Privacy Pitfalls

Guiding level: Pathfinders /Rangers
Topic: Privacy

No Internet connection is needed for this activity.

In this activity Rangers will be looking at the ways that commercial websites collect personal information from youth and what makes a responsible privacy policy.

Preparation:

- Print out copies of the following handouts:
    - *Protecting Your Personal Privacy on Commercial Websites*
    - *CyberZone Privacy Policy*
    - *Kids' World Privacy Policy*
- Prepare on a large sheet of paper or flipchart the following list of types of personal information: name; gender; age and birthdate; interests and hobbies; e-mail address; postal address; phone number; hardware and software information.

At your meeting

Begin by asking the girls:

- Have you ever been asked to submit information to a website?
- What kind information was requested?
- Why did you have to submit it? (i.e. register on the site, enter a contest, etc.)
- Did you mind doing this? Why or why not?

Discussion

Privacy is a big issue on the Internet, especially when it comes to kids and teens. A 2005 survey of Canadian youth by Media Awareness Network (now MediaSmarts) showed that 90 per cent of kids' favourite websites actively solicit detailed personal information from their visitors.

Review the list of types of personal information listed on the sheet of paper or flipchart with the girls. (Name; gender; age and birth date; interests and hobbies; e-mail address; postal address; phone number; hardware and software information.)

Ask them to rank this information, from items most requested to least requested.

Discuss with the girls:

- What kinds of "personally identifiable" information have you been asked for on commercial websites?
- How is this information collected? (i.e. registration forms, contest, surveys, etc.)
- What do you think the site uses this information for? Why is this information valuable to marketers?

Girls should be aware that personal information is a valuable commodity. Some kids' sites are supported through the selling of information gathered from young visitors to third parties such as marketing firms. Others use their understanding of kid's insecurities, preferences and lifestyles to maximize the marketing potential of their own sites.

1. Divide the girls into groups and have them review the handout *Protecting Your Privacy on Commercial Websites.*

2. Once they have done this, review the main points with them. Encourage the girls to share similar situations that they may have encountered while online.

3. Ask the girls the following questions:

   - Have any of them ever read a privacy policy on a website?
   - For those that have read privacy policies, which sites were they on? Were they easy to understand? Were there any surprises?
   - Why are privacy policies important?

4. Have the girls return to their groups to read and compare the mock privacy policies for *Cyber Zone* and *Kids' World*, assessing the strengths and weaknesses of each of these policies and noting any issues, vague or misleading language, or omissions.

5. Once they have done this, bring everyone back together to discuss their findings and to determine which of these sites is most respectful of the privacy of children.

Extension activity (if computers are available)

Have the girls visit their favourite websites and read through the privacy polices using what they have learned in this activity to determine how responsible the policies are.

Protecting Your Privacy on the Internet

The Internet provides marketers with many opportunities to gather personal information from children. Kids love playing on the Web and commercial sites for children are continually ranked as top online destinations.

However, as kids visit websites to play games, win prizes, chat online or join clubs, they may also be compromising their privacy. Here are some of the ways:

- **Online registration forms** that ask kids to sign up in order to become club members or access "fun" areas on a site

- **Quizzes and surveys** that are used to determine the preferences and attitudes of young consumers

- **Contests** in which kids are required to submit personal information to enter and win prizes

- **E-cards** where friends' email addresses are submitted to a website so that the company can send them e-cards and greetings

- **Chat environments** where children may be asked for personal information in order to join a chat room or where children may inadvertently post personal information while chatting

- **Cookie files** that track users when they enter a site and record the areas they visit; these files can be used by marketers to create customer profiles and deliver customized information to young visitors

Privacy policies

Privacy policies outline the privacy terms and conditions of a particular site. Many privacy policies are vague, misleading or difficult to understand. MNet's research shows that the language in the privacy policies of most kids sites is at a university level! Here's the important info to look for in a privacy policy:

- What information is being collected from kids and how will it be used?

- Will any information collected be shared with a third party (very important!)?

- Can parents change or delete any info that has been collected about their kids?

- What steps are being taken to safeguard kids' privacy when they are using the interactive parts of the site: chat rooms, message boards, etc.?

