

**SURVEY OF INTERNET ACCESS MANAGEMENT
IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES**

Summary of Findings

Prepared for the
American Library Association

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June 2000

SURVEY OF INTERNET ACCESS MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

This report presents findings from a national survey of public libraries to acquire information about how libraries are managing various aspects of public Internet access. The Library Research Center (LRC) of the University of Illinois conducted the study with funding from the American Library Association. A mail survey questionnaire was forwarded to a statistically random sample of 1,297 public libraries, selected from the 1997 Federal-State Cooperative System (FSCS) annual directory file published by the National Center for Education Statistics. Prior to sampling, tabulation of the FSCS directory file yielded 7,049 libraries, or 79%, who reported having Internet access. These libraries formed the survey universe for the study. There were 1,015 completed questionnaires, for response rate of 78.3%. (The survey procedures and final disposition of the survey sample are shown in Appendix A. The survey questionnaire, together with a summary of responses, is presented in Appendix B.)

SURVEY FINDINGS

General

The results indicate that among libraries who reported access to the Internet in the 1997 FSCS census, 96.3% have computer terminals (or work stations) that provide public access to the Internet. The distribution of libraries, by the number of terminals provided, is as follows:

<u>No. of terminals to access Internet</u>	<u>Percent of libraries</u>	
One	23.4	
Two	17.2	
Three	11.9	
Four	10.5	
Five	6.6	
More than five	30.4	Base = 978

The number of terminals for Internet access in public libraries correlates to size of service area population. As shown in Table 1, more than half (52.0%) of libraries serving under 25,000

provide 1 or 2 Internet access terminals -- in contrast to only 2.7% of those serving over 100,000 persons. Conversely, more than half (57.3%) of libraries serving over 100,000 provide over 30 terminals -- compared to only 4.1% of those serving 25,000 to 100,000, and none serving under 25,000 persons.

TABLE 1
Number of Terminals with Public Access to Internet
by Population of Legal Service Area
 (percent of libraries)

Number of terminals	<u>Population of legal service area</u>			All libraries
	Under 25,000	25,000 to 100,000	Over 100,000	
1 to 2	52.0	9.9	2.7	40.6
3 to 5	32.5	24.1	4.7	29.0
6 to 10	12.9	33.1	13.3	16.9
11 to 30	2.6	28.8	22.0	9.0
Over 30	--	4.1	57.3	4.5
(n) =	394	344	255	

The survey sought to estimate distribution of public access to the Internet, by asking: "In the past 30 days, how many times did patrons/visitors access the Internet at/through your library? (Enter total volume of use, i.e., the number of times users accessed the Internet -- not the number of unique users.)" The ranges of response and corresponding percentages of libraries are as follows:

<u>No. of times patrons accessed the Internet</u>	<u>Percent of libraries</u>	
1 to 200 times	47.0	
201 to 500 times	20.0	
501 to 1,500 times	19.2	
1,501 to 5,000 times	9.5	
Over 5,000 times	4.3	Base = 878

Volume of Internet use in public libraries (like the number of terminals) is correlated to size of service area population (Table 2). Among libraries serving under 25,000 persons, 59.3% reported patron access of 200 or fewer times in the past 30 days -- in contrast to only 3.8% of those serving over 100,000. Conversely, nearly half (47.5%) serving over 100,000 persons said that patrons accessed the Internet more than 5,000 times -- compared to only 6.4% of libraries serving 25,000 to 100,000, and 0.8% of those serving under 25,000.

TABLE 2
Number of Times Patrons Accessed the Internet in Past 30 Days
by Population of Legal Service Area
 (percent of libraries)

No. of times -- Internet access	Population of legal service area			All libraries
	Under 25,000	25,000 to 100,000	Over 100,000	
1 to 200 times	59.3	7.8	3.1	47.0
201 to 500 times	21.3	19.1	4.6	20.0
501 to 1,500 times	14.2	42.7	13.4	19.2
1,501 to 5,000 times	4.4	24.0	31.4	9.5
Over 5,000 times	0.8	6.4	47.5	4.3
(n) =	366	283	194	

Internet Use Policy/Guidelines

Nearly all libraries (94.7%) providing public Internet access said they have a formal (written) policy or set of guidelines "to regulate public use of the Internet." The survey asked: "Who participated in formulating the policy?" Principal "players" are the library director (cited by 92.5% of libraries), trustees (84.3%) and staff of the library (73.1%). Cited least often were public officials (9.1%) and people in the community (8.3%).

