In the trenches of the digital revolution: Intellectual freedom and the "public" digital library

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Abstract:
The development of the Internet and the increasing popularity of the World Wide Web have opened up a new realm of information access, storage, and delivery for librarians and information professionals. Libraries and schools are striving to respond to the pervasive and persistent growth of global networking and manage the demand for access to this dynamic medium. Currently, 21 percent of American public libraries and 35 percent of public schools have some form of internet access (U.S. Department of Commerce, 1995; Sackman, 1995). Working in the trenches of the digital revolution, librarians and information professionals are beginning to offer internet services to patrons; their work marks the beginning of the grassroots implementation of the "public" digital library. Such efforts do not come without their attendant risks, and it is extremely important that those who are becoming network service and resource providers and content producers clearly understand what is involved in their participation in the digital revolution from an issues- and policy-oriented perspective. This paper will outline one subset of the range of critical issues that are part and parcel of the world of networked information and discuss its impacts on librarians and information professionals. It will discuss questions of access, privacy, copyright, and the protection of intellectual property and suggest that librarians and information professionals discuss and develop reasonable acceptable use policies early in the implementation process that will allow them to effectively person the front lines of the digital revolution.

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