



Internet Safety Day 9.27.09

Parent Guide

Developed By:
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WHY INTERNET SAFETY DAY?

Internet Safety Day

Internet Safety Day or ISD is a day to create awareness about Internet and computer safety. Purposely chosen to coincide with millions of children and teens getting back to school causing them to spend more time on computers doing homework and research.

What can I do as a parent during Internet Safety Day?

Take this opportunity to sit with your child or teen at the computer for just 30 minutes and learn about their Internet activities. For example, ask about the social networking profiles they might have and see what information they include for others to view. Find out whom they chat or IM with and what their friends do online. Talk to them about each name in their buddy list and ask how they know that person? Do they know how to spot a predator and what to do if they are targeted? Do they understand the harm in cyber bullying and do they know anyone who has been a victim? Do they use file sharing services and have they downloaded songs illegally? What video websites do they like to use? Discuss your reservations about the Internet and learn how they feel about staying safe. Explain your expectations for their behavior online and why it is important to be safe.

Make sure you use this time as a learning tool and show a legitimate interest. Listen to their ideas and insight because after all, they are experts about what they do online. Just showing an interest in what they do will go a long way. Even if they know more than you about computers they still need parental guidance and involvement.

What if I don't understand enough about the Internet or computers to feel confident when discussing Internet safety with my child?

That is why we created this guide. It provides a brief summary on the most popular Internet activities among children and teens. In order for your discussion to be productive you don't need to be an expert but you must have a general awareness so you can ask the right questions and understand the answers you will receive.

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This guide contains excerpts from *The Family Computer Handbook* © 2006 Brian Rice (Practical Press 2006).

The Family Computer Handbook is available at: www.Amazon.com and www.BarnesandNoble.com.

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Updated: 3/09

INTRODUCTION

Computers and the Internet have come a long way in a short amount of time. As a parent, you likely have memories of a society that was much less technology dependent. Unfortunately, your children are growing up in a much different world and they need adult guidance to make proper choices about online activities. Without such guidance, they are forced to maneuver through the online world alone which is very dangerous.

For example, most parents would never drop a teenager off at the local mall known to be a hangout for thousands of registered sexual predators or allow a strange adult to visit their son or daughters bedroom. However, many of those same parents wouldn't think twice about allowing their child to sit in their bedroom using online chat rooms with complete strangers or hanging out in social networking sites known to have registered predators.

The majority of parents are invested in the face-to-face world where they communicate with friends in person or on the phone, watch television for entertainment, and use the Internet as a tool for looking up things like directions or the weather. They completely underestimate the power and danger of the online world. Their children, however, are largely invested in this world where they strike a balance between their real and virtual existence. Many times, both are equally important to them.

As a parent you must first accept the fact that you will probably never match your child's technical ability. With that out of the way you can begin to focus on your true role in serving as their monitor and guide. You do have a responsibility, however, to familiarize yourself with a general idea of how things work. After seeing the "Big Picture" you can begin to understand how it relates and thus be more effective in your efforts. This guide will hopefully serve as a first step in that journey for you. Please remember that although this guide covers several topics and is good for a general understanding most children are typically only using a few of the services that interest them. Once you discover what those are for your child focus on them first. For example, if they use Instant Messaging and MySpace.com then setup an account and start using those as well. Ask your child for help, they might enjoy introducing you to their online world and showing you around.

START FROM THE BEGINNING

To properly address the issues of Internet safety we must first examine the concept of computers and how they are networked to create the Internet. To keep things simple you should consider a computer as nothing more than a piece of electronic equipment that stores and displays information as well as allowing it to be manipulated. In order for computers to share information we have developed ways of connecting them with wires - known as networking. Without networking, all computers would be stand-alone devices unable to exchange information.

If we expand this concept to a worldwide scenario where millions of computers are connected to one single network we have a **World Wide Web** also known as the Internet. All website addresses start with **WWW** to tell the computer to browse to this network in order to find the information on the web of connected computers. It is considered a web due to the millions of connections resembling a spider's web.

When a member of your family is "online" they are plugged into the same network as the sexual predator in the next town or the identity theft operation in another country. It is just one more wire connecting one more computer and the communication availability is instant.

