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# Teens and Surveillance: Is Privacy a Problem?

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# Teens and Surveillance: Is Privacy a Problem?

Posted on **December 1, 2005** by **Editor**



By **Pat McGregor** <pat@hayseed.net>

For the last year or so, I've been focused on starting an after-school venue and dance club for teens ranging from 9th graders to those in Community College –roughly for ages 13 or 14 to 20. There are lots of places that 21+ kids can go to socialize, dance, and hang out the city down the hill from where I live. But not many at all for the High School and Community College crowd up here in the Sierra Foothills in Northern California. There are a few coffee houses, some restaurants, and a bunch of semi-sheltered plazas where they hang out to smoke, talk, and (frequently) sell and do drugs.

I wanted (and still want) to change that; an after school venue with an Internet Café and a video arcade, plus cozy places to sit and talk out of the weather is highly desirable, according to the 400 teens I've surveyed (about 23% of the target audience). Their parents think so, too.

What does this have to do with privacy and security? Lots. Parents want their kids safe. Kids want a place that they can talk and hang out without parents or monitors looking over their shoulders all the time. I want my Internet-connected networks to stay free of viruses, Trojans, and other malware, and similarly don't want it used as a launching point for script kiddies or from other, more malevolent computer attacks. And neither I nor the local authorities want the place to turn into a drug haven. We want the dance floor to be fun and not dangerous, with proactive and reactive security, and inconspicuous monitoring to help with that goal.

So, my advisory team of teens (a very hardworking and clever bunch of young men and women) suggested Closed Circuit TV. They wanted it for the reasons mentioned above, but they also wanted it for another reason: to have fun with it.

With TV screens mounted where the CCTV images can be seen in all the general (non dance) floors, and rotating images, the kids know that if they see something fun going on in another part

of the club, chances are good that kids will flock to see what's going on. If there's great dancing going on, kids will go out to dance. If an exciting LAN game is rolling in the Internet room, gamers will go to watch. If somebody has been on the Dance Dance Revolution (DDR) pads for 45 minutes and still hasn't missed a step, she'll get an audience crowded around her in the arcade. And a couple snogging on the terrace will get unmercifully teased – a form of peer behavior control.

These are all great ideas. It lets me have the kind of security monitoring I want, with the encouragement of the teens. What could be better than the willing participation of your customers? And with a digital video system, we can store the data on a hard drive, digitally sign it and back it up in case we need it for some legal reasons.

And there are precedents: a company called DriveCam already sells systems to trucking companies and other businesses because of the positive effect on their driving practices. According to a story on NPR [1], parents are interested in the idea to provoke the same improvement in teenaged drivers. However, there is no mention of privacy rights for the teens or appropriate use of the imagery. One fleet manager whose trucking firm uses the system mentions being able to send a video image of the accident to the insurance companies.

So I got to thinking (always a bad move). Some of the 9th graders we were targeting are 13. Some of the middle school kids who will undoubtedly come in for the arcades will definitely be younger. Are there rules about capturing and storing images of kids under 13 or 14? We certainly couldn't use any of the images in commercials or webcasts. Did we need to get parental permission?

### **The abyss looms**

Over the past quarter I've been trying to find concrete info on privacy requirements for monitoring customers, in general, and minors in particular. Since the CCTV systems are located in a business, rather than on public property, the information on how these uses are regulated is pretty thin. Even in papers concerning CCTV use in the UK and other European countries where CCTV has been in use for decades, the discussion of minors generally discusses their propensity for crime rather than their right to privacy. There is discussion of a general issue or expectation of privacy (which is apparently non-existent in public places), but no specific discussion of unaccompanied minors that I have been able to find.

And, apparently, the trend toward the use of surveillance for safety, protection, and general monitoring by individuals has been rising since 2003. In a review in *Future Pundits*, ([http://www.futurepundit.com/archives/cat\\_surveillance\\_society.html](http://www.futurepundit.com/archives/cat_surveillance_society.html), August 2003), Randall Parker quotes an article in MIT's *Technology Review*.