Trustees formulate public access policy less often in larger libraries -- in 69.9% of those serving over 100,000 persons, but in 85.4% of all other libraries. Conversely, library staff

formulate access policy less often in smaller libraries -- in only 66.4% of those serving under 25,000, but in over 91% of all other libraries.

Training in how to apply Internet use policy guidelines is provided either for all library staff (62.9%) or some staff (26.6%). No statistical relationship was found between the absence of such training (10.5% of libraries) and size of service area population.

Among those libraries without a formal policy to regulate public use of the Internet, half (48.8%) said they are "in the process" of formulating one. One fourth (25.9%) indicated such a policy was under consideration.

Internet use policy/guidelines address a number of issues. They include: content offensive to others (78.8% of libraries); content inappropriate for children (70.7%); content about illegal conduct, such as gambling or obscenity (64.6%); and first amendment rights of library users (46.4%). Other issues, cited by 16.8% of libraries, include: time limits/ use and care of computer equipment; the library has no responsibility for accuracy, validity, or type of information accessed online; and parents or guardians, and not the library, are responsible to monitor content accessed by children.

Classes/ Workshops

Just under half (46.2%) of libraries providing public access said that they offer classes/ workshops in Internet use for the public, or had done so in the past 12 months. These classes or workshops are more common in larger libraries -- reported by 78.3% of those serving over 100,000, compared to 62.5% of libraries serving 25,000 to 100,000, and 39.2% of those serving under 25,000.

Libraries were asked: "Which age groups are the classes/ workshops intended to serve?" (Response alternatives were "Children", "Young adults", and "Adults"; with the instruction to "use the definition of each age group that applies in your library.") The table below shows the age groups specified by libraries singly, or in combination (ordered by rate of occurrence from high to low):

<u>Classes/ workshops for...</u>	<u>Percent</u>	
Adults only	51.1	
All ages served	32.0	
Young adults and adults	13.4	
Children and adults	2.3	
Children only	0.5	
Young adults only	0.5	
Children and young adults	0.2	Base = 451

Pre-Selected Sites

One third of libraries (32.4%) reported they provide Internet users with a set of sites pre-selected by library staff. The incidence varies with size of service area population -- ranging from 69.6% of libraries serving over 100,000 persons, to 48.1% of those serving 25,000 to 100,000, to 25.0% of those serving under 25,000.

Among libraries that pre-select sites, nearly all do so for children (95.2%), for young adults (93.9%), and adults (96.0%). Within each age group, 93.3% of libraries, 97.7%, and 98.7% -- respectively -- allow access to sites beyond the pre-selected set. Over 95 percent of libraries (in each age group) reported that no warning notice is given to users when they leave the pre-selected site(s).

Formal Complaints

One-fifth of libraries (21.6%) who offer public access to the Internet have a formal (written) procedure for complaints about Internet content accessible in the library. The incidence differs by size of service area population. Half (50.2%) of libraries serving over 100,000 persons reported they have such a complaint procedure -- compared to 28.7% of those serving 25,000 to 100,000, and only 17.3% of those serving under 25,000.

Libraries with a formal procedure for complaints about Internet content were asked to indicate how many such complaints had been received in the past 12 months. The distribution is shown in Table 3. Overall, formal complaints about content were reported by less than 20 percent of libraries -- but they are notably more common in larger libraries. Complaints were received by more than half (57.5%) of libraries serving over 100,000 persons -- in contrast to only 5.9% of those serving under 25,000. Of formal complaints about content received by libraries, most (87.5%) concerned sexually explicit material. (See Appendix B, Q.14)

One-third (33.1%) of libraries with a formal complaint procedure expressed belief that formal complaints about content had come "from people who do not use your library, but heard about your Internet service." Of the few libraries (n = 11) that could estimate the percent of complaints that fell in this category, over a third said all their formal complaints about content came from non-users of the library.

