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Subject: Poll: Public Supports COPPA Rule Update



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Dec. 6, 2012

New Survey Reveals Strong Support for Updating Children's Online Privacy Protection Act

Majority express concerns about new marketing and data-collection practices such as behavioral profiling and mobile tracking

WASHINGTON, DC and SAN FRANCISCO – Two leading nonprofit groups, the Center for Digital Democracy and Common Sense Media, today released the results of a new survey on public attitudes about children’s online privacy. The study — conducted over a two-week period in November by Princeton Research Associates International (PSRAI) — polled more than 2,000 adults and found overwhelming support for the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA), the law that requires parental consent before websites can collect personal information from children under the age of 13. The findings revealed strong support not only for the basic principles of the law, but also for several key proposed changes in the rules that would address a range of online business practices — including mobile marketing and behavioral profiling — that have emerged since the COPPA took effect more than a decade ago. The Federal Trade Commission is expected to announce a number of updates to the COPPA regulations in the coming weeks.

The majority of respondents in the survey (90%) expressed support for COPPA’s basic requirement that online companies seeking to collect personal information from young children must first obtain permission from parents. In addition, the survey found significantly high levels of support for safeguards to protect children from many of the data collection and marketing practices that are frequently used to target them in today’s digital media environment.

Respondents expressed disapproval of a number of techniques increasingly employed by many child-directed websites — 80% of adults were opposed to allowing advertisers to collect and use information about a child’s activities online, even in cases where advertisers do not know the actual name and address of a child.

The survey also found that both parents and nonparents largely agree on many points:

- 91% of both parents and adults believe it is not okay for advertisers to collect information about a child’s location from that child’s mobile phone.

- 94% of parents and 91% of adults agree that advertisers should receive the parent’s permission before putting tracking software on a child’s computer. 96% of parents and 94% of adults expressed disapproval when asked if it is “okay OK for a website to ask children for personal information about their friends.”
 - 91% of parents said they strongly disagree with the idea, as did 86% of adults.

Congress passed COPPA in 1998 with bipartisan support. The law established a set of safeguards for website operators targeting children under 13, and ensured that parents would play the key decision-making role in determining whether and how their children’s personal information would be used in the online environment. The law was purposely designed to respond to changing technologies and business practices, and requires the Federal Trade Commission to conduct periodic reviews. A coalition of child advocacy, consumer, public health, and privacy groups has called on the FTC to update its COPPA rules to cover many of the techniques that marketers are using today, which include: collecting geolocation information from a child’s mobile phone; targeting children and their friends through social networks and interactive games; and employing cookies, plug-ins, and other software to track young peoples’ online behaviors. The FTC proposed changes to the rules last year, and has sought comments from a wide range of industry and public interest groups, but has yet to release its revised regulations.

“It is clear from these findings that the public supports strong action by the FTC to address the disturbing and widespread practices that threaten the privacy and safety of our nation’s children,” said Kathryn C. Montgomery, Ph.D, professor of communication at American University and one of the leaders of the campaign to pass COPPA during the 1990s. “Children should be able to reap the benefits of this new participatory media culture without being subjected to techniques that take advantage of their developmental vulnerabilities. We must ensure that the COPPA rules are updated effectively so that the generation of young people growing up online today will be treated fairly in the growing digital marketplace.”

“The results of this poll should be a wake-up call to the industry that parents understand what’s at stake for their kids in a digital world, and want the power to protect their children to remain in their hands,” said James P. Steyer, CEO and founder, Common Sense Media. “The industry argues that updates to COPPA will stifle innovation and cost jobs, when in fact, they should respect the role of parents and use it build consumer trust. The FTC’s recommended updates to COPPA represent the most important regulation of the past 10 years when it comes to protecting our kids’ privacy. They will help ensure that parents have better information and tools, and that parents -- not third-party ad networks and data brokers -- get to decide when their children’s personal information can -- and can’t -- be collected, shared, and sold.”

Additional information about the survey, including a summary of findings, full tables, and an infographic called "Big Data, Little Kids" is available at: <http://www.centerfordigitaldemocracy.org/new-survey-reveals-strong-support-updating-children%E2%80%99s-online-privacy-protection-act-coppa-majority-e>

About Center for Digital Democracy

The Center for Digital Democracy (CDD) is recognized as one of the leading consumer protection and privacy organizations in the United States. Since its founding in 2001 (and prior to that through its predecessor organization, the Center for Media Education), CDD has been at the forefront of research, public education, and advocacy on protecting consumers in the digital age. Its impact has been highly significant, fostering widespread debate, educating a spectrum of stakeholders, and creating a legacy of government and self-regulatory safeguards across a variety of Internet and digital media platforms. CDD’s public education programs are focused on informing consumers, policy makers, and the press about contemporary digital marketing issues, including its impact on public health, children and youth, and financial services. For more information, visit www.democraticmedia.org.

About Common Sense Media

Common Sense Media is dedicated to improving the lives of kids and families by providing the trustworthy information, education, and independent voice they need to thrive in a world of media and technology. We exist because our kids are growing up in a culture that profoundly impacts their physical, social, and emotional well-being. We provide families with the

advice and media reviews they need in order to make the best choices for their children. Through our education programs and policy efforts, Common Sense Media empowers parents, educators, and young people to become knowledgeable and responsible digital citizens. For more information, go to: www.commonsense.org.

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