It's very important to understand the Internet network because it serves as the backbone for all other functions. When discussing activities that use the Internet, for example instant messaging or file sharing, these activities are piggy backing on the already established network to function. Such services have flourished due to the Internet allowing instant communication between two computers across any geographic location.

INSTANT MESSAGING & CHAT ROOMS

Instant Messaging (IM) and Chat Rooms utilize the Internet network to operate. This allows for instant communication between two computers anywhere in the world. With this principle, services like IM and Chat Rooms have flourished.

INSTANT MESSAGING

Instant Messaging (IM or IMing) is a service allowing users to send typed messages, pictures, files, and live video with sound to a recipient based on their screen name. This exchange can go back and forth as long as both parties desire. It provides a personal way of communicating with friends and other known contacts and is very popular among teenagers as well as many adults.

In order to use this service a user must download a free program and install it on their computer. There are several available with the most popular being AIM (America Online IM), MSN Messenger, and Yahoo Messenger. The program handles all the communication and provides a window for the user to type and receive messages.

Websites like Yahoo and Google offer membership "ID" accounts that allow users to register and build a profile in exchange for the use of web services such as free e-mail, game playing, online shopping, maps and much more. Part of these offerings also includes Instant Messaging and Chat Room services. Once logged into the website a user can seamlessly maneuver through all application options. The website also keeps track of user's activities in order to provide a personalized experience on future visits. There are no verification efforts to make sure the person who creates an account is who they say they are. This allows for the anonymity many predators desire when they can pose as a much younger person in order to meet others.

With this multiple service concept in mind, a teenager who registers with a site like Yahoo just to have a free e-mail account essentially will also have access to all the other features. The teen's profile used in the e-mail account will also serve as their IM profile therefore it is important to always keep all online profiles generic.

A "buddy list" or "messenger list" is a small active window inside an IM program that lists screen name contacts a user wants to consider as a friend. It allows a quick communication by clicking the name and typing a message. Lists also indicate if that user is signed on to the service by placing some type of icon next to the name. It is very common for teenagers to have multiple names in their list. For safety reasons teens should set options in their account to only allow contacts from users on their buddy or messenger list (referred to as block or ignore people not on list). They should also never allow files to be accepted on their computer to reduce potential virus threat from a friend's computer.

CHAT ROOMS

A chat room is very similar to Instant Messaging (IM) but instead of one-to-one communication users log on to a themed based virtual room and communicate with several people only known by their screen names. By sending typed messages to the room all connected users can read and respond like a big online get together. There are numerous chat topics to choose from such as: hobbies, television shows, boy bands, sports, politics, health issues, and relationships. Basically if there is an interest, there is probably a chat room available.

As mentioned in the previous section, many chat rooms are seamless with IM services with regard to certain websites. Once a user has an account they can travel between both worlds with the click of a mouse. “Yahoo Chat” is one example. While using “Yahoo Instant Message” a user can simply drop down a menu and select “Yahoo Chat” and instantly be presented with a list of available topics and corresponding rooms. Other examples are “AIM Chat” and “Google Talk.” There are, however, hundreds of other chat room sites that focus on chatting exclusively and not tied with major search engine websites.

A chat room basically combines people who will only know each other based on their profile and registered screen name. If a person decides they want to “go private” with someone in the room they can click their name and ask to send an Instant Message. At that point, both users are simultaneously still in the room while engaging in a private IM session in a separate pop up window. This can be a concern as predators use this feature to target users they meet in chat rooms. Additionally, once a predator has a screen name of someone they like it can be used to send future Instant Messages by simply opening the service and typing it in along with a message.

IM AND CHAT ROOM DO’S AND DON’TS

- Try it yourself (learn what it is about) – use the service to communicate with your children
- Use generic screen names and profile information so predators cannot use it to gather information. For example screen names like “**boytoy17**” or “**socccrgr13**” are very inviting to predators because the name itself provides an image into that user’s personality (socccrgr13 it likely a soccer player and either 13 years old or it’s her jersey number)
- Require children to save IM and chat history for parent review
- Monitor child use (stay involved)
- Set preferences to only allow IM’s from Buddy or Messenger List, this blocks messages from users you do not know – especially predators who may try to send an IM while in a chat session
- Ask your child about each screen name on their list at least once a week to see how they know that person. If they only know them through online correspondence delete the name.
- No Web Cam. Many IM services allow video and audio to be sent through the online session. If there is no camera on your computer there is less temptation to use it.

