

Data Protection “Tip of the Month – January 2009”

Focus on Protecting our Children’s Online Privacy

Children know how to use the Internet far better than their parents. They enjoy greater access to products and services. However, they tend to be too trusting and have a curious nature that can lead them to give up their personal information without realizing it.

Parents should be mindful of the following tips to help you safeguard your children’s online privacy in these modern times:

- 1. Explain to your children** why privacy is important, and how to protect it. You’ve taught them not to talk to strangers, so you should extend that rule to environments both in and outside the home. Make it clear to your child that he or she should ask for your permission before surrendering any information about themselves or their family on the Web, over the telephone or in a survey or contest entry.
- 2. Make sure that your children know about marketing techniques.** Surf a variety of sites, watch TV and look at magazines and marketing materials with your children to help them understand the difference between content and promotion.
- 3. Teach your children that clubs, games and contests** (whether online or not) can be fun, but that they need to be cautious and should always check with you before joining a club, filling out a survey or entering a contest. Many marketers offer consumers the option to decline to have personal details collected or transferred.
- 4. Supervise your children’s online activities.** Put your family computer in a common area and check regularly. Take time to surf with your child, and look for privacy policies on a variety of sites. Come up with family projects that can be done on the Internet. Becoming familiar with the Internet will help you establish practical rules for what your children can and cannot do online.
- 5. Consider using parental control software** if you cannot be with your children when they surf the Web. But understand that these programs are limited, and cannot replace your own guidance of your child’s activities.
- 6. Watch for “Cookies.”** These are files automatically placed on your computer to track your behavior within certain websites. They allow companies to create profiles of people who visit your sites. You can also change the options in your browser so that a website will have to get your permission to place a “cookie” on your computer.
- 7. Encourage your child to keep his or her identity confidential** in chat rooms, bulletin boards or newspapers. Teach your child to choose a screen name that does not identify them, and help them understand that any information they exchange on the Internet is not private. If they meet someone online (even another child) who asks for their address, telephone number or other details, they should discuss it with you before sharing their personal information.
- 8. Use “what if” scenarios** to provide examples of how your children can make choices to protect their privacy. If a child has made a mistake by giving up personal information, use the experience as a learning opportunity.
- 9. If you think a marketer is collecting inappropriate information,** contact the company to register your objection.

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