**Answers to Patron Monopolizing Item**

Grand Rapids Public Library – Benjamin Knight

It may not be a perfect solution, but at previous libraries, the policy was to give the item 24hrs on the shelf to allow others to have a chance at the item before the person checked it out again.

Crooked Tree District Library – Leanne Milliman (Director)

Previous library had that issue with hotspots. We changed the policy to limit check-outs to no holds and one check out per household per week.

Woodland Center Correctional Facility – Elizabeth Popiel (Librarian)

Perhaps you can do some of the following

1. Take them in for “repairs” (set up a repair & cleaning schedule) and keep them out of circulation while you fix this policy.
2. Set it up so LoT items may only be checked out 1-2 times within a x month period.
3. Set up a further policy that states items may NOT be consecutively checked out from the same family or address – which I think ties into some of the policies listed below.

You can also blanket it as with this library:

* [Library of Things Lending Policy | Warwick Public Library (warwicklibrary.org)](https://www.warwicklibrary.org/library-things-lending-policy) “The library reserves the right to refuse service to patrons who abuse the equipment or who are repeatedly late in returning Library of Things items.”
* [PVD Things Tool Library at PPL - Providence Public Library (provlib.org)](https://www.provlib.org/using-the-library/tools/) Checkout is limited to three tools/devices per household. (see above)
* [The Library of Things - Upper Saddle River Library](https://uppersaddleriverlibrary.org/the-library-of-things/) Due to the limited availability of items in the Library of Things, patrons may borrow up to one (1) indoor game and one (1) outdoor game at a time per family.

I hope this helps – that way it doesn’t limit others, and doesn’t blame anyone, but creates the understanding that popular items should not be hoarded/abused or prevent others from enjoyment.

Burette Branch Warren Public Library – Sharon Linsday (Branch Librarian Supervisor)

We had a similar situation with our mobile hotspots. We now only allow one person per household (we check addresses) to have a hotspot checked out at one time. Once it is returned, everyone in the household has to wait at least 14 days before they can check it out again. It seems extreme, but it works.

Redford Township District Library – Suzy Shipman

I would just place a staff hold on it and try to take it off their radar for a bit.

Also, speaking to them directly about allowing others to see the item and give it a try themselves would be appropriate.

Bullard Sanford Memorial Library – Christian Dunham (Director)

With our checkoutable modems/tablets, we have a limit of one per month.

Buchanan District Library – Wendy Chapman (LoT Coordinator)

We have unfortunately run into this a few times and have modified our policy/procedures to help mitigate this issue. A couple of things that may be different from what you currently do:

1) We limit the number of Library of Things (LoT) items that can be checked out to TWO per linked household, not per patron in the household. All LoT patrons must be adults over the age of 18 as well.

2) Most of our LoT items check out for one-week and are only renewable for a second week if no other patron is on hold for the item. Popular items like Lawn & Garden tools go to a 3-day circulation period and are not renewable during the busier spring and summer months.

3) If you have another patron who has been interested in the item I would put them on hold for it to interrupt the cycle of holds by one family. I have been known to place a hold on an item for myself simply because I like to periodically perform maintenance on all items, particularly electronics. It would also be reasonable to pull an item for inventory.

I've struggled with this concern particularly as it pertains to the Hotspots that we circulate. We have 5 of them and during the summer months they check out frequently and are often not available without a hold. During the off months though they often sit on the shelf unused. We have one family in particular that relies on being able to check one out every week or two as we provide them their only source of internet. I'll admit I had a big issue with that for a long time, but again if no one else is waiting for the item I'd rather see it in use than sitting on a shelf, especially when we are paying for a monthly service.

Dexter District Library – Paul McCann (Library Director)

If you have any kind of library processing card, you could place a hold for that card and push it to the top of the queue. That way, the item would be trapped for someone other than the family in question. This would allow time to manipulate the hold queue.

We have to monitor our hot spots for this type of activity. We manually drop repeat users to the bottom of the hold queue in order for new patrons to get the items. This kind of supposes there is a constant hold queue. If there are not other patrons waiting in the queue, you could place the hold for the library's processing card and then check it out to a display category. The hold would get tripped 'for someone else' and after the patrons in question exit, the item could be displayed for browsing. If someone brought it to the desk, a charge over charge would clear the display checkout and pass it to a new patron. You might have issues with the patrons in question if their holds are the only ones outstanding, but your system should have an override that allows you to give an item to someone holding it in their hand, even if there is an outstanding hold in the system. The patrons in question will probably catch on to whatever you do after a while, but some of these workarounds might let other patrons discover the item.

There could also the option of placing a checkout limit (number of times per year, six months, etc.) and after that, preventing a particular user from further checkouts for a specific period of time. This would require development of a specific policy, contact with the patron to explain and consistent application.

Unfortunately, we have found there is human monitoring and manipulation that goes into situations like this. Sounds like it is time for someone to learn to share or purchase their own device.

