

Protecting the kids

Filtering systems ease parental worries as children navigate the Internet



Alex Kinsella

As a kid growing up in the 1980s, Christmas mornings always featured one major event. No, not eggnog. It was the frantic post-present-opening quest for “double A” batteries.

I have three daughters of my own now, and Christmas mornings haven’t changed all that much. We’ve traded batteries for the need to charge a toy first.

The one major change is a question that most parents have come to dread – “What’s our WiFi password?”

The age at which your child should have their own tablet or computer is a family decision. Technology permeates every facet of our lives as adults. It is only natural to want to set our children on a path of safe and responsible use of the Internet.

My children rarely use apps – spending most of their time on websites and YouTube.

There is a level of parental guilt when it comes to our children accessing the Internet.

We are aware there are places we don’t want them going. How do you manage restricting what sites they visit while also teaching them to self-direct? This need for managing children’s Internet usage is the spark behind two locally developed products.

LOCAL PRODUCTS

“When you want filtered water, you put the filter at the tap, not on the cup,” says Kris Braun, co-founder and chief technology officer of KidsWifi. “You should do the same with your Internet.”

KidsWifi is one of two Internet safety systems developed by local tech entrepreneurs.

Like most parents – myself included – Kris hadn’t gone into his Internet modem settings. These settings, which can be difficult to navigate, set the types of websites being blocked and what services were being restricted. “I’m a pretty typical example of a parent that KidsWifi would be right for,” says Braun.

The KidsWifi product consists of a small WiFi router that you connect to your existing wireless or wired network. You use a web-based application to quickly set up the KidsWifi network. You then connect the devices your children use to the KidsWifi network, which operates as a separate

network – allowing you to control the Internet on their devices without affecting the way you access the Internet.

Out of the box, KidsWifi filters adult content, gambling, identity trackers and ads. In addition, you can restrict Google and YouTube searches to age-appropriate content.

The KidsWifi web-based dashboard lets you see what sites or searches your children attempt. You can update the list of restricted sites or apps at any time.

KidsWifi is available for purchase at the company website (www.kidswifi.com) for \$99.

The other home Internet safety device developed locally is Kindera. Local entrepreneur Antoine Boucher was inspired by hearing his two children giggling under the table. He lifted the tablecloth and the giggles quickly stopped. “It wasn’t adult material,” says Boucher, “but it wasn’t something they should be seeing at their age.”

Kindera is built around three themes: knowing what your children do online; filtering sites before they visit; and modulating how much time they spend online. Using Kindera’s web-based dashboard, you can set what content is viewable based on a rating system. You can even assign ratings to each child in your house.

Thousands of new websites launch each

day, so filtering is important. Kindera receives regular updates of new sites to filter based on the ratings you’ve set.

Worried your children will sneak off with the iPad? Kindera also lets you create a schedule of when your children can access the Internet.

Kindera is available at the company website (www.kindera.com) for \$199, which includes a lifetime membership.

ONLINE SAFETY

Internet safety devices like these are just part of the solution. Providing your children with the knowledge of how to be safe online is key. “If there is one thing I would recommend, it is that kids should be in view,” says Cat Coode, founder of Binary Tattoo (www.binarytattoo.com) and a digital identity expert.

Coode teaches parents and children about proper digital citizenship. In her home, she teaches her children four points:

- Respect (yourself and others).
- Reflect: Think before you post. Would

you say it in public?

- Protect (your data): Don’t give away personal info.

- Project (a positive image).

“I always suggest a digital device contract for parents and kids to establish guidelines before a problem occurs,” recommends Coode. You can download a sample contract for free from the Binary Tattoo website.

IF I WERE SANTA...

... I would put a Sonos wireless speaker under the tree. I got my first Sonos Play:1 wireless speaker as part of a spending spree of soon-to-expire Aeroplan Miles last year. Sonos is one of those products where you really have to experience it to understand it.

Sonos is unlike your average wireless speaker in two main ways:

First, it connects via your WiFi instead of relying on a Bluetooth connection. You just add it to your network and that’s that.

Second, Sonos wireless speakers can operate without your phone, tablet or

computer. When you set up your Sonos system, you can add multiple music services directly to the speaker.

Sonos supports over 35 music services out of the box. These include free radio app Tunein Radio (www.tunein.com), Apple Music (www.apple.com/ca/music) and my personal favourite Spotify (www.spotify.com).

I recently added a second Play:1 speaker to our system. Our daughters can have the “Frozen” soundtrack upstairs. My wife and I can escape to the kitchen with an endless playlist of 1970s rock. Everyone is happy.

Sonos offers a number of models for the audiophile in your home. If you don’t currently have a home-audio system, there are the Play series wireless speakers. The Play:1 is the entry level model (\$249), followed by the Play:3 (\$379), and their top tier model, the Play:5 (\$649).

Here’s to a happy (and musical) holiday!

Alex Kinsella has been part of Waterloo Region’s tech community since 2004 and is always looking for the next great gadget (or tacos, if it’s Tuesday). Find him on Twitter at @alexkinsella

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