

Recommendations for Multipurpose Public Access Computer Configuration Using Windows

Overview

Multipurpose public access computers in public libraries are used by patrons who can't afford a computer and/or Internet access, who need help using computers, who wish to gain experience with computers and business software, or who are away from home and need to use a computer or the Internet for business or school. Internet-only, or "Express" computers provide a useful service, they do not address the full range of needs facing public library patrons.

Because the public access computer is the only computer available for many people, it is important that the computer provides an interface that closely resembles a PC that the user is likely to encounter in a new job, at school or at a friend's home. To help address the digital divide, the library computer should not be so different from a normal PC that the user is unable to translate their experience on the library's computer to other computing environments.

Library multipurpose computers are used by many patrons to apply for jobs, look up information about medical conditions, download government forms and do homework, conduct research. Therefore, it is important that library computers provide programs users most often need including word processing software for writing resumes and doing homework and Adobe Acrobat Reader for viewing and printing forms. Other productivity applications such as Excel and Powerpoint are important for business users and students.

Multipurpose computer users should be able to save files to the computer and to a removable drive such as a USB device or floppy. User should also be able to print and email files from the computer, use web-based email programs, search websites, and view state-of-the-art web pages.

As an institution that stands for free and open access to information, any library use of Internet filters should be transparent and manageable. If a filter is installed, patrons should have the ability to disable it or at least override a blocked site. They should be advised that a filter is in place. They should be advised when websites have been blocked. Keyword blocking should never be used because it always results in over blocking or unexpected and undesirable results.¹

Library computers are increasing in importance to both libraries and patrons. The popularity of public access computers has been largely responsible for increases in library use. Recognizing and supporting the broad range of services associated with the use of public computers is important to the future of public libraries.

¹ For more on Internet filtering, see Infopeople's Internet Filter pages at <http://infopeople.org/filtering/>

Recommended Tools for Protecting Patron and Library

1. Anti-Virus Software
 - Prevents computer and network infection by viruses, worms and trojan horses
 - Products: [McAfee Virusscan](#), [Norton Internet Security](#)
2. Anti-spy and anti-ad software
 - Removes software related to data-mining, aggressive advertising, parasites, trojans, dialers, malware, browser hijackers, and tracking software
 - Like anti-virus programs, anti-spy programs need to be updated to scan for new spyware applications and scan for changes in existing spyware applications
 - Products: [Spyware Doctor 3.2](#), [Webroot SpySweeper](#), [Spybot Search & Destroy](#)
3. Privacy Protection
 - Removes personal information from browser's temporary Internet files, cookies, history, pre-fill form data
 - Can be set to "wash" every time you close the browser (Window Washer) or logout (CleanSlate) creating a way to clean up after patron sessions without having to reboot
 - Products: Webroot [Window Washer](#), Fortres [Clean Slate](#)
4. Disk Security
 - Allows patrons to use the computer including installing files, saving files, creating documents, changing system settings, changing the screen saver, optimizing the computer for low-vision or limited mobility needs – anything they want to do – and then restores the computer back to the standard image upon reboot
 - Products: Centurion Technologies [Centurion Guard](#) or [Drive Shield Plus](#), Faronics [Deep Freeze](#) and [Anti-Executable](#) or Microsoft [Shared Computer Toolkit for XP](#)
5. Configuration Fine-Tuning
 - Allows administrator to hide portions of the computer from the public, how the desktop will look, what items will appear in the start menu, which items can be accessed in the control settings area, setting where the default save location will be (and making it be the same as "My Documents"). Also allows for fine-tuning individual programs such as limiting what options are available when right-clicking in Word or what menu options will appear under "File" in Excel
 - Products: Faronics [WINSelect](#), [Fortres 101](#), or Microsoft [Shared Computer Toolkit for XP](#)
6. Session Management (optional)
 - Controls the length of each patron's computer session
 - Usually provides several warnings to save files before automatically closing the session
 - Products: Fortres [Time Limit Manager](#), CMS Diginet [PC Cop](#), Microsoft [Shared Computer Toolkit for XP](#)

Recommended Software for Patron Use:

1. Internet Explorer with the following plugins installed:
 1. Adobe Acrobat Reader
 2. Quicktime
 3. Shockwave
 4. Flash
 5. Windows Media Player
 6. Real Player
2. Firefox (or Netscape) with the following plugins installed:
 1. Adobe Acrobat Reader
 2. Quicktime
 3. Shockwave
 4. Flash
 5. Windows Media Player
 6. Real Player
3. Notepad (or similar text editor)
4. [IrfanView](#) or [Fast Stone Image Viewer](#) (these free viewers open more file types than Microsoft Picture and Fax Viewer which is also a free option)
5. Paint or [OpenOffice Draw](#)
6. Microsoft Word or [OpenOffice Writer](#)
7. Microsoft PowerPoint or [OpenOffice Impress](#)
8. Microsoft Excel or [OpenOffice Calc](#)

Other Configuration Recommendations:

1. Folders should display in “details” view
2. File extensions should be set to display
3. In Microsoft Office applications:
 - Show “screen tips” (Options)
 - Show Standard and Formatting toolbars in two rows (Customize)
 - Always show full menus (Customize)
 - Show screen tips on toolbars (Customize)
 - Show shortcut keys in screen tips (Customize)
4. Patrons should be able to:
 - View and access files from the CD drive
 - Use web-based email
 - Access right click menus
 - Change screen resolution and contrast
 - Change sensitivity of mouse and size of cursor
5. Saving Files
 - Default save location should be the same location for all programs
 - My Documents should be linked to the default save location
 - Should be able to save to an external USB device and floppy