PARENT FYI - If you don't know how to manipulate the above settings ask your children or a friend for help. Anyone with some basic computer experience will likely be able to help you locate where to go. If you still can't find it, look for words like "preferences, privacy, or options" within the program windows.

IM CODE

When using IM and chat rooms it is common to use abbreviations for words or phrases that take too much time to type. This type of abbreviating almost becomes a cryptic language of its own preventing unfamiliar users from understanding what is actually being typed. This puts parents at a disadvantage even if they are watching over their child's shoulder. There are even codes for telling others a parent is watching.

This is a small list of some of the more common codes with their associated meaning.

More can be found by searching the Internet or using the following websites:

www.noslang.com/

www.netlingo.com/emailsh.cfm

www.netlingo.com/top20teens.cfm

| <u>IM Code</u> | <u>Interpretation</u> |
|-----------------------|---|
| 2NITE | Tonight |
| ADR | Address |
| AEAP | As Early As Possible |
| ALAP | As Late As Possible |
| ASL | Age/Sex/Location |
| AWGTHGTGTTA | Are We Going To Have To Go Through This Again |
| B4YKI | Before You Know It |
| BOHICA | Bend Over Here It Comes Again |
| BRB | Be Right Back |
| BRT | Be Right There |
| CP | Sleepy |
| CWYL | Chat With You Later |
| CYT or SYT | See You Tomorrow |
| E123 | Easy as 1, 2, 3 |
| EM? | Excuse Me? |
| EOD | End Of Day |
| F2F | Face To Face |
| FOAF | Friend Of A Friend |
| GYPO | Get Your Pants Off |
| HAK | Hugs And Kisses |
| ILU or ILY | I Love You |
| IMNSHO | In My Not So Humble Opinion |
| IWSN | I Want Sex Now |
| J/C | Just Checking |
| KFY | Kiss For You |

| | |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| KOTL | Kiss On The Lips |
| KPC | Keeping Parents Clueless |
| L8R | Later |
| LD | Long Distance |
| LMIRL | Let's Meet In Real Life |
| LMK | Let Me Know |
| LOL | Laugh Out Loud |
| MOOS | Member(s) Of the Opposite Sex |
| MorF | Male or Female |
| MOSS or MOTSS | Member(s) Of The Same Sex |
| N-A-Y-L | In A While |
| NALOPKT | Not A Lot Of People Know That |
| NAZ | Name, Address, Zip |
| NIFOC | Nude In Front Of Computer |
| NM | Never Mind or Nothing Much |
| OLL | Online Love |
| OSIF | Oh Sh** I Forgot |
| OTP | On The Phone |
| P911 | Parent Alert |
| PAL | Parents Are Listening |
| PAW | Parents Are Watching |
| PIR | Parent In Room |
| POS | Parent Over Shoulder |
| QT | Cutie |
| RN | Right Now |
| ROTFL | Rolling on the Floor Laughing |
| RU | Are You...? |
| RUMORF | Are You Male Or Female |
| SITD | Still In The Dark |
| SMEM | Send Me an E-mail |
| SMIM | Send Me an Instant Message |
| SO | Significant Other |
| SOHF | Sense of Humor Failure |
| SorG | Straight or Gay |
| SWDYT | So What Do You Think? |
| TDTM | Talk Dirty To Me |
| TOM | Tomorrow |
| TS | Tough Sh** |
| TTFN | Ta-ta For Now |
| U-R | You Are...? |
| WFM | Works For Me |
| WTH | What the Heck |
| WUF | Where Are You From? |
| WYCM | Will You Call Me? |
| WYRN | What's Your Real Name? |

SOCIAL NETWORKING

Another popular activity for teenagers and adults is creating a personal page on one of the many social networking web sites. Many sites offer this service but the most popular are www.MySpace.com and www.Facebook.com. Each site basically provides the same experience but each has its individual characteristics along with rules and regulations. The way it works is users register and create a personal page called a profile on the site. Profiles can include pictures, personal information, opinions, online journals called blogs, music, videos and basically anything else a person feels represents them and their personality.

