

Making the Internet Safer

Written by Joel Larkin

Monday, 13 April 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 12 April 2009 23:40

I've been asked repeatedly what you can do to make the Internet a safer place for your family or guests. This sometimes can be a delicate topic as it brings to light some interesting facts, like who really has a problem in this area. Most of the products in this area (there are more than a few) are cost items, some significant. What I'll be talking about here is a few of the low/no cost items that I've personally used.

Software certainly can help, particularly if it's installed in the right place, however these aren't as effective as actively monitoring computer usage. I can't tell you the number of stories I've gotten from friends, customers, or co-workers that start with my daughter/son did this... Typically they discover this accidentally and well after the event taking place. As we all know today's culture reinforces behaviors that we actively fight on a daily basis. Following these tips are the best way to avoid telling this story about your son or daughter:

- Keep the computer in a family space that's frequently used.
- Orient the monitor so that it's easy to see what's going on.
- Don't have a webcam connected to the computer when your not around
- Don't have a phone that can easily connect to the computer
- Educate your kids! Talk about Internet predators, appropriate use of technology, self-worth etc.
- Keep a 'public' attitude. Make sure the kids/family members expect you to look at history, pictures taken, IM sessions, etc. **AND ACTUALLY LOOK AT IT!** If they are ashamed to share it with you they shouldn't be doing it!

That being said there is more content out there than should be and it's important to protect the ones you love from temptation. There are three products I've run on my own and highly recommend.

The first on is called "[K9 Web Protection](#)" and offers protection on Windows & Mac OSX systems. This application has a great database, offers the ability to FORCE safe search on, and is pretty simple to use. The default blocking categories are sufficient to block most of the products out there. The only downside to this product is this: It has to be installed and enabled in order to work. If a new computer is plugged into your internet at home there is no protection for that new computer.

The second application is actually a service called "[OpenDNS](#)". This service performs name

Making the Internet Safer

Written by Joel Larkin

Monday, 13 April 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 12 April 2009 23:40

resolution (Kind of like a phone book, it tells computers how to call each-other) and if a site is considered in-appropriate it redirects it to a web page saying so. This can be setup to protect all computers at home including 'guest' systems. Although it can be bypassed by a technically adept person it's a great tool to help the honest stay honest. Also this works for any system (Linux, Windows, & Macintosh) and doesn't require anything be installed. You're home router or Cable/DSL modem can be modified to automatically provide the protection of any system connecting to it.

The third application worth mentioning is called "[Covenant Eyes](#)" and is geared towards producing Internet Accountability reports as well as filtering. Each report provides a scoring which allows easy identification of questionable sites, searches, etc. It's relatively inexpensive (it's a pay \$\$\$ for product). This provides an extra layer of transparency that doesn't exist in other products. The report that get's sent can be sent to an accountability partner, family member, friends, pastor, etc.

These three applications can be used in conjunction or independently to provide a high level of protection to any machines in your house. I highly recommend using both OpenDNS and K9 web protection at a minimum. These products are free, can be installed without any special know how (good installation instructions are provided!), and have great databases supporting them (meaning a good identification of the bad stuff). Just remember this is no substitution for good monitoring!

Some tips for these applications

- Decide what you want to block right away.
- Don't just block the obvious, some sites like photobucket have tons of inappropriate content on them.
- Does this include social networking (Facebook, MySpace, etc)?

- When asked for a password, make it complex. It shouldn't be easily guessed or written down in an obvious location.
- If you have a problem with this area:
 - Ask your spouse to set the passwords and not give them to you
 - Purchase the covenant eyes application and ask your accountability partner for help, encouragement, and prayer.
 - Change your Internet usage habits and computer location (Don't surf when nobody is awake, move your computer into a public location)
 - Consider what would happen if someone else in your household found out your internet

Making the Internet Safer

Written by Joel Larkin

Monday, 13 April 2009 00:00 - Last Updated Sunday, 12 April 2009 23:40

habbits.

- Put the protection in your home router, DSL Modem, or Cable modem. Consider purchasing a router with this protection built in. Note: [NetGear has formed a partnership with OpenDNS](#) to offer "Live Parental Controls" which doesn't (don't quote me on this) require any additional purchases after the Wireless router. This way more machines get covered (including guest systems).