

WINTER 2008

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Editor Signing Off

When I first arrived at OPLIN as the Managing Editor back in July 2001, I couldn't tell a router from a hole in the wall. Six and a half years later, I'm fairly certain that a router has something to do with Internet traffic. And for more information, I refer you to the OPLIN Support Center.

Such has been my progress. But as of January 2, I'll no longer be the "least techie" person here at OPLIN. Instead, I'll be working for Columbus State Community College and the Ohio Board of Regents on a joint web development project.

OPLIN has been a tremendous learning experience for me, and I feel very lucky to have met and worked with so many smart and talented people, not only in this office but also out in the Ohio library community.

I'd especially like to thank the three directors I've worked with: Carol Roddy, Don Yarman, and Stephen Hedges; as well as the current OPLIN staff: Bobbi, Karl, Vince, and Laura.

Joel Husenits

Librarians Focus on OPLIN

In the fall of 2007, OPLIN invited select library staff from across Ohio to participate in focus group sessions, the goal of which was to help OPLIN plan its future spending priorities. The OPLIN Board of Trustees asked Wayne Piper of the Ohio Library Council (OLC) to conduct these focus groups, which were held at five locations: Central (Delaware County Library); Northwest (NORWELD); Northeast (NEO-RLS); Southeast (SERLS); and Southwest (SWON).

Participants were generally selected by the director of their corresponding regional library system, and "major players" in the library community were intentionally not asked to participate. We wanted to hear from the librarians who use OPLIN services and face daily technology challenges in the library, but who may not get opportunities to voice their concerns or observations.

For the most part, what we heard was consistent from group to group. There were also some regional concerns; for instance, librarians in Northwest Ohio had some concerns about the future of their websites that are currently hosted by NORWELD, and librarians in Southeast Ohio were concerned that the lack of rural broadband was limiting the ability of their patrons to use their online library services, including the OPLIN-provided databases, from home.

When asked how they use OPLIN in their daily work, every focus group started by discussing the databases. There was very little sentiment for purchasing additional databases; rather, almost all of the discussion revolved around improving access and

usability of the databases OPLIN and LCO already buys, with many mentions of Google as a primary competitor.

At some point, each group shifted to discussing the Internet connectivity provided by OPLIN. This was sometimes expressed as a plea for more bandwidth, but was also often a simple "thank you" to OPLIN for something that libraries take for granted. When Ohio librarians turn on their computers in the morning, they trust that the Internet will be there. The OPLIN connection is widely viewed as a dependable "utility" serving the libraries. And in the rare cases

when there has been a problem, the groups were effusive in their praise of the OPLIN Support Center.

When asked about their daily technology challenges, the participating librarians made it clear

that public computing is becoming a burden on libraries. Members of the group with purchasing authority were concerned about finding space for more computers, and finding funds to purchase and replace computers, especially in light of the demands of the new Microsoft Vista operating system. Members of the group who spend a significant amount of their time in direct contact with patrons lamented their inability to answer many of the questions they get from public computer users, and expressed a desire for more computer training.

After listening to all five focus groups, the initial impression was that OPLIN's current spending addresses many of the major technology needs of libraries. OPLIN is

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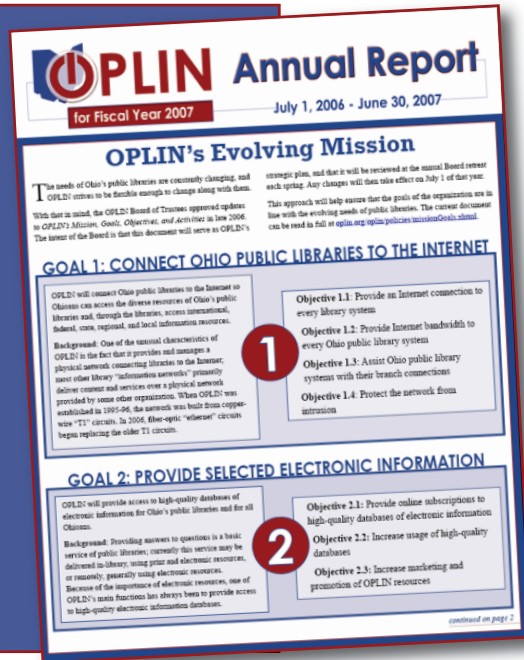
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Annual Report is Out

The 2007 OPLIN Stakeholders Meeting was held at the OLC Convention and Expo in October. Much of the two-hour presentation was built around OPLIN's 2007 Annual Report, which is available online at oplin.org/oplin/pdf/2007AnnualReport.pdf.