Users then browse other profiles looking for people with similar interests or locating people they went to school with etc.... Once found they make contact with them requesting "friend status". When accepted, a link is created on each other's page to their new friend's page. Users commonly communicate through e-mail or IM services provided by the site. They also visit each other's page to leave messages and meet each other's friends and the social networking cycle continues into one big weblog community. The general rule of thumb is the more friends a user has the higher status they enjoy. With MySpace.com it displays the number of times it has been visited, which also reflects status.

Replacing the need for face-to-face interaction, social networking has become a new addiction for many who spend hours cruising through endless profiles making connections with old friends or making new ones. Many amateur musicians use this medium to reach their fans and provide music for download eliminating normal distribution costs and allowing the potential for a larger worldwide fan base.

As with anything involving the Internet there are dangers to consider with social networking. For starters, it creates a place for online predators to gather information. This is a concern especially with MySpace.com considering the number of teenagers who carelessly list personal information such as their full name, town, high school, and post pictures of their house or car. Some sites prevent unregistered users from viewing profiles while others do not. The most popular site MySpace.com allows anyone to browse and view profiles although certain areas are restricted to unregistered users. Another area of concern with Myspace.com is the browse and search features allowing searches based on such criteria as body type, sexual orientation, smoker, drinker, and relationship status (i.e. Single, Married, In a Relationship, Divorced, Swinger). Some users also post risqué, nude and sexually suggestive pictures of themselves or others although MySpace.com has rules against it listed in the terms of use agreement. MySpace.com also restricts users under the age of fourteen from registering and having a profile. The method of age verification is determined by the birth date the user lists which is easily defeated. Myspace.com also states that anyone found to be underage might have their membership terminated and their profile removed.

In addition, MySpace.com has also made an attempt to crack down on predators by implementing restrictions for adults having access to underage user profiles. Although

with no age verification adults can easily pose as the age group they are targeting. Many social networking websites list safety tips for users to review and typically a safety link is available at the bottom of most webpages.

Social Networking profiles can be set to a private mode which only allows people to view it that have been accepted as a friend by the profile owner. This is default in Facebook.com. This prevents random users from viewing it and is a great safety feature for protection. All profiles should be set to private but keep in mind this prevents parents from viewing their child's profile as well unless they have a profile themselves and have been added as a friend.

VIRTUAL WORLDS

When most people think of social networking they think of MySpace.com or Facebook.com. There is also a completely different type of social network infrastructure available now that has taken lessons from role playing games. Websites such as www.secondlife.com, www.kaneva.com, and www.gaiaonline.com offer a virtual world / community that allow users to create a character of themselves known as an "avatar." Once created, they roam through this online world and interact with other avatars. The avatars represent other people sitting at their computers doing the same thing. Avatars allow people to be whomever they want. Men can become women and vice versa. Older adults can build their avatar to be 16 years old. Basically in a virtual world anything goes and no one can prove otherwise.

This is very dangerous because when children and teens are involved in this type of virtual reality world they are literally blind to who they are dealing with. They are mixed into a virtual world interacting with adults and potentially some predators. There are also several adult areas in Second Life including "rape rooms."

There are also virtual worlds targeted to grade school children. www.weeworld.com is one of those sites that allow very young kids to make avatars referred to as a "wee mee." They use their avatar to play with other kids in the virtual world. A potential for danger is very prevalent in this world as well.

SOCIAL NETWORKING DANGERS

- Adults use the site
- Inappropriate language, nudity, alcohol use, sexually provocative images, etc.
- Predators use it to gather information
- No real method of age verification
- Some Social Networking services allow people to view profiles without logging on; therefore teenagers and young children can access it easily

SOCIAL NETWORKING DO'S AND DON'TS

- Set profile to private
- Read safety tips on all SN websites
- Ask teenager to show you their profile (all of them)
- Discuss online privacy
- No addresses, phone numbers, other identifiable information (license plate)
- Once posted online it is there to stay
- No Web Cam

PREDATORS

Sexual predators do exist and are a very real threat. They target both boys and girls of all ages and use the anonymity of the Internet to their advantage since they can be whomever they want. Many are master manipulators with skills that can cripple any child's sense of awareness. This is known as the grooming process and predators look for children that are more technically savvy than their parents. They look for children that are emotionally vulnerable which can be related to personal issues derived from problems at school or home. They use these issues to befriend the victim and empathize with them while building a pseudo friendship and trust. If a child indicates frustration with parents or teachers at school the predator might suggest the child's parents are way to strict or their teacher is being unfair and this plays right into the adolescent mind as they look for people to verify their feelings.