John F. Kennedy, Jr. Library – Molly Mullen (Para-Professional)

Here at Dearborn Heights Library, we loan out wi-fi hotspots as part of our Library of Things and use a "One-per-household" rule. Taking down the patron's information onto a sheet is part of our procedure for checking out a hotspot, and if we notice a duplicate address has returned the item within the last 30 days we're advised to deny checkout. We also leave a note on the patron's account noting the date they last returned a hotspot to prevent monopolizing items between our two branches. Hope this helps and please let me know if you have any further questions!

Southgate Veterans Memorial Library – Donald Priest (Director)

It's not the same, but we do have a few families where the adults work together to make sure they pretty much always have one of our hotspots. We limit them to one per household, so when, say, the husband returns his, he'll place a new hold, and the wife will have one ready to borrow from when she placed a hold. That hasn't been a problem because A) we have multiple hotspots, and B) if they're ever popular enough that a hold isn't ready when they want it, too bad; they wait in line like everyone else.

If no one else is requesting the item, now that holds are available, it would say to me that there isn't much interest, so there's no real harm in these two constantly having it. Someone who wants it can get in line, and interrupt their monopoly, if they wanted to. If you think people might be more inclined to borrow the headset if it were on the shelf, maybe it's worth buying a second one?

We also tell patrons that, when an item is returned, it has to stay on the shelf for a full day; they can't borrow it again immediately, and they can't return it at night, then show up first thing in the morning to borrow it again. You could have a similar rule for households. That's hard to enforce, though, we have no automatic process in place that can handle that, so it's a matter of knowing who borrowed and returned what, and when. A solution, but not a great one, and if that's going to be the rule for any Library of Things items, it should probably be the rule for all of them.

T.A. Cutler Memorial Library – Jessica Little (Library Director)

We have a hotspot policy that has a two-week (formerly one-week) cooldown per "single family/address". It is hard to enforce reliably, especially when the parties have different last names. But if we realize a family/address is abusing the policy, we put notes on the multiple accounts to check the cooldown for each before circulating the item. We've had at least one couple insist they were merely "roommates" and the other party would not let them connect to the hotspot while they had it checked out, or that they traveled with it for work and it wasn't in the house (different stories, same couple). We told them that was something to sort out between them and their "housemate," because we had a very limited collection, which is why the policy exists. They could also attend a library board meeting and petition the board to change the policy. I cannot remember if that one resulted in them getting mad and leaving without one or if it was the one where they just decided to keep it, permanently banning the address from checking out another hotspot (and someone else with the same family name did try) while leaving them with a deactivated box. Making it a two-week cool down instead of one-week has reduced the abuse, because the policy also restricts hotspot lending to those over the age of 18. And our hotspots have never been reservable. They're always first come first serve, even if the person says they're "getting in the car right now."

If they're committed to abusing the policy, they'll probably find a way, but it has limited some monopolization.

Berrien Springs Community Library – Kristina Knezic (Director)

I have experienced the same thing. It is exasperating! After trying to come up with a solution and failing, I stepped back and tried to look at the situation differently, at least the item is circulating. Which I'm sure you have done. In my case, I encourage any patron asking about the item to place a hold on it, telling them it is very popular and that is the best chance of getting the item. You could even go as far as to place flyers up encouraging people to place holds on the LOT items because they are so popular.

Bayliss Public Library – Meredith Sommers (Library Manager)

That sounds hugely frustrating. I feel like we shouldn’t have to explain to adults that library materials are for everyone to share.

BUT, I perused our Patron Behavior Policy and our Circulation Policy [attached], and I think I’d rest on these lines from the Circ Policy:

Each Library may place loan and time limits on new titles, holiday materials and high demand subject materials.

Each Library may establish an “in house” collection for a period of time for high demand materials.

“Sorry, guys, but these are ‘high demand materials,’ and as such we’ve had to make them in-house-use only [until you two walk out the door, at which point they’ll go back to lendable.]” Honestly, though, I’d probably put on my stern face, and straight tell the patrons that “Library materials are for everyone to share, and you two have been inappropriately monopolizing this item. You may not check it out again until someone else has a chance.”

I would be very curious to hear how others respond. The question of patron privacy, when it comes to setting policies like “Can’t check out back-to-back to members of same household” seems thorny.

Renee Nixon

Maybe they can’t afford to buy one.

Perhaps consider if there would be a lot of interest from other patrons if the item is available on the shelf for a few days.

You could place your own hold on the item to test the waters! Name your patron “Shel Favailable.”

If it turns out the item does not circulate then you can just let the couple monopolize all they want!!

And you can make a large visible surrogate poster of the item to make sure other patrons know it is available although currently checked out. This would encourage new interest.

Howell Carnegie District Library – Dana Allen (Administrative Clerk)

We face a similar situation with some of our hot spots. While we're lucky to have a number of them, it's frustrating to basically be providing the service constantly for one family.

