

COPPA Cabana

**By Reg P. Wydeven
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A few weeks ago, I wrote about my dad's new iPod. He got comfortable with and mastered it pretty quickly, so he was ready to make the next technological leap: a smartphone.

We filled it with awesome apps, uploaded his tunes, downloaded some TV shows and set him up with a cool ringtone. We figured out how to take pictures and videos and send text messages. Of course, we were able to figure out all this stuff with the help of my kids.

I used to be up on all the technology, but I've fallen far behind. Thank goodness I had kids. When I was younger and got a Walkman or a Betamax VCR, they came with instruction manuals. Our iPod case came with the iPod and a power cord. That's it. My kids plugged it in and had it up and running in no time.

At a school open house, my son had his fingers flying over his classroom's iPad showing me all the math and reading games he loved to play. These games taught him multiplication tables that I didn't learn until I was three years older than he is.

On the computer, my daughter is able to whip up her school artwork account, which displays all of her masterpieces. She shows off her school page that has her projects uploaded. Things have come a long way since I used to load games onto the school's Apple IIe from a 5¼" floppy disk.

When my kids go back to school next month, they'll again be increasing their technological knowledge on computers and iPads. Thanks to new rules by the Federal Trade Commission, they will be safer when they're using these devices.

The FTC's new rules update the Children's Online Privacy Protection Act of 1998, which requires that website and online service operators acquire verifiable parental consent before they use, collect or disclose any personal information about children under the age of 13.

COPPA was passed in the year I graduated from law school. Back then, I was using dial-up Internet to access the AOL account I set up using a CD-Rom I got in the mail. Needless to say, there have been some technological advances in the last 14 years. Portable devices like iPods, iPads and smartphones weren't around back then, and neither were social media websites like Facebook or Twitter.

The new rules would expand COPPA to include mobile devices, like iPods, iPads and smartphones. The rules would also require websites and third-party data brokers, advertising networks and downloadable software kits (known as "plug-ins") to request parental consent before obtaining personal information from children. As it currently stands, COPPA does not apply to third parties, only website operators. The definition of "personally identifiable information" is also broadened under the new regulations to include IP addresses and cookies, which track data.

Current COPPA rules presume that all website visitors are under the age of 13. The new regulations would only require privacy protections for visitors who say they are under the age of 13 for sites geared toward adults and children. Sites that specifically attract children must continue to [presume](#) all visitors are under 13.

Mary Engle, associate director of advertising practices at the FTC, explained that, "We're trying to make sure that the COPPA rule protects children online and that the information they provide is keeping up with technology and kids' use of social media."

The FTC will solicit public comment on the proposed rules until September 10, and then make final recommendations by year end.

I'm just glad the FTC is looking out for my kids. When I was young, there was a lock on the plastic case that held our 5¼" floppy disks; somehow I don't think that's a strong enough parental control today.

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