With the presence of searchable user profiles when dealing with Instant Messaging and Chat Rooms as well as Social Networking profiles, predators can easily find information about potential victims since many naive children list personal information with no regard for safety. Even simple statements listed on a profile such as school attended, sport played, or even what jersey number worn can allow predators to target them. Posting a picture of their new car or in front of their house can also provide information that predators can use to find out more.

Once a predator Instant Messages or Chats with a victim and gains their trust they often send pornographic pictures via the IM session or e-mail and sometimes gifts through the mail. They might even have a toll free phone number for the victim to call or mail a cell phone so it will not show up on their parent's bill. If the victim tries to cut off communication, predators will often convince them that they will tell their parents what they have been doing online and that they have viewed pornographic pictures, etc. and scare the victim into continuing the relationship.

The Internet is a worldwide network that stretches far beyond the grasp of the US judicial system. Technology moves so fast the slow progression of our law making process will never fully address the problem. Therefore, parents must be on guard to protect their families. There are many organizations and government agencies designed to assist parents with issues such as these. Internet searching for information will also provide many links and web sites to help.

PREDATOR GROOMING

- Chat Rooms (based on interest)
- Look for child oriented screen names
- Search through Social Networking profiles
- Strike up a conversation
- Show interest and gain their trust
- Build them up (be their friend)

PREDATOR WARNING SIGNS

- Spends a lot of time online
- Find porn on the computer
- Receive phone calls, mail, gifts from people you do not know
- Withdraws from normal activity
- Switches screen quickly (Alt+Tab)
- Uses other accounts for e-mail or Instant Messaging

Other helpful web sites for more information:

www.fbi.gov/publications/pguide/pguidee.htm

www.ic3.gov

www.missingkids.com

www.netSMARTz.org

www.staysafe.org

www.isafe.org/

CYBER BULLYING

When someone uses the Internet to threaten someone or treat them in a negative way this is known as cyber bullying. Such activity is commonly found with teenagers who allow these situations to be reinforced within social groups at school. Cyber bullying can be represented in many forms such as a student building a webpage making fun of another classmate and spreading the website link at school for other students to visit or sending threatening IM's or e-mails to that student. Sometimes a teenager will IM a fellow classmate and act like their friend in order to gather private information to spread around school for embarrassment. Cyber bullying is only limited by the creativity and technical ability of the bully.

Unfortunately sometimes the bully is hard to catch. For example, a student that builds a webpage remains anonymous and it is likely being hosted on a server in another state or even out of the country. The company hosting the webpage is not inclined to provide the name or remove it since Internet companies typically feel it is not their role to police the Internet.

If you or someone you know is being bullied make sure to keep as much documentation as possible. If it is in the form of e-mail or IM it should be saved and printed. Consult with the school administration to determine what can be done. Also, keep in mind that bullying can take the form of cell phone text messages.

Visit these websites for more information about Cyber Bullying:

www.cyberbully.org

www.stopcyberbullying.org

www.wiredsafety.org

www.isafe.org/

SEXTING

Becoming increasingly popular with the use of imbedded camera cell phones "sexting" is the common name for taking nude or provocative pictures of oneself and sending them through cell phone text service to another person. Most commonly done by teenage girls for their boyfriends, they never think about the legal issues of this practice. Often times, after a breakup the receiving party may retaliate by sending the images to other friends in an attempt to embarrass the sender. Several cases have risen over the past year where teenagers have been charged for producing and sending child porn since they are underage. The image recipients are also liable for having the images on their phone and/or sending child porn. This is an increasing problem facing schools in dealing with this issue. Such images spread quickly throughout the student body creating an administrative hassle as schools must confiscate phones and work through the authorities. This can also take the form of bullying as students might take a picture of an unsuspecting classmate in the locker room and circulate it throughout the school.

