

Bytes & PC's

Where do you not want to go?

Preserving the Sanctity of our Homes

By Yitzchok Adlerstein

Now that you've been using the Internet at home for years, are you getting more relaxed about its place in the family? You shouldn't be. The bad guys aren't. They are having a field day.

A recent experience of a *Jewish Action* reader will show you how. Turning to a familiar address of a very major Jewish site, he was somewhat shocked to find himself in the hands of a pornography purveyor! The site in question had changed its Internet domain name, and did not hold on to the old one, which tens of thousands of Jews had turned to for years. The old name was quickly

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seized by smut salesmen, eager to have their products come up on the screens of unsuspecting people who either went there out of force of habit, or were pointed there by other sites which still retained the old address.

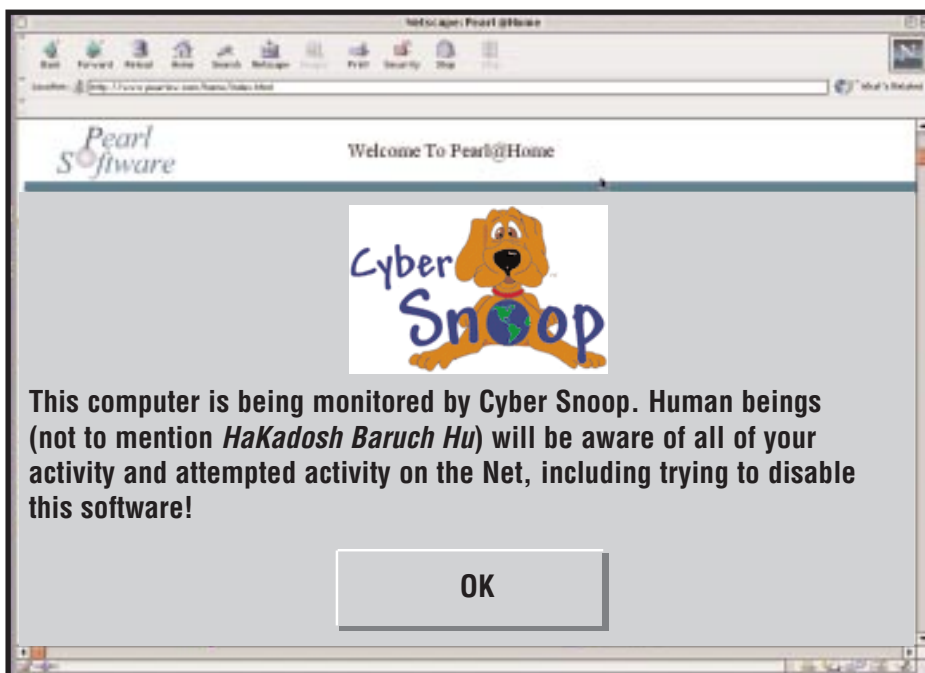
Irresponsible? Entirely. The Jewish site should have protected its clientele by preserving its title to the old name. The rest of us should be chastened by its sloppiness. Even the parent who insisted on the best safeguards for his or her children—sitting with them 100 percent of their online time—would have been mortified by the images that were substituted for the expected Magen David!

This practice of forcing old users to unexpected cyberturf is not an isolated one, and I have no solution for the problem. But it does underscore the need to take as much control as possible

of our Net environment. Cyber Snoop 4.0 (Windows; \$49; downloadable at http://www.pearlsw.com/home/cyber_snoop.html) offers a different and effective weapon in the ongoing struggle.

Cyber Snoop polices the Net through subtlety and stealth, rather than as a gatekeeper. What makes the Internet so tempting is its anonymity. Cyber Snoop destroys that anonymity—as long as there is someone in each home committed to regularly examining the meticulous trail it keeps. Cyber Snoop records the travels of every user on the Net: every chat room, every newsroom, and every email message. It lets all users know that someone will know where they have been, and what they have been looking at. In other words, it sees deterrence as the prevention worth far more than the cure.

The software makes it easy. It includes access to a basic “bad” list, which will mark in red any attempt to get to some of the more egregious sites. (The list is not particularly exhaustive or effective, but it is not the product's backbone.) As the administrator scans the list of places visited, he or she can check anything suspicious by simply clicking on the line, and the content will immediately appear. Did someone innocently stumble upon an objectionable site through no fault of his own? Cyber Snoop will show how long the user tarried at the location before moving on. The program can be tweaked to set different types and levels of surveillance for different users. A warning screen (which can be personalized to include threats of seven levels of *gehennim* or having to clean the cholent



pot after Shabbat) can intermittently remind the user that someone is snooping. And the teenager who tries to disable the product, or tamper with its record keeping will be in for a nasty surprise.

Finally we have an Internet safety product that is as good as the user's resolve to make it work. Those looking to make their family's Internet experience more wholesome should definitely give this product careful consideration.

Mum's No Longer the Word

All the news is not bad. There are products that make the Internet increasingly valuable. Which Jewish home doesn't appreciate the well-crafted sentence? Online reference works have made good writing easier. The tool most useful to users is the online dictionary. Some of them are light years ahead of the print editions which all of us still use. The advantage of the electronic kind is accessibility to multiple and specialized works with one search.

My favorite is *One Look Dictionaries*, a free service at <http://onelook.com/>. Here the power of over 700 dictionaries becomes available at every query. Of course, for most of what you will be looking up, you will not need to search so many works. However, looking up even common words will yield a rich assortment of reference works from which to choose.

When confronted with this choice, try out the *American Heritage Dictionary* (<http://www.bartleby.com/61>) for the Internet at its best. Here you will find a solution to one of the irritations of using online dictionaries. Each dictionary employs its own pronunciation legend, and you often have to laboriously toggle between slowly downloaded pages to compare the word you are interested in with the scheme which will help you figure out the correct pronunciation. *American Heritage* provides each entry with a small speaker icon. Click on it, and it will download a sound file which will literally read the word to you, removing all the guess work. If you don't get it right the first time, simply hit the play button again. You will run out of patience before it will. 