TABLE 3
Number of Formal Complaints about Content in Past 12 Months
by Population of Legal Service Area
 (percent of libraries)*

Number of complaints	Population of legal service area			All libraries
	Under 25,000	25,000 to 100,000	Over 100,000	
None	94.1	79.6	42.5	82.7
1 to 2	4.4	13.3	25.2	10.0
3 to 10	1.5	6.1	22.1	5.7
Over 10	--	1.0	10.2	1.6
(n) =	68	98	127	

* Among the 21.6% having a formal procedure for complaints about Internet content publicly accessible in the library.

Informal Complaints

The survey asked whether, in the past 30 days, libraries had received informal complaints regarding "any aspect(s) of Internet use -- e.g., equipment failure, time limits, too few computers, slow response time, content, etc." Half (49.9%) responded "yes" -- comprising 72.6% of libraries serving over 100,000 persons, 62.0% of those serving 25,000 to 100,000, and 44.8% of those serving under 25,000. The following table gives the distribution of these libraries by the number of informal complaints received in the past 30 days:

<u>Number of informal complaints</u>	<u>Percent of libraries</u>	
1 to 2	17.0	
3 to 5	32.7	
6 to 10	27.7	
11 to 25	13.0	
Over 25	9.6	Base = 471

Averaging (computing the mean of) percentages given by each individual library, the subject matter of informal complaints was distributed as follows:

<u>Category</u>	<u>Percent</u>	
Equipment failure	24.9	
Time limits	14.6	
Too few computers	21.3	
Slow response time	25.9	
Content	7.5	
Other	5.8	Base = 471

Relatively few (15.1%) said that informal complaints came "from people who do not use your library, but heard about your Internet service." Libraries gave the following estimate of the proportion of their informal complaints that fell in this category:

<u>Proportion of complaints from non-users of library</u>	<u>Percent of libraries</u>	
Less than 10 percent	15.0	
11 to 50 percent	56.7	
51 to 99 percent	9.8	
100 percent	18.5	Base = 69

Filters

The survey asked -- of computer terminals used for public access to the Internet, "how many have filters?" Four in five libraries (83.2%) responded "none", or -- stating the result conversely -- 16.8% use filters on some or all terminals for Internet access. The incidence varies with size of service area population -- ranging from 36.1% of libraries serving over 100,000 persons, to 25.9% of those serving 25,000 to 100,000, to 12.7% of those serving under 25,000.

Geographically, use of filters is more common in Rocky Mountain and Pacific states (24.3% of libraries) and in the South (23.1%); it is least common in the Northeast (16.1%) and Midwest (11.4%). Among libraries that do use filters, two in five (40.2%) said filters were installed on all of their Internet public access terminals (see Table 4).

Libraries using filters were asked to indicate how many of the terminals offered "the choice of using the filter or not." Most of them (85.9%) responded "zero" or "none"

Among those libraries that do offer choice, most (87.0%) reported it was offered on all of their public access terminals.

TABLE 4
Proportion of Internet Public Access Terminals Equipped with Filters
by Population of Legal Service Area
 (percent of libraries)*

Proportion	<u>Population of legal service area</u>			All libraries
	Under 25,000	25,000 to 100,000	Over 100,000	
1 to 25 percent	18.0	30.3	31.5	23.8
26 to 50 percent	26.0	28.1	15.2	25.0
51 to 99 percent	10.0	14.6	6.6	11.0
100 percent	46.0	27.0	46.7	40.2
(n) =	50	89	92	

* Among the 16.8% reporting use of filters.

Parental Permission

For children to use the Internet, permission is required from parents by nearly two-thirds (63.9%) of libraries. The incidence of this requirement is correlated inversely to size of service area population -- reported by only 35.0% of libraries serving over 100,000 persons, by 57.1% of those serving 25,000 to 100,000, and by 68.2% of those serving under 25,000.

Libraries were asked at what age the parental-permission requirement stops. For a majority (66.5%), the requirement is carried forward until age 18, as shown in the table below.

<u>Age at which requirement stops</u>	<u>Percent of libraries</u>	
18	66.5	
16 to 17	16.1	
14 to 15	8.4	
Age 13 or younger	9.0	Base = 593

Other Tools

To close the survey, libraries indicated other techniques/tools important in management of Internet access. Cited most often was the location of terminals within the library -- "in open spaces" (80.6%) and "near the staff desk" (80.2%). Use of "privacy screens" was mentioned by 8.3%. Other procedures, cited by 12.9%, included: the enforcement of sign-in procedures; requiring users to have a valid library card; and careful monitoring of adult users by library staff.