WEB VIDEO

The ability to use the Internet to share videos has recently become popular in large part to the increased use of high-speed Internet service for home users. Videos are large files therefore they take a lot of time to transfer across a network and that includes the World Wide Web. Therefore dial-up customers just a few years ago would not have been as eager to wait for videos to download in order to watch.

The fact that anyone with a video camera can record something and post it online for millions to access is very appealing to amateur actors and directors who traditionally had no large outlet for their creative talents. By using the Internet as their distribution vehicle they have leveled the playing field with many of the television and movie networks. Simply put, people are turning to their computer for entertainment and customize their experience based on what they want to view. Many amateur videos posted online receive pop culture status and are viewed by millions of people, which sometimes garner big breaks for these struggling amateurs.

Many videos consist of stupid human tricks, comic parody commercials, clips from music videos and television shows and anything else you can imagine. Unfortunately, many videos also contain sexuality and nudity as well as alcohol use and violence. Some of the website video services try to remove this type of material but videos are being posted at such a rapid rate it is almost impossible. Many also employ mechanisms to prevent underage users from seeing such content but with no real form of age verification it is not practical.

Web videos are also becoming part of social networking profiles where profile holders place videos for others to view. This has created a direct link between social networking and web videos and increased the popularity of both. In fact MySpace.com, a popular social networking site, has recently released its own video site called MySpaceTV.com.

Out of all the video websites www.YouTube.com is by far the most popular, but there are many others. Search engines such as www.Google.com and www.Yahoo.com are also getting into the video service as well.

Here are some examples of other Web Video websites:

www.guba.com

www.veoh.com

www.metacafe.com

www.stupidvideos.com

E-MAIL

E-mail (Electronic Mail) has become a popular way of communicating over the Internet. It enables messages to be sent instantly anywhere in the world. Instead of writing a letter and paying postage why not send it electronically? Using e-mail requires an e-mail address that is either provided by an Internet Service Provider (ISP) or a free service web site. Free addresses are popular due to their availability.

SERVERS

This is a good time to discuss the existence of servers and how they play a crucial role in Internet communications. A server is a fast, high-powered computer or bank of computers with large amounts of data storage. The basic function of a server is to store data and then serve or deliver that information to users when requested. Servers are specifically designed for their function and there are many types such as e-mail servers, web servers, ISP servers, and DNS servers to name a few. They work together to make up the backbone of the Internet and permit our communications with it. These servers are typically found in an ISP office or many large web site search engines will have them as well.

E-MAIL FUNCTION

It is important to understand that e-mail travels over the Internet from server to server. For example: I send an e-mail to a friend living in Florida. I log on to my e-mail server, type my friend's e-mail address in the "To:" box and then type the message. Once I select "Send" my server uses the address to forward the e-mail to my friend's server. My friend then retrieves the e-mail during his next log on to his server.

ISP BASED E-MAIL

As mentioned before, e-mail is available through either an ISP or a free service. The provider's name is typically part of the address revealing what type it is. All ISP's assign at least one e-mail account per customer but some people decide not to use it. They prefer instead to use a free e-mail account. It is common to access ISP e-mail with a client program installed on the user's computer. Programs like Microsoft Outlook Express (included with Windows), Microsoft Outlook, QUALCOMM Eudora and Mozilla Thunderbird, as well as many others are designed for this purpose. When a client program is opened, it contacts the ISP e-mail server and synchronizes to receive new e-mails or updates. The client program has all functions related to e-mail like composing and deleting. After making changes, the user can close the client program or manually press a Send/Receive button to update the server. Once updated, the server will replicate the changes and send e-mails accordingly. ISP's commonly provide web based access on their web site allowing users to access e-mail from any web connection. This can be for users who either do not want to use a client or are away from their normal computer.

