



Meal Plan 7

Laptop Checkout Programs

Laptops for checkout? But we just spent thousands on all these desktop computers for the public, and now they want laptops! What can you do on a laptop that you can't do on a regular PC? Well, several things. Patrons can't install their own software on your desktop computers, but with the right setup, you can give patrons free reign on your checkout laptops. Also, laptops are great for group work. Five or six students can reserve one of your meeting rooms and take a laptop in there to work together on a project. Finally, laptops are mobile, allowing patrons to move around among your different departments and collections. If you've run out of space and can't provide any more stationary computers for the public to use, laptops might be the way to go.

This section of the Cookbook lays out some tips and recommendations for those libraries that are planning to implement a laptop checkout program. The primary focus here is in checkout laptop safeguards, as well as laptop and filtering considerations.

TOPICS TO BE COVERED:

- Laptop Security
- Laptop Maintenance
- Buying Your Laptops
- Do You Need to Filter Your Checkout Laptops?
- Check Out This Real, Working Laptop Checkout Program



Laptop Security?

So ... what about laptop security? What's to keep someone from checking out a laptop and walking away, never to be heard from again? What if a patron drops it? Here are some actions you can take to secure your laptop:

- **Picture ID** — Hold their driver's license or another photo ID until they return the laptop.
- **A checkout form** — Ask your patrons to sign a form indicating that they won't take the laptop out of the library and what their responsibility is should they damage it somehow.
- **Accidental damage protection** — For an extra charge, most hardware companies will repair or replace your laptop should it get damaged.
- **Serial numbers** — Engrave the serial number into the laptop and then keep track of those numbers.
- **RFID or security tags** — Tag the laptops in several places
- **TattleTape** — Put some "tattle tape" or "tamper strips" over the security tag, over the hard drive bay, over the battery, over the memory bay and elsewhere, so you don't get a laptop back and find out later that it's missing a key component.
- **"LoJack for laptops"** —LoJack is a product that tracks your computer. When a laptop with this product is lost or stolen, it begins to "dial home" every time it's connected to the Internet. Computrace, who makes the product, will alert the police and provide them with the information they need to recover the laptop. To see if this product will work with your systems, go to:
<http://www.absolute.com/laptop-security-solutions.asp>.
- **Your staff** — Make sure that staff at the front desk know what to check for when the patron returns the laptop. They should look for all the major pieces before returning the patron's photo ID.



Security Tags as a Safeguard

"All the systems are security engraved in numerous places, and all serial numbers are kept in our database. To stop them from walking out of the door, I have placed visible and not so visible security tags on them that will trigger the alarm system when they are taken out of the building. We do not allow patrons to take them outside. The laptop bags also have two or three security tags in them, so if someone does try to steal one, they would have to find at least six or seven tags to get over all the security!"

*Terry Caudle
Madisonville Public Library, TN*



Notes from
a Chef

No Insecurities About Security

“We are very lucky here; this is the kind of place where people don’t lock their houses or their cars, and so security is not an issue here. We do check them out to people. If they have a library card, we check them out to them; if they don’t, we still let them use them, but they give us their driver’s license or something — we hold onto it. And we have never had one walk out the door, and we would all be flabbergasted if it happened here.”

*Laura Tretter
San Juan Island Library, WA*



Notes from
a Chef

The Lowdown on LoJack

“Among other things, I was told by several excellent sources to get LoJack for Computers, sold by many computer vendors (Computrace is its real name). I guarantee it will seem affordable the first time they recover a \$2,000 laptop! The ‘we can’t afford it’ line doesn’t wash with me — when I worked to develop a laptop checkout program, I struck a couple of the laptops from the plan in order to afford things like Computrace, a locking case, extra cords, etc.”

*Karen Schneider, Research and Development Consultant,
College Center for Library Automation, Tallahassee, FL*



Notes from
a Chef

Laptops on the Loose

“Some of the things that we’re hoping to do in the future is to get laptops that people would be able to check out and use within the library, especially for our Teen Services. That would be something that we would want to do so that they would be able to use those computers in a different area, away from the regular public access computers, and then to hopefully be able to allow some gaming events, some contests and that kind of thing.”

*Chris Beyerl
Redwood Falls Public Library, MN*



Notes from
a Chef

Tracking Laptops for Home Use

“We check out laptops within the library, but have plans in the near future to check them out for home use. We plan on installing a built-in GPS tracking system to track where the laptop is — in case people don’t bring it back. I know it seems like a problem, but currently people have DVDs and books issued out that are worth almost that much! Again, installing Deep Freeze will prevent virus retention, and we understand that even though wireless is in-built only those who have Internet access at home will benefit. Students can always use it to do their assignments using PowerPoint or Word or Publisher, etc., which are all pre-loaded.”



