

From: Chair, TPL Board chair
To: Allan Farrington
Date: Thu, Jan 8, 2004 8:35 AM
Subject: Computer Access

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January 8, 2004

Mr. Allan F. Farrington

Dear Mr. Farrington:

Thank you for your letter of December 30, 2003 regarding the on-line services provided by the Library and also requesting to address the Board at its January 19, 2003 meeting.

This matter will be placed on the agenda of the January 19, 2004 meeting. The meeting will be held in the Beeton Auditorium of the Toronto Reference Library, 789 Yonge Street and will commence at 6 PM. In accordance with the Toronto Public Library Board Procedural By-law, you will be limited to 5 minutes for your deputation. Please confirm your attendance by contacting Nancy Marshall at nmarshall@tpl.toronto.on.ca.

Our staff has reviewed the various issues that you have raised in your letters, and I would like to take this opportunity to provide some further information in response.

As you note, the Library's computers are in constant use. Library users can pre-book computers for one hour per day to ensure equitable access and respond to customer demand. In addition, beyond that hour, people can use a computer as long as no one else has booked it. It is also worth noting that booking and access to Library computers is the same at all district and neighbourhood branches across the City, regardless of the neighbourhood served.

You have asked that we notify branches when we take the system off line. In fact, this process has been in place for several years. We use a variety of means including email, our work order "splash screen", our telephone-recorded hotline for staff and occasionally, telephone trees. However, these notification methods are only effective when our information technology staff is aware of the system being down. For example, from time to time, there are isolated instances in local branches where some or all computers may be down for a period of time due to line problems or other localized hardware failures. Information technology staff is not aware of these occurrences until reported by branch staff. In checking activities at the Weston branch over the past few months, with the exception of October 2 when all computers in the branch were down for approximately 2 hours due to a Bell line problem, there were only a few minor computer problems reported which would not have interfered with the overall use of the branch computers. For example, in November, a catalogue terminal was reported to be down by branch staff but was operational again when the technician arrived; staff reported that a patron was unable to register in Hotmail, but our information technology staff was not able to replicate the problem; and finally, branch staff reported that a patron could not open an email attachment in WordPad and information technology staff advised that this application is not available on public computers.

You have asked about access to CD-ROM and floppy drives to enable the public to download Internet information. As staff has advised you, public computers are not currently

configured to support this in any of our 98 branches (with the exception of 4 PCs at the Digital Design Studio at the Toronto Reference Library) for a number of reasons, including system security. Our 2004 work plan includes a roll-out of a new operating system and software image on all public computers. As part of this process, we will be looking for a way to resolve the security issue, in a cost-effective manner that addresses the needs of a large and heavily used, mixed-use (public and staff) environment.

Other issues that the Library will need to address before enabling downloading include requirements for added bandwidth and associated operating budget costs; costs to add CD-ROM burners to PCs since our current configuration does not include them; increased maintenance requirements and branch staff time to deal with various issues, e.g. damage to customer diskettes and library floppy drives; review of any other issues related to enabling customers to download large amounts of data to CD-ROM.

Currently, several computers at Toronto Reference Library and North York Central Library may be accessed by customers to insert and use CD-ROM's. These designated computers are not networked so there is no concern about network security and there is no Internet access. Their primary use is for dedicated sets of CD-ROM's such as genealogy CD-ROM's.

Finally, you refer to problems accessing Sympatico email. Accessing various sites including some email services through Netscape 4.7, our branch browser, has been a growing problem. We are aware of these problems and are very sorry that the public has been inconvenienced by them. We anticipate that by the end of March 2004, Internet Explorer 6 will be made available as an additional browser on public computers. This should resolve the problem with Sympatico. Please note however, that as indicated by the Library's Internet Use policy, Toronto Public Library provides access to the Internet, which is an unregulated, frequently changing environment. While the Library makes every effort to keep up with the changes, it cannot guarantee access to Hotmail, Sympatico, etc. or to any external website over which it has not control.

Thank you for your interest in the Toronto Public Library. I hope that this information addresses your concerns. Ron Dyck, Director, Information Technology will be available to answer any further questions you have after January 12, 2004. Ron can be reached at rdyck@tpl.toronto.on.ca.

Yours truly,

Gillian Mason
Chair
Toronto Public Library Board

Copies to:
Josephine Bryant, City Librarian
Anne Bailey, Director, Branches
Ron Dyck, Director, Information Technology & Bibliographic Services
Mayor David Miller, City of Toronto (via Canada Post)