11 July 2000, Chicago, IL

"Redesigning Reference Service for the 21st Century," Canadian Library Association Boards of Trustees Annual Meeting, 24 June 2000, Edmonton, Alberta

"Rethinking Reference in the Digital Age," Nylink Conference, 7 June 2000, New York City, NY

"How We Can (and Why We Must) Compete," South State, MCLS, and Santiago (California) Library Systems, 2 June 2000, Pasadena, CA

"Reference Service to Remote Users: The Key to Surviving (and Thriving)," VRD 1999 Annual Digital Reference Conference, 14 October 1999, Boston, MA

"Staying Ahead When You're Already Behind: Changing Competencies and Models for Keeping Up," ALA/RUSA/MARS ETSC Program "Models for Training Public Services Librarians in a Continually Changing Electronic Environment," 26 June 1999, New Orleans, LA

"The Future of Reference in the Internet Age: Anytime, Anywhere, AnyWay," MCLS, 21 May 1999, Los Angeles (PowerPoint slides available at http://www.mcls.org/homepages/ref/lipow.ppt)

"Who Will Give Reference Service in the Digital Age?" Keynote, BayNet Annual Meeting, 20 May 1999, San Francisco, CA

Keynote Address at Information Online & On Disc 99, Sydney, Australia, 19-21 January 1999: "Serving the Remote User: Reference Service in the Digital Environment"

Anne Lipow Expert Report List of Blocked Sites Reviewed

site # = number on Appendix A CD-R to Edelman Expert Witness Report * = inaccessible sites

Site #	URL	Category
1	http://www.1sn.com/homehealthcare	X-B
2	http://www.a1-frontpage-hosts.net	X-B
3	http://www.aardvarks.com/rewind	В
4	http://www.aasect.org	А
5	http://www.aberdeen-indy.co.uk	X-A
6	http://www.acas.org	X-B
7	http://www.actionfit.com	X-C
8	http://www.adambutler.com	*
9	http://www.adbusters.org	X-A
10	http://www.adultdev.org	А
11	http://www.advanced-art.com	В
12	http://www.advocate.com	X-B
13	http://www.afao.org.au	X-B
14	http://www.agapechurch.com	С
15	http://www.agi-usa.org	X-A
16	http://www.albertaflyfish.com	В
17	http://www.alphasearch.org	X-A
18	http://www.altindia.net	В
19	http://www.altindia.net/esg	В
20	http://www.amazingraymond.com	В
21	http://www.americanfootcare.com	С
22	http://www.andalusianhorses.com	С

Site #	URL	Category
23	http://www.angelsofvenice.com	X-C
24	http://www.antichildporn.org	С
25	http://www.apricotpie.com	С
26	http://www.arabicnewspaper.com	А
27	http://www.armenianfood.com	С
28	http://www.art- connection.com/default.asp?gallery=Connaught+Brown&branch=London	X-A
29	http://www.artpostcard.com	С
30	http://www.artscenechina.com	В
31	http://www.arttexnet.com	X-B
32	http://www.asacp.com	X-C
33	http://www.asiaguide.com	X-B
34	http://www.Athena-Inst.com	С
35	http://www.autowire.net/1999-25.htm	X-B
36	http://www.avi.org	X-C
37	http://www.awcm.com	X-B
38	http://www.backdoor.com/csg	С
39	http://www.barcelonareview.com	А
40	http://www.bayswan.org/APA.html	В
41	http://www.bayswan.org/student.html	В
42	http://www.bceafocus.org	А
43	http://www.beautifulself.com	X-B
44	http://www.berkshire.net/~ifas/activist	В
45	http://www.berkshire.net/PittsfieldLibrary	А
46	http://www.bibliomania.com/NonFiction/Nefzaoui/Garden/index.html	В
47	http://www.bisexual.org/chicagoland	С

