

**INFORMATION SECURITY IN THE AOL COMMUNITY:  
Technology, Tools, and Education**

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With 34 million members, 1.4 billion daily Instant Messages, and 400 million daily e-mail messages, AOL is the world's largest ISP. At our daily peak usage we have 2.5 million AOL members simultaneously using our network. Together with our members, we have created an extended family in a worldwide community.

But with our successes come the challenges that face our entire online industry, including the challenge of ensuring the security of the entire Internet infrastructure and reducing the vulnerability of personal information. What can companies do to help consumers protect their information security? At AOL, we are committed to playing a leadership role on the issue of security, and are constantly striving to be the safest on-ramp to the Internet. Employing our technology, tools, resources, and educational efforts, we have developed an extensive plan to meet these challenges, working together with our members and **the** industry to implement solutions.

Surfing on the Internet is not unlike walking your neighborhood. Ultimately, no one piece of software can completely protect you unless you follow some easy and simple rules. You would not cross the street without looking both ways but many people will click on hyperlinks or provide personal information online to unfamiliar people or web sites. Many of the problems our members have online are the result of engaging in this type of activity despite having been warned over and over again not to. It is our responsibility to curb this behavior by making online safety as simple and automatic as crossing the street.

For AOL, online security is an ongoing process. It means providing safe online areas, controlling the use of our networks, keeping personal information private, avoiding scams, and educating consumers about safe computing practices. Through these and other efforts, we are continuously working to safeguard our members' accounts and computers, our system, and our network infrastructure. We recognize that safety is one of the keys to instilling consumer confidence in the online medium and is critical to the continued growth and expansion of the Internet.

The AOL approach to consumer security is therefore threefold, with a focus on: 1) technology, 2) tools, and 3) education.

## **TECHNOLOGY: BUILDING SECURITY INTO OUR INFRASTRUCTURE**

At AOL, we dedicate significant resources to the technology that helps keep our network and the information of our members secure. For example:

**Ensuring the security of our network.** We recognize that network security is critical to the security of our members, and therefore we work diligently and continuously to protect our infrastructure. We are constantly on the alert for software vulnerabilities, and we apply software patches promptly.

**Anti-Virus Protection** We monitor our network for viruses and take both proactive and reactive measures to prevent, detect and eliminate them. In addition, we empower our users to protect themselves against viruses by making anti-virus software easily accessible through our AOL Computing Channel.

**Providing a secure environment for members' communications.** AOL member-to-member communications take place within a controlled environment, and are facilitated over our highly secure data transit network.

**Preventing Denial of Service Attacks or other intrusions.** We have integrated denial of service mitigation protection at all levels of our system, which helps us to protect against attempted attacks. When we become aware of potential vulnerabilities to our systems, we work quickly to address these issues and prevent any disruptions to our service.

**Safeguarding access to member data.** AOL is deeply committed to the security and privacy of our members' personal data. We have designed privacy protection control systems to help ensure security. AOL keeps passwords strictly confidential; verification of screen names and passwords is performed on AOL's secure servers. We have implemented numerous safeguards on access to member data. We understand that a sound security system is the result of not only tools such as firewalls, intrusion detection systems, and anti-virus software, but that the internal employees play an integral role in protecting security. To this end, security access to member data is granted on a need-to-know basis and employees are extensively screened prior to being granting access privileges. We conduct periodic internal auditing of network records of data access to detect and promptly address suspicious activity.

## **TOOLS: ENABLING MEMBERS TO USE THE INTERNET SAFELY**

AOL members need tools to assist them in protecting their information, their computers and their online experience. AOL provides an abundance of educational resources for members, as well as tools that help consumers secure their systems and enable us to intervene on their behalf when they encounter security problems that violate our system rules.

### **Tools for Learning**

AOL devotes significant resources to providing a wide-range of well-placed education tools and resources that our members would find difficult to avoid. Because our members spend an

average of 70 minutes per day online with AOL, we have ample time to remind them about security, and we do.

**AOL Neighborhood Watch** Member security begins with educational tools that are clear, easy to find and ubiquitous. At AOL, our primary member resource for security is AOL Keyword: Neighborhood Watch. Collectively taking care of our community, this site urges members to “protect your home computer and the nation’s Internet infrastructure.” Specific topics found at the Neighborhood Watch educate members on how to protect themselves against scams and viruses, as well as how to protect their credit card numbers and passwords. Neighborhood Watch also hyperlinks members to industry collaborative sites like “StaySafeOnline,” “GetNetWise” and “Site-Seeing Tips: Travel Insurance for Cyberspace” for other specific suggestions and reinforcement of our messages.

**AOL Keyword: Help** AOL Keyword: Help provides a resource for members who need assistance on any topic, including security. This process is easy to navigate, clear and simple to understand. At Help, one of six listed topics is “Online Safety.” Clicking this link gives the member online safety subtopics to choose, including information on protecting your password, avoiding computer viruses and spotting scams and schemes. Clicking any of these choices gives the member a menu of related short, simple, useful articles such as “Password Requests in E-mail,” and “Password Stealing Schemes.”

