

# Recommendations for Multipurpose Public Access Computer Configuration Using Windows

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## Overview

Multipurpose public access computers in public libraries are often used by patrons who can't afford a computer and/or Internet access, who need help using computers, who wish to gain experience with computers and business software, or who are away from home and need to use a computer or the Internet for business or school. Internet-only, or "Express" computers provide a useful service, they do not address the full range of needs facing public library patrons.

Because the public access computer is the only computer available for many people, it is important that the computer provides an interface that closely resembles a PC that the user is likely to encounter in a new job, at school or at a friend's home. To help address the digital divide, the library computer should not be so different from a normal PC that the user is unable to translate their experience on the library's computer to other computing environments.

Library multipurpose computers are used by many patrons to apply for jobs, look up information about medical conditions, download government forms and do homework, conduct research. Therefore, it is important that library computers provide programs users most often need including word processing software for writing resumes and doing homework and Adobe Acrobat Reader for viewing and printing forms. Other productivity applications such as Excel and Powerpoint are important for business users and students.

Multipurpose computer users should be able to save files to the computer and to a removable drive such as a USB device or floppy. User should also be able to print and email files from the computer, use web-based email programs, search websites, and view state-of-the-art web pages.

Library use of Internet filters should be transparent and manageable. Patrons should be told that a filter is in place and how to turn it off or bypass it (some library policies require staff to assist patrons with this process). Patrons should be told when websites have been blocked and keyword blocking should never be used because it results in over blocking.<sup>1</sup>

Library computers are increasing in importance to both libraries and patrons. The popularity of public access computers has played a part in increases in library use. Recognizing and supporting the broad range of services associated with the use of public computers is important to the future of public libraries.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on Internet filtering, see Infopeople's Internet Filter pages at <http://infopeople.org/filtering/>  
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## Recommended Software for Patron Use:

1. Internet Explorer with the following plugins installed:
  1. Adobe Acrobat Reader
  2. Quicktime
  3. Shockwave
  4. Flash
  5. Windows Media Player
  6. Real Player
2. Firefox (or Netscape) with the following plugins installed:
  1. Adobe Acrobat Reader
  2. Quicktime
  3. Shockwave
  4. Flash
  5. Windows Media Player
  6. Real Player
3. Notepad (or similar text editor)
4. [IrfanView](#) or [Fast Stone Image Viewer](#) (these free viewers open more file types than Microsoft Picture and Fax Viewer which is also a free option)
5. Paint or [OpenOffice Draw](#)
6. Word Processing program such as Microsoft Word or [OpenOffice Writer](#)
7. Presentation software such as Microsoft PowerPoint or [OpenOffice Impress](#)
8. Spreadsheet software such as Microsoft Excel or [OpenOffice Calc](#)

## Other Configuration Recommendations:

1. Folders should display in “details” view
2. File extensions should be set to display
3. In Microsoft Office applications:
  - Show “screen tips” (Options)
  - Show Standard and Formatting toolbars in two rows (Customize)
  - Always show full menus (Customize)
  - Show screentips on toolbars (Customize)
  - Show shortcut keys in screen tips (Customize)
4. Patrons should be able to:
  - view and access files from the CD drive
  - use web-based email
  - access right click menus
  - change screen resolution and contrast
  - change sensitivity of mouse and size of cursor
5. Saving Files
  - Default save location should be the same location for all programs
  - My Documents should be linked to the default save location
  - Should be able to save to an external USB device and floppy