CREATE A SMART WIRELESS NETWORK FOR YOUR LIBRARY

- Creating A Smart Wireless Network for your Library.rtf

This is an accompanient to the webinar, Easy to be Free: Creating a Smart Wireless Network for Your Library.

Lately, I've been thinking a great deal about how to create a "Culture of Yes" in our libraries. Dealing with the public, I believe it's all too easy to fall into a "Culture of No", where you just want patrons to come in, get what they want, then get out. Don't make a mess on the floor, don't destroy the materials, don't linger…just don't! Of course this isn't our default position, but the daily grind can make such an attitude all too easy to slip into. For my own part, I have been struggling to

Embrace the Yes!

in all of our services – programming, collections, even equipment. We create the "Yes!" when we don't simply provide a service, but herald its arrival and sing its praises – or at least make sure we and our patrons are using it to full advantage.

So what does this have to do with providing wireless Internet service? Everything. Wireless is a relatively new service in libraries – I estimate most libraries have been providing it for fewer than five (5) years. Experiences with wireless implementation vary. I've heard from libraries who had their IT staff announce "you'll be getting wireless Internet access tomorrow" with no planning time, and others who planned meticulously for its arrival. Either way, there may be aspects that were missed or that tapered off after launch. Have you fully embraced the "Yes!" of your wireless service? It's worth thinking about a review of your wireless service. Are you taking it for granted? What do your patrons think about it? How might you make your wireless Internet service better?

I recently presented a short webinar for WebJunction on wireless Internet service – what it is, how we provide it in libraries, how we promote it, policy issues, etc. A number of questions came up in the webinar which are illustrative of this concept of Creating the Yes, and might be useful to you as you review your wireless Internet service. What follows are a few of the topics raised, with some food for thought as you review your wireless service and what it might do for your library.

Captive Portals

You may use a captive portal product in your library, which stops your wireless traffic and requires users to do any number of things to continue on to the Internet. If you've ever used wi-fi in a hotel, you've probably run into this – you open your browser, and get sent to the hotel chains login page to enter your room number or similar. Most common use in libraries is to read and click through a copy of the library's Internet Use Policy or similar. Your library may require some form of authentication

(library card, username, student ID, etc.) before traffic is let through, or some combination of these steps. Why might your library want to use a captive portal?

Cons: It's one more step for patrons to go through before accessing the Internet on their own equipment. Do you require patrons on your wired stations to read your policy before proceeding? Then this makes sense to have wireless users do the same. There are good reasons to use a captive portal product (see Pros), just be sure you're not making it so complicated that patrons just give up and go elsewhere.

Caution: *don't make wireless customers into second-class users – to some extent, they're doing you a favor by using their own equipment and not clogging up your wired stations.*

Pros: There are a number of positives about captive portals. They can gather statistics for you about actual wireless users. You can also assure your Internet Use Policy gets "in their face" – but be careful! Don't create a Culture of No around this – if they have to enter two fields and click three times before getting to the Web, they'll be tempted to move on to another library.

Another pro: *captive portal landing pages can be used to brand your wireless service to your library. A simple splash page with your logo, library name, and Internet Use Policy offers a quick branding opportunity – and a gentle reminder that they are in the library, not in Starbucks ™. Yes! You are in the library, and you are welcome!*

Bandwidth

Someone asked about what to do when your wired and wireless services become so popular that bandwidth starts getting sucked up. I'm going to give you what sounds like a flippant answer, but I don't mean it to be. Buy More Bandwidth (if you can). There are services/software that can squelch your bandwidth by user or by other variables. However…is this creating a Culture of Yes? Bandwidth is relatively cheap, compared to the staff time and stress of explaining why this patron can't watch a YouTube video of a cat playing piano, or that patron can't download a learning module for his online class.   When you can say "yes, of course you can watch that streaming video for your class!", you create a Yes! moment for your patron and your staff. I realize this may not be an option for all libraries, especially those in more remote areas with limited Internet service options. For those libraries, a product to control and distribute bandwidth might make sense. My only caution would be to be sure you're distributing fairly to wired and wireless users. Today, most of the popular websites require high bandwidth connections.

Electrical Outlets

This may seem a weird subject to include here. Nonetheless, I'm frequently asked about how to "deal with" a shortage of available electrical outlets for wireless users and their laptops. I'm also frequently shocked when wi-fi hotspot providers don't offer electrical outlets. Don't think this is a major issue? Last month, an article ran in *The Des Moines Register* [Tom Vander Well "Plug-In Customer Service" 9/6/10], which newspaper is distributed statewide in Iowa. In it, the writer complained about a local bookstore, where he was accosted and humiliated by an employee for

daring to plug his laptop in to the sole electrical outlet in the café, declaring "We have to pay for the electricity! It's not yours!" Talk about a Culture of No! He has never returned to that store.

I laughed at this…until I remembered having this identical conversation with a librarian newly adapting her library to accommodate laptop users. She complained that patrons "all want to plug in their laptops and cell phones, but we don't have any extra outlets!" Her concern was valid, as her small library couldn't hold a lot of people at tables with electrical equipment. However, a pal of mine at another library came up with what I thought was a brilliant solution that fully embraced the "Yes!" opportunities in this situation. In response to a discussion about when/whether to let patrons plug in their cell phones (and laptops) to recharge, Tena Hanson, Library Director, Milford (Iowa) Memorial Library responded:

> We actually installed a "laptop bar" in our library, complete with the addition of a few outlets. We have very limited space for tables, and not many seating opportunities near walls with outlets, so we designated an under-utilized area and installed a simple counter top for this purpose. As long as a cord is not posing a tripping hazard, our members are welcome to use our outlets.