The four-page report contains lots of information and graphics pertaining to OPLIN's 2006-2007 fiscal year, including stats about Ohio public library database usage, wireless Internet access, OPLIN Support Center requests, and more.



Librarians Focus on OPLIN (from page 1)

currently spending money to develop an interface to the databases that will probably not “beat” Google (can anyone do that?), but may at least compete in the same arena. Once that interface is developed, OPLIN plans to spend money on marketing and promotion of the databases. OPLIN is also spending money to upgrade the library community's Internet connections.

However, OPLIN can always do more. Some potential future steps might include:

- Continuing to spend money on development and usability testing for the Ohio Web Library website, as well as money to upgrade public library websites. These sites should be able to take full advantage of the Ohio Web Library and provide an attractive “home” for links to OWL. OPLIN may not have enough resources to do this alone, but can perhaps combine resources with other groups, for example, considering membership in the Plinkit Collaborative (www.plinkit.org).
- Becoming more aggressive in upgrading the Internet connections to libraries. In particular, upgrading the connection of any library that consistently uses over

80% of its current circuit capacity during peak afternoon hours. Ethernet should be the upgrade path, if available.

- Purchasing a block of online technology courses from WebJunction, to be added to the block of general courses (800 hours) being purchased by the State Library. OPLIN had considered this action before, but was unhappy with WebJunction's offerings. That selection has now improved and looks like it would address many of the computer training needs of libraries.
- Planning to spend significant funds on media promotion of the Ohio Web Library once a satisfactory user interface has been developed.
- Repeating these focus groups in two years, with new participants. This experience has demonstrated that holding these focus groups is a very strong public relations tool.

Ideally, the funds to accomplish any of these recommendations will come from OPLIN's E-Rate reserves. Read the entire *OPLIN Focus Groups 2007: Report at* www.oplin.org/page.php?Id=62-4-438.

More Pipe?

On December 14th, the OPLIN Board decided to automatically upgrade the connection of every library that is consistently using over 80% of its current circuit capacity during peak afternoon hours.

To determine whether a library qualifies for this upgrade, OPLIN staff will periodically gather five days of statistics related to library circuit usage. Any library that uses more than 80% of their circuit capacity on at least three of the five afternoons will qualify for a larger circuit. If possible, this will be an Ethernet connection; if Ethernet isn't available, OPLIN will install an additional T1 circuit.

The Board also moved to help libraries that do not use 80% of their current circuit, but would still like to purchase a larger circuit with their own funds. In this situation, a library would typically add a T1 line. Using the state SOMACS contract to purchase a T1 to the OPLIN core, the library will pay \$400/month for the circuit and \$250/month for management, with OPLIN continuing to pay hardware maintenance and bandwidth charges. So if a library wants to add a 1.5Mbps T1 to their existing OPLIN T1, they would pay \$650/month and have a total of 3Mbps of circuit capacity.

In areas where Ethernet is available under state contract, the library could have another option. If the library agrees to pay the \$710 monthly charge for a 10Mbps Ethernet circuit, OPLIN could disconnect its T1 and instead take care of all other Ethernet charges involved; \$250 for management, \$35 for maintenance, and about \$300 for bandwidth. Clearly, this scenario would be financially attractive to the library; for a small additional monthly amount (\$710 instead of \$650), the library gets much more circuit capacity (10Mbps instead of 3Mbps).

If you have any questions about your circuit usage or switching to Ethernet instead of installing an additional T1 line, contact Karl Jendretzky <jendreka@oplin.org>.



Filtering Grants: Tally Up

Since 2001, OPLIN and the State Library of Ohio have offered financial assistance to public libraries interested in implementing filtering technology for managing public access to the Internet. Each year the State Legislature allocates additional funds to OPLIN for this purpose, stipulating that, "...up to \$100,000 in each fiscal year shall be used to help local libraries purchase or maintain filters to screen out obscene and illegal internet materials."

This year, OPLIN received 41 requests from libraries for filtering assistance, totaling \$125,864.28. While it has been our practice to slightly exceed \$100,000 in grants each year, a 25% "overage" was beyond our means.

A quick review of the requests revealed that many libraries were requesting 2- or 3-year subscriptions for content filtering. While this is undoubtedly the most economical way to buy subscriptions, OPLIN can only award grants annually, so we had to limit our grants to the amount needed for 1-year subscriptions.