FREE E-MAIL

Many search engines and web sites like www.yahoo.com, www.hotmail.com, and www.gmail.com offer free e-mail service. Such e-mail accounts are completely web

based and popular despite the advertisements users must endure. Such popularity also creates a breeding ground for spam. Web based e-mail is accessible through web browsers. The web site supplies a web interface for users to gain access. Mail is never stored on the user's computer unless they purposefully save it there. This creates a safety zone from malware and other undesirable items that might be hiding. However, if an attachment is opened or a link selected, it will use a program on the user's local computer therefore opening the potential for infection.

Take note when signing up for free e-mail; it requires personal information during registration. The provider uses this for target advertising. Some people use fictitious names as well as other fake information. Users who plan to use the e-mail address for professional correspondence should consider using their real name or initials. This name will be attached to all e-mail sent and might confuse recipients. Some free e-mail services do allow the sent name to be changed making it different from the registered name.

Here are some examples of websites that provide free E-mail:

www.hotmail.com
www.mail.yahoo.com
www.mail.lycos.com
www.mail.com
www.hushmail.com
www.bluebottle.com
www.cooltoad.com

SPAM

Spam is basically junk e-mail from advertisers, companies, or people you don't know. It is similar to junk mail sent to your home. Many times it contains inappropriate words in the subject line as well as suggestive phrases. Most people ask me how they get Spam when they use antivirus protection software on their computer. Well for starters, Spam is not a virus it is just unwanted e-mail. In addition, it is typically stored on the server, not the user's computer. For users with a client e-mail program installed locally, Spam would only flag antivirus software if an attachment were infected. Some antivirus programs also have Spam filtering included.

Many e-mail providers scan for Spam but are typically overwhelmed and miss some. Setting filter parameters is also tricky when discerning between Spam and legitimate e-mail. If a user checks e-mail with a web interface, there is no concern with Spam prevention on the local computer since it stays entirely on the e-mail server. Usually there is a way to designate e-mail as Spam which will attempt to block future e-mail from the same sender. Chain e-mails are also known to cause Spam. Chain e-mails have cute pictures, graphics, jokes or encouraging stories. Recipients like them so much they forward them to all of their friends. Many times the e-mail also includes instructions to send it to other people to keep it going. Most users never realize their

address and their friends' addresses become part of the chain history. A Spammer will use these e-mails to extract addresses. Ask your friends not to send such e-mails and you should never forward them to other friends. If you must participate in receiving such e-mails, create a junk account with a free e-mail service. Tell your friends to forward them to that account so your real address is not as susceptible to Spam.

PHISHING

Phishing is an e-mail appearing to be from a legitimate company. The purpose is to trick recipients into providing personal information such as credit card, bank account, and social security numbers. The e-mail uses the legitimate company logo and other identifiable marks to gain the trust of the victim. With claims of "During our regularly scheduled account maintenance and verification procedures, we have detected a slight error in your billing information" or "If your account information is not updated within 48 hours then your ability to purchase will become restricted" it is tempting for recipients to respond. Typically users respond by selecting a link in the text of the e-mail. The e-mail originator knows many recipients will not have an account with the company and realize it is a trick. However, phishing a large group might hook a few people who actually do.

FILE SHARING

File sharing has become a major problem for the entertainment industry. With the use of file sharing web sites such as www.kazaa.com, www.limewire.com, www.bearshare.com, www.edonkey2000.com and www.bittorrent.com many people are stealing music and movies by downloading them for free. The process works by users connecting to an Internet based peer-to-peer network and making their files available to others connected to that same network. For example, a user logs on to the peer-to-peer network and searches for a particular song. In turn, the network searches through all logged on computers and displays who has it. The user initiates the download and a copy of the song is transferred to their computer. If a user's computer holds songs that others want, the same process is repeated in reverse. This is the file sharing process. The network makes everyone's files available in order to share.

The potential for viruses and other forms of malware from this activity is a major concern since users literally download files from unknown computers. In fact, some files are simply viruses disguised as songs or movies. Many times entertainment companies purposely dump placebo files in the mix to cause frustration and prevent users from downloading the real thing.

It is illegal to copy or share copyrighted material over the Internet. A friend of mine who works in the file sharing prevention industry told me he is surprised how many people play ignorant about what is copyrighted and what is not. His statement to me was "If it is not a home video of your family or a song you recorded yourself then it is probably copyrighted and you shouldn't be sharing it. In addition if you're not paying for it, and you can download it onto your computer for free, your copy is most likely obtained illegally." This is the bottom line.