- Does the site adhere to any industry guidelines for selling to, and collecting data from, kids on the Internet?

- Do they try to make sure that parental consent is obtained before a child, younger than 13, releases any personal information online (this is the law in the U.S.)?

CyberZone Privacy Policy

We love kids! So much, in fact, that we decided to create a fun, safe and educational website, just for children, ages 4 to 12. It's been a challenge, but with the support of our sponsors, and feedback from people like you, we're getting close to achieving our dream.

With the financial support of companies who also care about kids, we've set out to create the best place on the Net for young people from around the world to share friendships and experiences that will last a lifetime!

We care about your privacy

Anyone can participate in *CyberZone,* but kids do have to register if they want to post anything to the site, join our e-pal program, collect prizes or receive special newsletters and activities.

When registering, we ask kids to give us their real name, date of birth, city/province/postal code and e-mail address. This gives us a better idea of who is visiting us and how we can keep improving the content of our site to meet the needs of our young visitors.

We *do* ask kids for some additional information in surveys they complete before collecting the nifty prizes that they've earned playing games. Surveys are a purely optional activity, but winners cannot collect their prizes without completing them. Kids aren't required to fill out our *CyberZone* surveys to enjoy other parts of *CyberZone.*

Collection of information by third-party sites and sponsors

Our site contains links to other sites, including those of sponsors, advertisers and survey companies. *CyberZone* does not share a visitor's e-mail address or other personal information with such third parties without permission. However, if you do not "opt-out" (uncheck a checked box that will provide a sponsor with your information), that means you have allowed us to give your registration and other information, including e-mail address, to the third party.

Kids' World Privacy Policy

Privacy Policy

Kids' World is committed to keeping kids safe on the web. We have worked very hard to provide a fun, healthy, and enriching experience for kids.

To make sure we respect our young visitors, we adhere to the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA) and the Children's Advertising Review Unit's *Self Regulatory Guidelines for Children's Advertising: Guidelines for Interactive Electronic Media.*

Personal information

Registering with personal information to play in *Kids' World* is not required. Every visitor, whether they've registered or not, can access all the sections of the site. In addition, all the activities can be experienced and enjoyed without sharing any personal information.

Voluntary submissions

Kids who want to participate in special *Kids' World* activities, like free email accounts, joining chat rooms and contests are asked for minimal personal information.

To obtain a bug-mail account, each user is asked to provide their parents' e-mail address. We use this address to let their parents know that their child has registered with us. We don't do anything else with parents' e-mail addresses. And we don't sell bug-mail addresses to third parties.

To participate in chat rooms, we ask users to make up a screen name and password and to provide their birth date and gender. The age and gender information is used so that we can calculate the typical gender and average age of our audience.

If kids want to be eligible to win free prizes, we ask them to give us their full name, mailing address and parents' email address. We collect this information so we know where to send any prizes they might win. Should a child win a contest, parents will be contacted directly. This information is not used for any purposes.

For kids who state that they are under 13, we require parental permission before they can participate in these special activities. We've set up a 1-800 phone number that their parents can call to let us know that it's ok. Or, parents can also download and sign our e-mail consent form and fax or mail it to us. We want parents to know what their kids are doing, so any time kids give us personal information when they sign up for activities on the site, we send an e-mail to the parent's e-mail address just to let them know.

Kids' World doesn't share users' information with any of our partners, sponsors, advertisers, friends or other third parties.

No matter what information is given to us, it is our policy never to post more than a user's screen name, home town, province/territory and age.

Updating and deleting personal information

Kids' World members and their parents can view, correct update, and delete personal information from our database at any time. (Visit the Kids' World "sign-up zone" for more information on how to do this.)

Cookies

Cookies are small text files that we send to your computer. They help us improve your experience of our games (by marking how far you got and what your score was) and they help us administer our e-mail service and our chat rooms. Cookies are not used for gathering information. However, if you are concerned about the use of cookies, you will find information on how to disable them here.

If you still have questions about our policy, feel free to email us at parents@kidsworld.com or call 1-613-389-1234. Our real-world address is: Kid's World Inc., 1023 Spruce Ave., Rome, New York 154578.

Kids' World is a member of the *Better Business Bureau*