APPENDIX A

SAMPLE DESIGN AND SURVEY PROCEDURE

LIBRARY RESEARCH CENTER
Survey of Internet Access Management in Public Libraries
Sample Design and Survey Procedure

The Library Research Center of the University of Illinois conducted a survey of U.S. public libraries to acquire information about how libraries are managing various aspects of public Internet access. The goal of the survey was to determine sources and incidence of complaints received about Internet content accessible in libraries, current policy/ guidelines regarding Internet use, and prevalence of filters on public access terminals.

The target population for the survey was the subset of U.S public libraries having access to the Internet.

The universe listing (sampling frame) for the survey was the 1997 Federal-State Cooperative System (FSCS) annual directory file, published by the National Center for Education Statistics. Tabulation of the directory file indicated an access-to-Internet prevalence of 79 percent, or an eligible survey universe of 7,049 public libraries.

Prior to sample selection, the universe listing was sorted in ascending order by size of service area population. The listing was then divided into three subgroups, or strata: (i) smaller libraries (serving under 25,000 persons); (ii) medium-sized libraries (serving 25,000 to 100,000 persons); and (iii) large libraries (serving over 100,000 persons).

It was planned that estimates within the library subgroups and their comparison would be of equal (or possibly greater) interest than estimates of the total universe. Therefore, the total sample was allocated so as to achieve approximately equal sampling errors within each stratum. (All libraries were included that serve populations of over 500,000.) The allocation and final disposition of the survey sample are shown in the table below.

The original sample design called for standard errors (for proportions) not to exceed 2.6% in each stratum nor to exceed 2.0% for whole-universe estimates, and an overall response rate of not less than 68 percent. All of these tolerances were bettered by the achieved survey sample.

To make whole universe estimates, weights were applied to the strata so that percentages of libraries in the strata precisely match the corresponding percentages in the library universe. (The weighting factor is the proportion of the library universe falling in the i^{th} stratum divided by

the corresponding proportion in the sample.) Statistical significance of differences between strata was determined with the chi-square test of independence. For all differences reported, $p < .01$; to reach statistical significance, $p \leq .05$.

The survey instrument was developed in collaboration with the American Library Association and pretested by the LRC. The survey procedure consisted of an initial and two follow up questionnaire mailings. Data collection was conducted from February 23 through May 12, 2000.

Population, Sample, Response, and Response Rate

Population	Number of libraries	Sample	Response	Response rate (%)
Under 25,000	5,287	526	414	78.7
25,001 to 100,000	1,288	435	344	79.1
Over 100,000	474	336	257	76.5
Total:	7,049	1,297	1,015	78.3

APPENDIX B

SUMMARY OF SURVEY RESPONSES
(presented in questionnaire format)

University of Illinois
Library Research Center
SURVEY OF INTERNET ACCESS MANAGEMENT IN PUBLIC LIBRARIES

A. GENERAL

1. Does your library offer public access to the Internet?
- | | | |
|---------------|--------|--------|
| Yes | | 96.3% |
| No | | 3.7 |
| | Total: | 100.0% |
| | Base: | 1,015 |
2. In your library, how many computer terminals (workstations) are available for public access to the Internet?
- | | | |
|--------------------|--------|--------|
| 1 to 2 | | 40.6% |
| 3 to 5 | | 29.0 |
| 6 to 10 | | 16.9 |
| 11 to 30 | | 9.0 |
| Over 30 | | 4.5 |
| | Total: | 100.0% |
| | Base: | 978 |
3. In the past 30 days, how many times did patrons/visitors access the Internet at/through your library?
[Enter total volume of use, i.e., the number of times users accessed the Internet -- not the number of unique users.] (IF UNSURE, GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE.)
- | | | |
|---------------------------------|--------|--------|
| 1 to 200 times | | 47.0% |
| 201 to 500 times | | 20.0 |
| 501 to 1,500 times | | 19.2 |
| 1,501 to 5,000 times | | 9.5 |
| 5,001 to 50,000 times | | 3.0 |
| Over 50,000 times | | 1.3 |
| | Total: | 100.0% |
| | Base: | 878 |