Site #	URL	Category
48	http://www.blacksmithchic.com	С
49	http://www.blk.com	X-C
50	http://www.bloomsburyart.com	А
51	http://www.bluedesertproductions.com/siglff	В
52	http://www.bobcoughlin.org	В
53	http://www.bravenewgirl.com	X-B
54	http://www.btdesigns.com	С
55	http://www.cancerftr.wkmc.com/equip.html	А
56	http://www.carnaval.com/music/salsa.htm	С
57	http://www.casanova.org/memoir	А
58	http://www.CastleRockInfo.com	В
59	http://www.cco.caltech.edu/~clu	В
60	http://www.cdrominvestigations.com	С
61	http://www.cedarwoodsudbury.org	X-C
62	http://www.cedc.org	С
63	http://www.cloc.org.au	С
64	http://www.columbia.edu/~gmo9/poetry/index.html	X-A
65	http://www.compamerica.com	С
66	http://www.compamerica.com/sss	С
67	http://www.compupix.com/gay/havurah.htm	С
68	http://www.conrocapub.com	В
69	http://www.coolbeans.com	С
70	http://www.corpun.com	С
71	http://www.cris.com/~golden10/horse.html	С
72	http://www.critpath.org/~tracy/spot.html	С
73	http://www.cs.brown.edu/~lsh/smoking.html	X-C

Site #	URL	Category
74	http://www.csmaca.org	А
75	http://www.csulb.edu/~asc/journal.html	А
76	http://www.csun.edu/~sr2022/index.html	А
77	http://www.cvbi.net	А
78	http://www.cyberiron.com	D
79	http://www.delanet.com/~huskys	А
80	http://www.diabetic-foot-consensus.com	А
81	http://www.dimensional.com/~randl/buch.htm	C
82	http://www.dirtypicturesband.com	В
83	http://www.dlc.fi/~hurmari/castles.html	А
84	http://www.doitnow.com/~smd/agorg.htm	*
85	http://www.dreamcastle.com/tungs	X-B
86	http://www.drruth.com	А
87	http://www.dumblaws.com	X-A
88	http://www.dvdemand.com	X-B
89	http://www.eade.es	А
90	http://www.engr.ucdavis.edu/~jsdevlin/glorygod.html	В
91	http://www.epix.net/~jlferri/profit.html	X-B
92	http://www.eserver.org/bs	А
93	http://www.eskimo.com/~bpentium/marcia/strassman.html	X-B
94	http://www.eurotrotter.com	X-C
95	http://www.everwonder.com/david/gorillas	X-A
96	http://www.everwonder.com/david/mistakes.html	X-C
97	http://www.evesapple.com	X-B
98	http://www.farmersandsavings.com	В

Site #	URL	Category
99	http://www.fdb-flower.com	В
100	http://www.fdp.dk	В
101	http://www.fineartsgallery.com	А
102	http://www.finlandia.ro	А
103	http://www.Fitness1000.com	X-C
104	http://www.flying-viper.in2home.co.uk	С
105	http://www.forevermemorials.com	X-C
106	http://www.friesian.com/ross/ca40	В
107	http://www.fundaschool.org	С
108	http://www.gay.ch	X-C
109	http://www.gaysport.org/pesce	С
110	http://www.gaytas.org	С
111	http://www.geocities.com/adamscopa	X-C
112	http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/2933/fauves	X-A
113	http://www.geocities.com/CapeCanaveral/2933/fauves/fvbegin.htm	X-A
114	http://www.geocities.com/Hollywood/Studio/3015/index.html	С
115	http://www.geocities.com/HotSprings/Spa/3156	C
116	http://www.geocities.com/Pentagon/1151/enter.html	С
117	http://www.geocities.com/Tokyo/Courtyard/9049/singapore/whatodo.htm	С
118	http://www.gianna.org	X-C
119	http://www.girlskickbutt.com	X-C
120	http://www.girlsplace.com	X-B
121	http://www.glaa.org	С
122	http://www.glasswings.com.au/sexual/contraceptives.txt	С
123	http://www.goaskalice.columbia.edu	А
124	http://www.goehs.com	В