Buying Your Laptops

Before you begin shopping for new computers, you have to decide on the overall purpose of these laptops. Will patrons be using these laptops for gaming? Will they be editing graphics and videos? Or will they be checking them out to do research, word processing and recreational Web surfing? Any graphics-intensive activities will require more memory (RAM) and a higher-quality graphics card. Microsoft's latest operating system, Windows Vista, also requires more memory and more graphics power than Windows XP. If you look around, you can still buy new computers with Windows XP (or Linux, for that matter), which might allow you to save on the laptop itself. Remember, you can buy Windows Vista, Windows XP and other Microsoft software from TechSoup.org (<http://www.techsoup.org>) at steep discounts. For more advice on buying laptops, see "Other Tasty Recipes" at the end of this chapter.



Notes from
a Chef

Buying Laptops and Warranties

"One of our libraries had a Library Services and Technology Act (LSTA) grant to buy laptops for a computer lab and chose the Dell Latitude 630. The tech guys wanted me to get the four-year gold warranty, but that adds \$184 to each unit. Since we had budgeted for 20 laptops, it looked like we would need an additional \$3,680. My advice was to buy an extra laptop (actually even three for that price!) instead of a gold warranty. These are sturdy and if one does break down, the regular Dell warranty covers a replacement or gets the repaired laptop back in two weeks. In the meanwhile, the extra laptop (or three) will come in handy".

*Malavika Muralidharan
Arizona State Library Archives and Public Records*



Laptop Maintenance

So who's gonna fix the laptop when it comes back with a new operating system, ten pieces of gaming software and an inappropriate screensaver? You can't send it back to IT every time that happens.

DeepFreeze, CleanSlate, Windows SteadyState and other hard drive protection or lockdown utilities are one way to go. See Meal Plan 2 in the first *The Joy of Computing: A Cookbook for Small and Rural Libraries* for more information regarding locking down your computer (<http://maintainitproject.org/node/74>).

In contrast, the Alachua County Library District went in another direction, as discussed below.



Patron Portioning

"One of our network technicians, Kelley Stewart, tested a different approach. Using a bootable Flash drive, disk-imaging software and drive partitions, he created an image of the partition used by patrons, copied it to a hidden partition on the hard drive and wrote a script to refresh the patron partition after every checkout. To ensure non-technical staff would not have problems with refreshing the partition, he automated the process. When a patron returns a laptop, staff plug a Flash drive into any USB port and power up the laptop, the laptop boots from the USB port, then a script takes the image from the hidden partition, rewrites the patron partition (takes three to four minutes), then ends by displaying the imaging software completion screen. At this point, staff can power off the laptop and place it in a secure storage container for recharge or check it out to another patron. This method met all our requirements and puts a high-demand resource back in service very quickly."

*Michael Fettes
Alachua County Library District*

Do You Need to Filter Your Checkout Laptops?

If your library falls under the purview of the CIPA act (i.e., you receive E-rate money in the Internet Access category), you probably need to filter any laptops that you make available for checkout. This may sound odd, since in Chapter 7 we said that CIPA doesn't require you filter patron laptops. The distinction, as made clear in this article (<http://webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=990>) has to do with who owns the equipment. If the library owns the laptop and makes it available for checkout, it must be filtered.



OTHER TASTY RECIPES

Advice on Buying a Laptop

- A Quick Guide to Buying a Laptop
Yahoo!
An easy visual guide to some of the major factors to consider when you buy a laptop.
http://tech.yahoo.com/qg/quick-guide-to-laptops/laptops;_ylt=AIQe.kPAECP6Hvsdp3WFeC9SLZA5
- How to Buy a Laptop
PC World
A more in-depth look at the features available to laptop buyers and advice about how to choose between them.
<http://www.pcworld.com/article/id,125647-page,1/article.html>
- Tech Purchasing Advice
WebJunction
General advice on buying computer hardware
<http://www.webjunction.org/do/DisplayContent?id=10230>

Check Out This Real, Working Laptop Checkout Program

For another take on Alachua County Library District's experience with checking out laptops, read this article <http://maintainitproject.org/files/Micheal%20Fettes.pdf>. In Appendices B and C, you'll also find the list that Alachua staff uses when they're checking out and checking in the laptops. In Appendix D, we've also included a copy of the form that Alachua patrons have to sign when borrowing a laptop.



Fast Food — Meal Plan 7 Summary

- A laptop checkout program requires security measures to prevent the possibility of theft or damage.
- If your library falls under the purview of the CIPA act (i.e., you receive E-rate money in the Internet Access category), you probably need to filter any laptops you make available for checkout.

MENU 4 CHECKLIST

- If laptops are available for checkout, consider any of the following security actions:
 - Hold their driver's license or photo ID until laptop is returned.
 - Ask your patrons to sign a checkout form that clearly spells out their responsibilities.
 - Look into the purchase of accidental damage protection for laptop repair/replacement.
 - Engrave the serial number into the laptop.
 - Place security tags on the laptops in several places.
 - Put some “tamper strips” over the security tags.
 - Use “LoJack for laptops.”
 - Train your staff to check the laptop when the patron returns it and to look for all major pieces before returning the patron's photo ID.
- Lock down your laptop computers using DeepFreeze, CleanSlate, Windows SteadyState and other hard drive protection or lockdown utilities.