B. INTERNET USE POLICY/GUIDELINES

- 4a. Does your library have a formal (written) policy/ set of guidelines to regulate public use of the Internet?
- | | | | |
|---------------|--------|--------|--|
| Yes | | 94.7% | |
| No | | 5.3 | |
| | Total: | 100.0% | |
| | Base: | 978 | |
- b. At present, is your library in the process of formulating such a policy?
- | | | | |
|------------------------------------|--------|--------|--------------------|
| Yes | | 48.8% | } -->(SKIP TO Q.8) |
| No | | 25.3 | |
| No, but being considered | | 25.9 | |
| | Total: | 100.0% | |
| | Base: | 52 | |
5. Who participated in formulating the policy? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY.)
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| The public library director | | 92.5% |
| Library trustees | | 84.3% |
| Staff of the library | | 73.1% |
| Public officials | | 9.1% |
| People in the community | | 8.3% |
| Other | | 10.2% |
| | Base: | 926 |
6. Do library staff receive training in how to apply the policy guidelines?
- | | | |
|---------------------------|--------|--------|
| Yes, all staff | | 62.9% |
| Yes, some staff | | 26.6 |
| No | | 10.5 |
| | Total: | 100.0% |
| | Base: | 915 |
7. Which of the following are addressed in your Internet use policy/guidelines? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY.)
- | | | |
|---------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-------|-------|
| Internet content offensive to others | | 78.8% |
| Internet content inappropriate for children | | 70.7% |
| Internet content about illegal conduct
(e.g., gambling, obscenity) | | 64.6% |
| First amendment rights of library users | | 46.4% |
| Other | | 16.8% |
| | Base: | 926 |

C. CLASSES/ WORKSHOPS

8. During the past 12 months, has your library offered classes or workshops in Internet use for the public?

Yes	46.2%	
No	53.8	-->(SKIP TO Q.10)
Total:	100.0%	
Base:	976	

9. Which age groups* were the classes/workshops intended to serve? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY.)

Children	34.3%
Young adults	45.1%
Adults	96.4%
Base:	451

D. PRE-SELECTED SITES

10. Does your library provide Internet users with a set of site(s) pre-selected by library staff?

Yes	32.4%	
No	67.6	-->(SKIP TO Q.12)
Total:	100.0%	
Base:	973	

11a. To which age groups* does site pre-selection apply? (FOR EACH, CIRCLE 1 FOR "YES" OR 2 FOR "NO".)	(FOR EACH "YES" TO Q.11a):			(FOR EACH "YES" TO Q.11b):			(FOR EACH "YES" TO Q.11b):		
	Yes	No	Base	b. Does this age group have access to sites beyond selected set?			c. Do these users receive a warning notice when they leave the pre-selected site(s)?		
- Children . . .	95.2%	4.8%	293	93.3%	6.7%	274	4.9%	95.1%	249
- Young adults .	93.9%	6.1%	271	97.7%	2.3%	250	4.4%	95.6%	235
- Adults	96.0%	4.0%	282	98.7%	1.3%	266	1.9%	98.1%	252

E. FORMAL COMPLAINTS

12. Do you have a formal (written) procedure for complaints about Internet content accessible in your library?

Yes	21.6%	
No	78.4	-->(SKIP TO Q.15a)
Total:	100.0%	
Base:	972	

13a. In the past 12 months, how many formal (written) complaints about content have you received? (IF UNSURE, GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE. IF "NONE", ENTER "0".)

Zero	82.7%
1 to 2	10.0
3 to 10	5.7
Over 10	1.6
Total:	100.0%
Base:	210

b. Is there reason to believe that any of these formal complaints came from people who do not use your library, but heard about your Internet service?

Yes	33.1%	
No	66.9	-->(SKIP TO Q.14)
Total:	100.0%	
Base:	35	

(IF "YES"):

c. Approximately, what percent of the formal complaints fell in this category?

Less than 10 percent	10.5%
10 to 50 percent	30.5
Over 50 percent	59.0
Total:	100.0%
Base:	11

* Use the definition of each age group that applies in your library.

