

Do Not Track: Children Should be a Top Priority

Society has an obligation to protect our children and online safety for children should be a priority. We need a three-pronged approach to address this issue: policy changes; industry self-regulation; and more parental tools, monitoring and education.

A 2010 [Wall Street Journal investigation](#) into online privacy, found that popular children's websites install more tracking technologies on personal computers than do the top websites aimed at adults. In fact, the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) says 8 percent of the ID theft complaints in 2010 involved children. Further, [Consumer Reports](#) notes that one million children were harassed, threatened, or subjected to other forms of cyberbullying on Facebook in the past year – and that's just one social media site.

Current legislative efforts have failed to act to update COPPA, the industry is failing miserably at self-regulating. As such, it is essential that thought leaders such as the World Wide Web Consortium come to agreement on standards that legislators will support and the industry will implement – all without stifling innovation. No easy task!

Simply, consumers must be allowed to control their personal data without losing all the benefits offered by the Internet. As an example, many Facebook apps require absolute access to all the personal data of a user in order to participate. This is a false choice. Consumers should continue to be able to participate online without being forced to give up their personal privacy. Children should be able to go online, play and learn without leaving a digital track that haunts them for life.

As the media continues to expose the prevalence of the collection and aggregation of personal information, consumers will demand change. Even with action from Congress and more regulation of the online marketing industry, we believe that to keep up with new technologies, the private market must be a large part of the solution.

We need to look at the broader implications and responsibility of Silicon Valley, and not simply the profit margins of data aggregators and marketing agencies. The short-term “get it while we can” mentality has long-term consequences for the profitability of technology and online marketing companies: they will continue to lose trust with consumers unless they step up and support best practices that protect their own revenue source – people. How many more articles like the New York Times’ [You for Sale: Mapping, and Sharing, the Consumer Genome](#)” will it take before consumers begin to exodus Facebook and Google. How long will it take before McDonald’s [HappyMeal.com](#) and [CartoonNetwork.com](#) are blacklisted from the family computer?

Parents certainly play an important role in modulating their kids’ online lifestyle, and parents should be educated about best practices and the tools already at their disposal to monitor and moderate what content their kids see.

However, our kids should be allowed access to the wealth of information and entertainment the Internet has to offer...just not at the cost of their safety and privacy..

It is currently a big line between data use and abuse. The debate around Do Not Track standards should serve to define that line. Focusing on children first is not only a societal obligation but the path to a faster resolution of a growing problem that threatens technological innovation and our access to the Web.