The federal government has been working with music and movie executives to create new ways to crack down on illegal file sharing. Many legitimate web sites have been created that charge a fee to download music that is paid to the appropriate party. Obviously the free sites are more attractive and the apparent anonymity of the Internet makes it seem okay for many people.

Recently the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) has been targeting college students who have downloaded illegal music from campus networks across the US. They are mailing pre-litigation letters requesting the recipient to either settle out of court by paying a fee or face a civil lawsuit. See p2plawsuits.com for more info.

Here are some additional websites with information about File Sharing:

www.riaa.com

www.respectcopyrights.com

www.mpaa.org/piracy.asp

Popular File Sharing Services (used for illegal sharing)

www.kazaa.com

www.limewire.com

www.bearshare.com

www.edonkey.com

www.bittorrent.com

Websites that Allow Legal Purchases

www.apple.com

www.rhapsody.com

www.emusic.com

www.walmart.com

SEARCH ENGINES

The Internet is commonly used to search for information which is performed with the help of web sites called search engines. There are numerous search engines available but some of the more common ones are www.google.com, www.yahoo.com, www.msn.com, and www.lycos.com.

Many of these web sites allow image searches. This is very popular with students doing school projects. It is also a way to look up inappropriate images and not be detected by filtering programs. The search engine shows the images within its own results page therefore it does not flag filtering software. If the user selects the picture the corresponding web site address would attempt to open and then be subject to filtering. However, the original picture shown is large enough to cause concern. In addition, many search engines restrict results based on filters but offer customizable filter settings for a user to quickly turn them off.

PROXY SITES

A "Proxy Site" is a web site that provides visitors with a way around security blocks and is very popular with teenagers in schools or other areas where computer restrictions are in place. By providing a separate address bar on the webpage a user can surf the Internet within the proxy page bypassing the local security.

When a proxy site is used the only Internet activity history to be found will be the proxy site itself because as far as the computer is concerned the user only visited that site. The remaining activity was done within the site.

Here are some examples of Proxy websites:

www.getunblocked.info

www.unblockhi5.info

www.proxisurf.info

www.mysplashspace.com

www.footballscorelive.com

www.skoolunblocker.com

ONLINE GAMES

Online games come in various forms from simple quick games (www.addictinggames.com) to intense role-playing games also known as RPG's. When it comes to online game safety RPG's are the most to be concerned about.

ROLE PLAYING GAMES

Role Playing Games also known as RPG's have been around for many years. Many people are familiar with the original tabletop Dungeon's and Dragon's game that was developed in the 1970's. The basic function was to let players take on the identity of a character and play against other players that assumed their own identity. The players work their way through various scenarios of the imaginary world.

As computers and the Internet have evolved, RPG's have gone virtual and are now online. There are many types to choose from based on themes and they are just a click away. In fact, there is a new acronym to explain the online version - MMORPG (Massive Multiplayer Online Role-Playing Game). Just typing RPG or MMORPG in any Internet search engine will return more results for games than you would ever care to know. One of the more popular ones is RuneScape, www.runescape.com.

Like other online activities, such games are very addictive and will occupy players for hours. One area of concern is unlike the tabletop RPG's from the 70's people playing RPG's are playing against people they do not know.

VIDEO GAME SYSTEMS

Many parents consciously make an effort to keep computers out of their children's bedrooms but never consider the video game console.

Units like Microsoft's XBOX 360 and Nintendo's Wii do more than just play games – they are computer systems with network capabilities that can access the Internet. Even if you do not connect the unit to your home Internet connection via a network cable some systems can still access wireless networks. That's right – little Johnny can potentially sit in his bedroom using his game console and connect to a neighbors unsecured wireless network and surf the Internet without anyone knowing.

Additionally these units have the potential to connect to an online Internet service allowing online communities in order to play against other players with the same equipment. Players can message each other or install a webcam and headset or microphone for players to see and talk to each other. Yes – there are adult predators in these communities as well. Microsoft's service is called LIVE and can be accessed for a yearly service fee. LIVE service is also available for players using their computer to interact.