This is a perfect example of saying "Yes!" to patrons needs and wants, without breaking the bank, your building or your staff. Another idea is one that I ran across some years ago, and which I still think is simply brilliant – with emphasis on the "simple"! Madison Public Library has an **electrical outlet map** image on their wireless FAQ. Brilliant! I guarantee some poor laptop user with 5 minutes of battery left has found this a lifesaver! Similarly, some libraries have "hotspot maps" of good wi-fi signal in their buildings. Yes!

Wireless Printing

When I wrote a book on wireless in libraries some years ago, wireless printing options were pretty limited. Since then, however, there has been a huge surge in the number and type of printers with wireless options, or other options for creating a wireless connection to a printer. I mention it here as something to consider if you've had wi-fi for a while, and have not yet looked at offering printing directly from laptops.

We adopted wireless fairly early, so printing at the time was largely off of our planning radar. We have always allowed patrons to save to flash drives and use our wired stations to print. However, like many libraries in this economy, we're now facing huge jumps in our wired station usage, so this is not always feasible. In addition, we use a time and print management system that automatically charges for printing after some free pages. When we first installed both wireless Internet and our time/print management software, wireless printing options were not available. The printer we had networked for the public stations was older, and did not have a readily available wireless add-on. We made the choice to hold off on that particular option.

This decision, though realistic at the time, has bothered me for some time. I am now exploring options for adding a wireless printing option for our patrons using their own laptops – a section of our users that is growing every day! A number of the time/print management vendors now have options for seamlessly pulling in wireless printing through the pay-for-print systems. Talk to your vendor – they may have some plug-and-play options you can implement.

Wi-Fi in the Parking Lot!

I've been writing and presenting about wireless in libraries for several years now. There is one conversation that never fails to appear, and I think it's the perfect example for this whole concept of "Yes or No". Invariably, for very good and sane reasons, a discussion will begin about whether wi-fi should be made available outside the library building – for instance, extending into the parking lot.

Overheard In a Library Meeting: "I left the building at closing yesterday. Some guy was sitting in his car, with his laptop on the steering wheel, surfing the web using our wireless. We need to turn the wi-fi off when we close!" I can't even count the number of times I've heard this. Now, there are various reasons for this concern – both valid and not – and a number of possible solutions. Let's examine them – and I would ask you to think of each concern and each solution in terms of a Culture of No vs. a Culture of Yes:

1)   **Staff is concerned about loitering in your parking lot because you library has had an actual problem with criminal behavior in this space**. In that case, to keep from encouraging loitering, you may want to move your access points (wi-fi transmitters) or dial down the signal from your access points, to keep the service largely within the walls of the library proper.

2)   **Staff is concerned about loitering, because they don't like the idea of anyone using the library or its services without staff supervision**. I'm going to have to point out that, the minute you published a website, you gave up on any idea of being able to see all of your patrons. When we give up control in return for patron goodwill, we generally make a good bargain.
 I can't tell you how grateful I've been to find free wi-fi in the parking lot of a public library on a Sunday morning or late in the evening, when I need to get directions to someplace. One small town public library even had some cross-country RV drivers send them a donation in gratitude for being able to use the library's wi-fi an hour after closing!

3)   **Staff don't like the idea of patrons using Internet "unsupervised" or without having read your library Internet Use Policy**. If they're using a laptop in one of your armchairs, chances are pretty good you don't see what they're doing anyways. That said, if you want to be sure they are aware of your Internet Use Policy – since yes, they are using your Internet pipeline – then you may want to look into a captive portal (see above) as an option for splashing the Use Policy in front of any user, in or outside the building.

Notes on Policy: To be sure you are covering your bases with patrons using Internet in places other than your wired Internet stations, you may want to consider a few small changes to a couple of existing policies, rather than trying to create a separate wireless policy. I've written about some of these changes elsewhere. However, a few quick ideas:

- Make sure your <u>Library Conduct Policy</u> includes something about not viewing images that might offend others, or similar. There are lots of examples out there from which to borrow.
- Make sure your <u>Library Conduct Policy</u> says that all its rules apply "on library property" not just "in the library".
- Make sure your <u>Internet Use Policy</u> (separate from Conduct Policy) talks about rules for "using the Library's Internet service" not "the Internet stations". That way wireless is covered, as they're still using your pipeline.

Marketing

Finally, a very few words on marketing your wireless service. Mostly, these days, wi-fi doesn't need much marketing beyond "we have it!". Wireless laptop users generally know how to connect. That said, making sure your staff is knowledgeable on the basics of using a laptop to connect to wireless (finding the SSID/wi-fi signal, making sure the wireless card is turned on, etc.) can give both patrons and staff confidence about the service. In addition, some libraries have created "HOTSPOT" signs to put in their libraries, especially if they have exceptionally good and bad areas in their building for wireless service.   And dare I point out – this is a great branding opportunity! "Wi-fi, brought to you by Acme Public Library –Welcome Laptop Users!" Yes!

Embrace the Yes!

I hope that I've sparked in you a desire to find the Yes! in all of your library services, not just your wireless Internet. Talk to your patrons. Find out where they feel stymied by your rules, or blocked by your technology.   Where you can safely do so, pry open the gates. Free Internet – wired and wireless – is one of the great offerings of today's libraries, but it also can benefit from review, revision and a good dose of Yes!

Source : http://www.webjunction.org/documents/webjunction/
Create_a_Smart_Wireless_Network_for_Your_Library.html