14. Of the formal complaints about content reported in Q.13a, about what percent were concerned with the following?
 (GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE; IF COMPLAINTS COVERED MORE THAN ONE CATEGORY, INDICATE THE ONE THAT WAS OF MOST CONCERN TO THE COMPLAINER.)

[Average percentages]	Hate	0.2%
	Violence	3.1
	Sexually explicit material	87.5
	Unable to find what is needed	4.4
	Other	4.8
	Total:	100.0%
	Base:	34

F. INFORMAL COMPLAINTS

15a. In the past 30 days, has your library received informal complaints regarding any aspects(s) of Internet use?
 (For example -- equipment failure, time limits, too few computers, slow response time, content, etc.)

Yes	49.9%	
No	44.9	-->(SKIP TO Q.17a)
Don't know/ No data available	5.2	-->(SKIP TO Q.17a)
Total:	100.0%	
Base:	974	

b. How many of these informal complaints have you received? (IF UNSURE, GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE.)

1 to 2	17.0%
3 to 5	32.7
6 to 10	27.7
11 to 25	13.0
Over 25	9.6
Total:	100.0%
Base:	471

c. Is there reason to believe that any of these informal complaints came from people who do not use your library, but heard about your Internet service?

Yes	15.1%	
No	84.9	-->(SKIP TO Q.16a)
Total:	100.0%	
Base:	477	

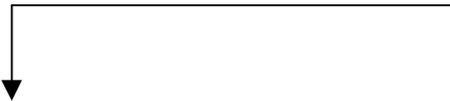
(IF "YES"):

d. Approximately, what percent of the informal complaints fell in this category?

Less than 10 percent	15.0%
10 to 50 percent	56.7
Over 50 percent	28.3
Total:	100.0%
Base:	69

16a. Of the informal complaints reported in Q.15b, about what percent fell into each of the following categories:

[Average percentages]	Equipment failure	24.9%
	Time limits	14.6
	Too few computers	21.3
	Slow response time	25.9
	Content	7.5
	Other	5.8
	Total:	100.0%
	Base:	471



(IF YOU HAD INFORMAL COMPLAINTS ABOUT CONTENT IN Q.16a):

b. About what percent of informal complaints about content were concerned with the following?
 (GIVE YOUR BEST ESTIMATE; IF COMPLAINTS COVERED MORE THAN ONE CATEGORY, INDICATE THE ONE THAT WAS OF MOST CONCERN TO THE COMPLAINER.)

[Average percentages]	Hate	1.2%
	Violence	1.6
	Sexually explicit material	66.0
	Unable to find what is needed	22.7
	Other	8.5
	Total:	100.0%
	Base:	113

G. FILTERS

17a. Of the computer terminals (workstations) mentioned in Q.2, how many have filters? (IF "NONE, ENTER "0".)

None	83.2%
1 to 25 percent	4.0
26 to 50 percent	4.2
51 to 99 percent	1.8
All	6.8
	Total: 100.0%
	Base: 978

b. Of computer terminals that have filters, how many offer the choice of using the filter or not? (IF "NONE", ENTER "0".)

None	85.9%
1 to 50 percent	0.6
51 to 99 percent	1.2
All	12.3
	Total: 100.0%
	Base: 163

18. Which age groups use terminals that offer choice? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY.)

Children	74.0%
Young adults	62.7%
Adults	63.2%
	Base: 23

H. PARENTAL PERMISSION

19a. Do you require permission from parents before children can use the Internet?

Yes	63.9%
No	36.1 -->(SKIP TO Q.20)
	Total: 100.0%
	Base: 973

b. At what age does this requirement stop?

Age 18	66.5%
Age 16 to 17	16.1
Age 14 to 15	8.4
Age 13 or younger	9.0
	Total: 100.0%
	Base: 593

I. OTHER TOOLS

20. Which of the following tools do you use in the management of Internet access? (CIRCLE ALL THAT APPLY.)

Privacy screens	8.3%
Smart cards	0.1%
Computer terminals in open spaces	80.6%
Computer terminals near staff desk	80.2%
Other	12.9%
None of the above	3.9%
	Base: 978

THANK YOU VERY MUCH FOR YOUR COOPERATION.