

## **Internet Content Filtering – a FREE high quality solution**

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An internet content filter is used to block inappropriate and unsafe web sites. Most educational professionals are well aware of the requirement and importance of having a good internet content filter at their school(s). We know, for example, that it only takes one second for a student to minimize or close a screen window when a teacher approaches them. It could potentially only take an accidental internet misuse event to get students, teachers, parents and board members very concerned.

Unfortunately, a tight and reliable web content filtering solution is expensive. We are presently at the end of a yearly service agreement with our present filter provider (Sonicwall). As we considered new options before renewing, a powerful, stable and free solution came up for discussion. A technician friend recommended considering the use of “open DNS” as a solution. They have been using it for their mid-size business and are very pleased with the results. By definition, a schools’ internet blocking and financial needs are typically quite different than those of businesses. Because schools require the most reliable type of filter systems available, let’s analyze the “OpenDNS” internet content filtering option from a school point of view.

### 1. Is it really free?

As a larger school, we spend more than a thousand dollars per school year to have a solid filter for our student and teacher users. This solution is really free. My mother told me that if it’s too good to be true, it probably is. It’s always good to find out how such “free” services fund their high quality service. OpenDNS uses very discreet advertisements. Here is a quote from an IT manager who has been using OpenDNS. “The ‘advertisements’ are so unobtrusive that you hardly even notice them. In fact, the ONLY time advertisements will appear is if a user tries to access a blocked page.”

### 2. Any school size or level?

The OpenDNS internet content filtering can be used in a very small setting or in a large environment. It can serve the whole spectrum of school needs K-12.

### 3. Very quick and simple to setup.

If compared to any other high quality “tight” filtering solution, it is the easiest setup I have ever seen. No local management is involved and any operating system can access your personal web management screens from any computer in the world.

### 4. Many Schools already use it

20 000 K-12 schools and libraries are already using this newer product and the number is growing very quickly.

### 5. Increased Internet Speed and filtering service stability.

OpenDNS users report that their internet access speed has noticeably increased. This is

especially true for users who were already using another web content filtering method. One of the reasons for that is the way this solution handles the verification and blocking procedure. Their filtering service also has “zero downtime” because of their rerouting structure using their 5 data center world locations.

#### 6. Filtering Categories

OpenDNS offers 50 optional internet content blocking categories such as webmail, porn, games, or chat. These categories are compliant with the US’s Child Internet Protection Act. I have not spent much research time on this issue, but I am not personally aware of any Canadian Child Internet act in existence. Note that OpenDNS uses the well respected internet content filtering database called “iGuard” from “St. Bernard”.

#### 7. Extra Protection

On top of serving as a reliable web content filtering solution, OpenDNS also serves as extra protection from Phishing, malware and viruses from web sites.

#### 8. Customization

Your school's logo and your custom message can appear on the OpenDNS Guide and block pages. It may also help communicate your school's Internet policy to students. This would help students understand that OpenDNS is a school-approved service put in place to make their Internet experience safer. You can also add your own local exceptions to the company’s filtering (adding or removing assigned web site blocks).

#### 9. Potential Negative aspects

The OpenDNS option has only a single filter for both students and staff. It would be preferable to use a heavy filter list for students and a lower filter list for teachers. They are currently working on a solution, but have not yet developed an option to block all sites that are so new that they have not been rated/categorized yet. That would be a way to make the system extremely tight. A way around this issue exists (using a capable firewall with two isp static ip addresses through one wan wire) but it requires a little more technical time and knowledge and potentially a more capable firewall to set up on your server. Their “sites visited” reporting (monitoring) system is nice but does NOT identify the specific user names like the ones that come with the expensive solutions. It can, however, report on the workstation names with times and web sites visited. Another useful feature that is not included in that service is the ability to block by specific Word(s).

For more information, you can visit this web location for OpenDNS School environment information: <http://www.opendns.com/customers/k12/>