Two suggestions if you don't want to talk to them directly - put a hold on the item for some "maintenance" and have it out of commission for a period. The other option would be for others to put holds on the item so that they can't constantly have it. It could include staff members who really don't need it but in theory are hoping to break the monopoly chain. Maybe if they couldn't have access as much, they'd look for a permanent solution (at their expense).

Dearborn Heights Libraries – Carolyn Smith (Branch Librarian)

We thought about this scenario when we started loaning out hotspots and made it policy that they can only be checked out every 30 days, from date of return. Also, members of the same household (residing at same address) could not check out a hotspot after another family member had just returned it within those 30 days. For example, I checked out a hotspot 6/1 and it is returned on 6/8 (ours are 7-day loans) I wouldn't be able to check out again until 7/8. Consequently, my fiancé would not be able to check one out until 7/8 as well. This has worked out pretty well and get minimal complaints. We have a check out sheet at circulation patrons sign when they check them out and we note the account as well.

Gloria Coles Flint Public Library – Janet O’Keefe (Lead Librarian)

Not with a library of things item, but we had a similar problem with people passing our more popular books around. They would bring a friend in when they returned it, who would immediately ask to check it out. Our response was to change our policy so that returned items must be sent to the back for processing and reshelving and can only be checked out again once they are reshelved. This might not deter this couple. If they're that determined the might come back first thing the next day and get it the minute it's shelved. It has helped with us, though, to give other people a chance to use the item.

Milan Public Library – Barbara Beaton (Assistant Director/Reference Librarian)

What a dilemma. Is no one else ever placing a reserve on the item? You might consider placing a reserve on it yourself just to break their pattern. I'll let you know if any brilliant ideas pop into my head!

Culter Library Tech – Colin Lipka

Just playing evil librarian here, have you tried having your staff, yourself, and other family members or patrons, placing holds on the item so the wait list becomes very, very long before these patrons could have it again? Or maybe there is some "routine maintenance" on this item, so it has to come out of circulation for a while, and maybe they will lose interest? I know these options won't keep the item available for other patrons, but it sounds like the cycle just needs to be broken for a while with these patrons.

We had to create a two week cooldown period, per household, for our hotspots after running into a similar issue with people from the same house checking out hotspots back to back. It has helped.

Warren Public Library – Maren Kroening (Branch Librarian @ Maybelle Burnette)

Here at Warren Public Library, we have a policy that is specific to our high value items like circulating laptops, hotspots, and similar that might work for you.

We state that not only do they have to wait two weeks to check out a hotspot again (only enforced with a note in the patron's account and the hope that all staff make sure to check the notes first) and that rule is for the whole household as well as the individual. Again tricky to have your ILS enforce for you unless you have the option of accounts being associated by household, which is something we do not have. However, if we notice patrons doing something like this, we let all staff know about the known violators and then whoever is checking them out can enforce the policy verbally in person.

For the laptops and hotspots and some of the other Library of Things items we have the patron sign a waiver at checkout and on that waiver, we list the policies, including the two-week wait, as approved by our Library Commision so we have something easy to point to if anyone ever protests. If two weeks seems extreme for most of your users, you could make it as little as 24 hours if you think that could help.

Hastings Public Library – David Edelman (Assistant Director)

We had this issue with hotspots initially and instituted a change that patrons had to wait one week after returning them before they could check one out again. It has generally worked well so long as staff pays attention to the notes on patron accounts about when they are eligible. It is more effort on our part, but was necessary. We’ve never had this issue with other Library of Things items but would do the same for those if needed.

Shelby Township Library – Catherine Schmidt (Assistant Library Director)

We have had this happen with some of our unique items. Allowing a hold queue and promoting the item has helped get more patrons on the wait list to break that cycle. For some really difficult cases, we have used our test cards to place holds and put some space between those repeat users.

Richmond Township Library – Jan St. Germain (Director)

Have you physically seen the item? You could also tell them that the item can't be checked out the next time they want it because it has to be cleaned or routine maintenance needs to be done. Maybe a very nice phone call needs to be made to explain that there are other people trying to check it out.

We don't have a policy that deals with this situation but maybe we should.

I was looking at the Cleveland Public Library Policy of Patron Conduct, Section 1, Number 10. It mentions monopolizing material. Does your library have a policy like that so you can show the patron.

<https://cpl.org/aboutthelibrary/usingthelibrary/policy-on-patron-conduct/>

Stephanie Herm

Just a few quick ideas: when the item is returned, explain to the patron couple that they are not going to be allowed to check it out for the foreseeable future- someone with authority can decide that, maybe. You don't have to obey what is on the computer screen simply because the patrons know how to manipulate the system. Is it possible for a staff member to delete a patron's holds on a specific item? Maybe keep doing that till they get the message.

Just thoughts. I know your computer system may be the same as ours.

Its the staff who make the decisions, though, not the computer or the patrons.