

Firms can create personalised marketing for a particular child

A survey showed that more than half the word searches carried out on an Internet engine were for pornography

Mark Griffiths

Children and the Internet: issues for parents and teachers

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1. Never tell anyone whom you meet on the Internet your home address, telephone number or school's name unless you are given permission by a parent or carer.
2. Never send anyone your picture, credit card or bank details (or anything else).
3. Never give your password to anyone — even your best friend.
4. Never arrange to meet anyone in person whom you have met on the Internet without first agreeing it with your parent or carer.
5. Never stay in a chat room or in a conference if someone says or writes something that makes you feel uncomfortable or worried. Always report it to your parent or carer.
6. Never respond to nasty, suggestive or rude e-mails or postings in Usenet groups.
7. If you see bad language or distasteful pictures while you are online, always tell your parent or carer.
8. When you are online, always be yourself and do not pretend to be anyone or anything you are not.
9. Always remember that if someone makes you an offer that seems too good to be true — then it probably is.

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Defenders of the Internet argue that only 3% of the total number of files are pornographic, but a survey carried out by the University of Middlesex analysed a million word searches on an Internet search engine and reported that over half of them were aimed at locating pornography. The top eight word searches were all pornography-related. The study also reported that the pornography was more than just pictures of naked people; for instance, there was information for paedophiles on how to entrap and (in

some instances) kill children. It was also claimed that some bulletin-board sites gave information on how to have intercourse with amputees, as well as accounts of child sexual abuse, which appeared to have been put there by the abusers themselves.

Another survey by Carnegie Mellon University in the USA (conducted over 18 months) found nearly one million sexually-explicit computer files. On Internet discussion groups, 83.5% of all pictures were pornographic. In another survey, 13 of the 40 most frequently-visited newsgroups were pornographic.

The high level of interest in these sites may not just be restricted to the adult population, since there have been reports of downloaded computer pornography circulating in school playgrounds. Such material is easy to conceal, and it is impossible to determine a disc's contents just by looking at it. A survey by the University of Central Lancashire reported that computer pornography was available at 3 out of 10 boys' secondary schools — a lot of which was bought and sold at car boot sales!

The issues raised here are not meant to be alarmist, but have been highlighted to raise awareness amongst parents and teachers of Internet issues concerning the exploitation of children and the potential unsuitability of some material. These issues need to be explicitly stated, as there may be a 'technological generation gap' between parents and children (and maybe between children and some teachers). Everyone involved with contemporary technological issues needs both to be educated *about* the Internet and to understand how to be educational *with* the Internet.

COMING SOON!

A new report from the Schools Health Education Unit

A study of young people's mental health, in the context of their physical health and social relationships.

The data were derived from the Health Related Behaviour Questionnaire, as used in surveys between 1991 and 1997.

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