

Nik Rawlinson is tired of **being the babysitter** for unsupervised children on the Internet.

The high price of vigilance



I don't browse the Internet to find porn. I'm bracing myself for countless emails along the lines of: 'methinks the gentleman doth protest too much', but that's my story and I'm sticking with it. If I did, though, I can't help thinking

that I would soon become angry at the attitudes of those parents who give their children free rein to roam the online world unsupervised.

Why? Simple: how many times have you found yourself following a link you've quite innocently turned up on some portal search or other, only to be stopped in your tracks by a message telling you that the site is protected? To stop unsupervised minors seeing something mummy or daddy won't like, it'll cost you upwards of 10 quid to go any further.

Some people would say that's a good thing. It saves you from a cache full of extraneous body parts – especially if you're accessing the site from work, with a systems department that keeps a close eye on the

happens to the money you pay for your Adult Check membership? If they visited its homepage at www.adultcheck.com they would see that hosts implementing the system get a financial kickback for every visitor their site manages to attract, so there is now a very real incentive to get your kit off and post your personal bedroom snaps, in glorious 32bit TrueColour, on your own free web space.

In unleashing their kids on an unsuspecting Internet, some parents have unwittingly done more than the American publisher Larry Flint ever did to make skin available to all. As civil rights activist Tony Smythe once said (quoted in *The Observer* and subsequently the Encarta Encyclopedia), 'Censorship is more depraving and corrupting than anything pornography can produce'.

I only hope that those parents who leave their kids unsupervised don't treat their wallets in the same way. To get yourself an Adult Check membership – or any other Internet service for that matter – you have to send your credit card details, and it's going to be easy enough for Nigel to copy this off mum's cards or even just a statement. There's a further implication here, too: anyone joining an identity verification service is effectively adding their name to a register of Internet users who want to see 'adult content'.

Why is it that irresponsible parents expect other netizens worldwide to pay to look after their children? They should

realise that the Internet is now becoming more than just an information resource. We used to liken it to a library but now, as thousands of new members join every day, it is fast becoming a global city on a scale we have never seen before. Would they let their child wander unsupervised around Glasgow, London or Newcastle – real cities – and expect you to look after him if, by chance, he came across some strip club or politically offensive rally he should not see? I think not. Then what is it that makes them believe you should do it online?

And as anyone who has used the Internet for any length of time knows, the real porn and bomb making instructions won't be found on any website. They are in the newsgroups and thankfully, for the time being at least, the burden of cost when it comes to censoring them falls entirely in the direction of the parents.

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material that passes through its servers. But that's simply missing the point, which is that you end up paying to access certain parts of the Internet, just so young Nigel next door doesn't get an eye full. And this is all because his parents are too lazy to watch over his online activities.

Following this logic, perhaps you should also pay for a baby sitter so that mum and dad can enjoy a night out, without having to worry about what he's getting up to. Have you also thought of offering to pay for higher shelves to be erected at the local corner shop, so that he can't reach the unsuitable magazines which he's not yet ready to read?

The parents may try and argue that it is your fault. If you actively go looking for pornography you are creating a market for it. You risk contaminating Nigel's impressionable mind and should have to pay, financially, the consequences. But what do they think

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