Site #	URL	Category
125	http://www.greenhousegallery.com	X-A
126	http://www.griviere.com/artlib/alib1.html	А
127	http://www.grownmencry.com/mijo/Femmass.html	С
128	http://www.hcsa.com	X-A
129	http://www.headinghome.org/linked/html	В
130	http://www.heartratemonitor.co.uk	C
131	http://www.hi-ho.ne.jp/yokoyama-a/taxationinjapan.htm	В
132	http://www.hobrad.com/and.htm	X-A
133	http://www.hoyka.com	*
134	http://www.hrgiger.com	X-A
135	http://www.hs.ttu.edu/sexuality&aging	А
136	http://www.hubcom.com/tantric	X-B
137	http://www.hudmark.com/schoolnet/art.html	X-C
138	http://www.hudmark.com/schoolnet/history.html	X-C
139	http://www.hudmark.com/schoolnet/science.html	X-B
140	http://www.husn.com	С
141	http://www.idzap.com	В
142	http://www.i-iman.com	С
143	http://www.illinoisrighttolife.org	С
144	http://www.imagesjournal.com	X-A
145	http://www.implantnetwork.com	С
146	http://www.indiamike.com	X-C
147	http://www.indra.com/archives/alt-locksmithing	С
148	http://www.infonet.ee/~lpk17	С
149	http://www.inmate.com/prislibr.htm	С

Site #	URL	Category
150	http://www.innerself.com/Magazine/Sex_Talk/Sexual_Surrogate.htm	X-C
151	http://www.intercourses.com	X-C
152	http://www.inwood.org	C
153	http://www.i-out.com/nhglcc	C
350	http://avivasg.eresmas.com/diab.htm	В
351	http://bi.org	В
352	http://blitz.org/powmia/dan.html	В
353	http://byo.com	X-A
354	http://cancerftr.wkmc.com	А
355	http://ccat.sas.upenn.edu/~humm/Topics/Lilth	X-B
356	http://citizens.nettaxi.com/azukatheatre	X-B
357	http://danni-dawson.com/index.html	X-B
358	http://data.fineartstudioonline.com/dataviewer.asp?keyvalue=125&page= Contact%20the%20Artist	X-B
359	http://desires.com/1.6/Sex/Museum/museum1.html	X-B
360	http://desires.com/1.7/Word/Bookrevs/Docs/mv.html	А
361	http://eserver.org/gender	X-B
362	http://gensex.channel4.com	X-B
363	http://hjem.wanadoo.dk/~wan42942/frameset.html	В
364	http://home.12move.nl/~sh360505	X-B
365	http://home.netcom.com/~youngop	C
366	http://host.bip.net/tracker/dict/index.html	А
367	http://lenbat.narod.ru	В
368	http://marinenet.mite.com.au	В
369	http://members.aol.com/Sebringsil/sex.htm	В
370	http://members.spree.com/lifestyles/cullerdgrrls/monster.htm	C

Site #	URL	Category
371	http://members.spree.com/mfpr	X-B
372	http://members.spree.com/mfpr/cgpa.htm	X-B
373	http://members.spree.com/pahoa/199.html	X-C
374	http://members.spree.com/sip/beyondmarty/poetry	X-B
375	http://members.spree.com/sip/jdcclinic/leftframe.htm	X-C
376	http://members.spree.com/sip/kin92	X-C
377	http://members.spree.com/sip1/caledonia	X-C
378	http://members.tripod.com/~fourwalker/start.html	С
379	http://muchlove.org	X-B
380	http://pacificcoast.net/~manymoons/menstruation.html	С
381	http://pages.cthome.net/dtgriffith	X-B
382	http://plaza5.mbn.or.jp/~aiueo	В
383	http://plaza5.mbn.or.jp/~aiueo/jls30.htm	В
384	http://pobox.upenn.edu/~davidtoc/books.html	В
385	http://psych.fullerton.edu/throck	В
386	http://sdcc13.ucsd.edu/~ucsdlgba	X-A
387	http://surgest.com	X-A
388	http://usinter.net/wasa/contents4f.html	X-A
389	http://violet.umf.maine.edu/~sharkey/bpj	X-A
390	http://vzone.virgin.net/sizzling.jalfrezi	X-A
391	http://w1.871.telia.com/~u87112797/show-off.html	X-B
392	http://websmurfer.devnull.net	X-C
393	http://wildfree.com/drmarten.htm	В