We also noticed that there is a general industry trend toward devices that combine a firewall/security device with the filter, in

effect blocking both obscene content and security threats simultaneously. While this is certainly an excellent practice, we think it is clear that the intent of the legislature was to provide financial support for blocking obscene content, not security threats. Where possible, therefore, we removed funds for firewall support or subscriptions to security updates from proposed grant awards. We did not, however, remove funds for purchasing firewall devices, since some libraries will use these to separate various kinds of Internet traffic before the filtering is applied.

Finally, some requests included the cost of hardware that the library should already have on hand for normal operations, such as cables and uninterruptible power supplies. We removed these costs from the proposed grant awards. Once these changes were applied, the 41 requests totaled \$103,078.76, which allowed OPLIN to fund all of the requests, without breaking the budget.

Next fiscal year, OPLIN will again have \$100,000 to distribute to libraries for filtering. Watch for an announcement of the next grant cycle sometime around August.

DNS Done Right

When requesting a change in your library's Domain Name Server (DNS) information, keep in mind:

- Requests must be made in writing. Your library can submit a ticket, e-mail, or chat with OPLIN Support Center personnel at <http://support.oplin.org>.
- Requests must be made **before noon** if you want them to take effect the next business day. Any requests made after noon will take an extra day to process.

E-Rate Deadlines

- The last day to file E-Rate **Form 470** is **January 16, 2008**.
- The last day to file **Form 471** is **February 7, 2008**. This form cannot be filed until at least 28 days *after* the corresponding Form 470.

Out & About on the Circuit

OPLIN Board Meeting
Friday, February 8
State Library of Ohio

OLC NE Chapter Conference
Wednesday, March 19
Kent State University

OLC SE Chapter Conference
Thursday, March 27
Ohio University Inn (Athens)

I Feel the Need:

The Need to Test My Speed

When it comes to troubleshooting a slow Internet connection, websites that claim to test your connectivity speed can be misleading.

Every "speed check" website basically works the same way: the "speed" of your connection is based on the amount of time it takes for you to download a specific amount of data from their server to your computer.

Here are some things to keep in mind when you conduct any online speed test:

- Your connection passes through a number of network "hops," each with its own

variables that contribute to the overall latency of your individual speed test.

- Your line is only as fast as the slowest node in the network path, so if a router in the testing path is slow, your projected line speed will also be slow.
- High utilization can cause slowness. Your test results will be skewed by all of the existing traffic in your library.
- You should test your speed against the closest ISP, as longer physical distances will slow things down.
- Because Internet pathways are constantly

fluctuating, even multiple consecutive tests will show varied results.

- If you have multiple circuits from the OPLIN core to your library, a speed test will only use one of the circuits, even if they're balanced.

If your library's Internet connectivity seems excessively slow, contact the OPLIN Support Center for troubleshooting help.



OPLIN'S FEATURED DATABASE

NetWellness

OVERVIEW

NetWellness is an Ohio-based, non-profit, consumer health information website started in 1994, and currently supported by OPLIN and the State Library of Ohio.

Its high-quality health information is created and evaluated by medical and health professional faculty at Case Western Reserve University, the University of Cincinnati, and The Ohio State University.

USE IT TO:

- Quickly find general information on almost any health topic.
- Submit questions to real health professionals in the "Ask an Expert" section.
- Access the *ADAM Health Encyclopedia* and other high-quality health reference sources.

GETTING STARTED

To access NetWellness:

- Start at the OPLIN home page (www.oplin.org).
- Click on **Research Databases** in the left navigation bar.
- Scroll down to the **NetWellness** link (under **Health & Medicine**).

Search the site.

Choose from dozens of Health Topics.

Ask an Expert allows consumers to submit questions to real health professionals.

Nine different Health Centers go in-depth.

High-quality health reference resources.

NetWellness Needs You!

NetWellness is actively recruiting Ohio librarians to participate in a **NetWellness users group**. The group would advise NetWellness on the health information needs of Ohio library patrons and librarians. You would be asked to help prioritize the development of new features and content, and to comment on test versions of new functionality. The group might meet once or twice a year, but most of your input would be by e-mail, blog, or conference call.

NetWellness is an asset to Ohio citizens, and this is an opportunity to help it be even more so. Please contact Stephen Hedges <hedgesst@oplin.org> if you'd like to participate.