**Other help areas**. AOL provides a computer center and a computer community that can be reached easily through a number of routes. Here the Neighborhood Watch and Help messages of computer and information security are restated and additional topics are addressed. FAQs and Advanced FAQs are useful tools found here. In addition, members can go to AOL Keyword: Virus and receive anti-virus tips, as well as join anti-virus chats. And throughout our service, we provide safety reminders to our members, including warnings regarding Internet scams and hoaxes. We specifically remind members that “AOL staff will never ask you for your password or billing information”, a warning which appears in bold on all Instant Message windows and Email Inboxes on the service.

**Security in AOL’s Kids Only and Teens Channels**. Children’s online safety is a primary concern for AOL. Learning how to explore and understand the online world is an essential skill for our children in today’s wired world, and learning the basics of computer and information security is part of that learning experience. We use our Kids Only and Teens Channels to deliver special safety and security tips in language appropriate to these age groups. We use our technology to integrate the tips into the other experiences that children enjoy on our service. For example, a child cannot get into a Kids Only chat room without first passing through our kids safety tips screen. There a child finds six basic safety tips written in language that speaks to children, such as “Don’t give your AOL password to anyone, even your best friend,” and “Don’t accept things from strangers (e-mail, files, web site addresses).” AOL Keywords: “Kid Help” and “Safety Tips” mirror similar services for adults in kid friendly language.

Separate AOL messages aimed at parents reinforce the security education directed toward their children, and we provide parents numerous choices regarding the ways in which their children can use the Internet. A majority of AOL parents with children online use Parental Controls, a comprehensive AOL feature that permits parents to select the appropriate levels of online participation for each of their children.

## Tools for Action

**NotifyAOL.** Because the AOL community is self-policing, AOL provides tools for members to report infractions of our community policies. Keyword: Notify AOL is available to all AOL members as a source for information and as a mechanism for reporting member violations in features on the service such as screen names, e-mail, and message boards. Members use Notify AOL to report any inappropriate activity. For example, a member can click Instant Message Notes to report a password request in an Instant Message note, and Notify AOL walks the member through the reporting process. Children use an even easier version of Notify AOL called Tell AOL.

**Community Action and Enforcement** AOL has a zero-tolerance policy for illegal behavior on our service. AOL's Community Action Team (CAT) reviews reports from NotifyAOL and takes action against members responsible if the activity demonstrates a violation of AOL Terms of Service. Options include both written warnings and account termination if necessary. All reports of Terms of Service violations are processed promptly. And of course, AOL works closely with law enforcement and public interest groups to track down perpetrators and prevent cybercrime.

**At AOL Security is a Full-Time Job.** Assuring the integrity of the AOL experience is a full-time AOL effort, engaging the talents of a dedicated Integrity Assurance office with outreach to all the internal AOL Time Warner divisions, as well as our partners and members. These employees are concerned with the user experience—how we display security information and how understandable it is to our members. We also have a dedicated team of network security specialists that are on call 24-hours a day to ensure that our infrastructure remains secure.

## EDUCATIONAL OUTREACH: SPREADING THE WORD BEYOND THE AOL COMMUNITY

Online leadership means taking on responsibilities beyond the AOL community. AOL feels keenly an obligation to use our resources wisely for the benefit of all consumers in the online world. To that end we have undertaken numerous initiatives, including the following:

**National Cyber Security Alliance and StaySafeOnline.** We have joined with other leading private sector companies to form the National Cyber Security Alliance, a unique partnership with the federal government that fosters awareness of cyber security through educational outreach. The Alliance website, <<<http://www.staysafeonline.info>>>, provides clear and concise consumer tips on information security. AOL is proud to have participated in the design of that site, to be hosting it on our web servers, and to be dedicating substantial resources toward driving traffic there.

**SafeKids, SafeTeens, and Safe Surfin' on the Internet.** Other AOL safety and security projects that reach beyond our immediate AOL family include collaborative websites such as SafeKids.com and SafeTeens.com, which reinforce safety and security messages for both parents and children. AOL has also produced the Safe Surfin' video for kids which features six online

safety tips for "Safe Surfing" on the Internet.

**AOL's Internet Security Study.** To gauge consumer security issues we commissioned an Internet security study that was completed late last year. We found that home Internet users are concerned about Internet security (82%). Their top concerns are theft of their credit card and other personal information, and viruses acquired through e-mail and downloads. However, our study demonstrates that most home users are vulnerable to Internet security threats because they do not adhere to all the key practices that would protect their systems from attack. For example:

—most anti-virus software users do not update their software regularly (77%);

—most people do not choose strong password protection; and

—people are generally aware of only the most widely discussed security messages (*i.e.*, don't open attachments from unknown sources and use virus protection).

The results of this study demonstrate the critical need for continued public education and outreach on the issue of online security, and reinforce our commitment to providing consumers with the resources they need to protect themselves online.

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At AOL, we recognize that security is an ongoing process and are committed to protecting the personal safety of all of our subscribers. We are proactive in using our technology to protect our network and our members' personal information. We have also created an infrastructure for members to easily learn about security and take action to protect themselves. We strive to be responsive to the issues and problems that our members bring to our attention. And we are fully committed to continuing to partner with our online industry colleagues to provide the safest possible online environment.