Library Broadband: Are you getting what you pay for?

Libraries provide an essential public service through their broadband connections. These free connections provide citizens access to e-government resources, job, education and health resources, and the entire range of internet enabled library materials (databases, WorldCat, etc.). Libraries in theory offer patrons computers and internet services at speeds that often exceed those available at home or work. In addition to the basic internet, most libraries (some estimate up to 90%) today have some sort of wireless connectivity for their patrons. Many libraries offer formal classes in computer and internet use. However even in these fast times, In order to provide these services libraries will require increased capacity and higher Internet speeds. A recent survey by the North Carolina State Library found that a number of public libraries in North Carolina were not getting the Internet bandwidth that they were paying for. The problem appears to be that with so many patrons online at once, all the traffic is funneled into the one data line, reducing the speed to that of a dial up line. The solution of course is to provide more lines into the library to handle the increased library user traffic. Often Internet Service Providers (ISP) are reluctant to do this because of the increased cost to them. Library users replied in a 2013 Pew Interest Poll that 77% considered Internet access "very important." (Women 81%, Men 73%) The FCC has proposed that by 2020 all libraries have a bandwidth of at least 1Gbps. The current target level for 2014-15 school libraries is 500Mbps or half of the proposed 2020 standard. Other groups have proposed target speeds of 500 Mbps for 2014, 1Gbps for 2017 and 2Gbps for 2020. Regardless of what the target rates are you will want to make sure you are getting the speed you are paying for. There are several free tools to check your upload and download speed with. A good one can be found at www.speedtest.org. Speedtest has several servers at various locations in the United States (Virginia, Texas, Washington, California, Florida, Missouri and New Jersey). Another service that checks your broadband speed is AppNeta's SpeedCheckr (http://www.appneta.com/resources/free-tools/speedcheckr); however to use the AppNeta's service you have to register and receive a link via e-mail. Probably the best thing you can to do protect your library user's broadband capability is to frequently check upload and download Internet speed. If you are not getting the speed you as promised, then you need to notify your ISP. Hopefully the ISP can fix the situation and your patrons will be happier Internet users.

Letters to the editor should be addressed to the editor and sent to Joyner Library, East Fifth Street, Greenville, NC 27858, or by electronic mail (scottr@ecu.edu). We reserve the right to edit all submissions. If you are interested in writing for North Carolina Libraries or would like consideration for news and product information, please send brief information to the editor at the above address.

Submission requirements for North Carolina Libraries

Eletronic articles can be submitted online at http://www.ncl.ecu.edu

- To submit you must login; if needed you can register using the link in the header.
- We use the *Chicago Manual of Style* (15th edition, 2003).
- We have a rolling deadline, articles are juried when received.
- Publication of approved articles is in about 3-9 months depending on space available.
- For additional information, contact Ralph Scott scottr@ecu.edu.