It's not all about Big Brother or Big Business, either. Widespread electronic scrutiny is usually denounced as a creation of political tyranny or corporate greed. But the rise of omnipresent

surveillance will be driven as much by ordinary citizens' understandable—even laudatory—desires for security, control, and comfort as by the imperatives of business and government. “Nanny cams,” global-positioning locators, police and home security networks, traffic jam monitors, medical-device radio-frequency tags, small-business webcams: the list of monitoring devices employed by and for average Americans is already long, and it will only become longer. Extensive surveillance, in short, is coming into being because people like and want it.

He goes on to discuss [2] the sharing of video surveillance among neighbors to watch houses where no one is at home, or to monitor the behavior of children, particularly teens, or the already widespread use of “grannycams.” (web cams set up so that adult children can keep an eye on elderly relatives or friends).

Research in Europe, where the use of video surveillance is highest, talks a great deal about the reduction of crime, the shaping of society when a population knows it's under observation, and other really interesting topics. But nothing on the privacy rights for minors.

And then we thought about kiddie porn. Could video surveillance records of a teen in a duct tape flippy skirt and a Lurex™ crop top that was bouncing up a little too high while she danced be construed as child pornography? Or the record of a couple who started to get a little too involved out on the patio?

The team and I began to wonder if there was any safe path here.

This week, I discovered an article by Lynsey Dubbeld, entitled “People Watching People,” and one of the things that she explores is how video surveillance affects the social shape of the space being observed. After her general discussion, and before she goes into the details of her case studies, she takes us back to the basic principles of privacy protection, and how they affect both the ethics of information collection and its retention.

... three types of principles appear (although often in different wordings) in several international agreements, national laws, and organisational guidelines and codes of practice. To sum up: after the general permissibility of data processing has been assessed, criteria for adequate uses of information are at stake, which consist of mechanisms for ensuring data quality as well as for protecting data subjects' rights. [3]

With that reminder, we had A Clue, which gave us a solid starting point. Although we couldn't find much to guide us as we developed our policies, we knew that going back to the basics would ensure that we would at least be rooted in the granite of regulation and best practice. And, if we treated our data and protected our clients' data stringently, we would have fewer worries later on.

We also knew that schools, daycares, and other programs for children required that parents sign permission slips if they would allow images of their children to be used in flyers, commercials,

other forms of PR, and even to take pictures and put them on the bulletin board.

Many jurisdictions require prominent signage to inform people that they are under observation. We couldn't track down some of the rules for private businesses (such as the grocery store, where the cameras think they are hiding behind those shiny black domes), but we assumed that placing signage was better than not. And, look what fun we could have figuring out how to word the signs to be entertaining to teens!

And, the data needed to be protected from tampering in case we ever needed it for legal purposes.

### **And so, our policies**

With only a little guidance from me (concerning data backup and integrity), here is what my teen advisory group came up with.

- We would post big signs where people enter the building warning them of the CCTV. There would be additional signs in all the rooms (mentioning the rotating coverage on the TV screens). (Advance notice)
- While our security staff would watch the imagery to keep track of behavior in the club, there would be no review of the imagery except perhaps for training purposes. No facial recognition or other biometric identification methods used to filter the data unless there was a legal reason to do so. (Appropriate use and restricted access.)
- There would be no projection of any digital imagery outside of the club. Strong protection would be installed to prevent leakage of the data to our external-facing network or Internet Café. (Appropriate use, protection of our underage clients from exposure on the Internet, protection for us against charges of displaying child porn.)
- If we *were* taking footage or stills to be used in advertising or streaming to the Internet, larger signs would be placed at least 3 days in advance warning the patrons, and they would be reminded when they entered the club. If they didn't want to be photographed, they would need to leave. (Fair notice of data collection, and opt-in.)
- As we had concerns about customers under 14 using our Internet Café anyway, we decided that we would include notice of video monitoring as one of the items included in our required parental permission process for Middle School students. (Compliance with the spirit of COPA, and notification to parents of underage children.)
- Imagery would be directly transferred to a write-only CD, which would be digitally signed and backed up daily, and removed from the premises at least once a week. (Integrity and non-repudiation)
- We don't have a good strong feeling for data retention. The tapes from the school bus surveillance are apparently kept for 90 days, the same as many credit card records are kept by the merchants.

We know that if we actually get the club open, these policies will need to be reviewed with our

lawyers, the police and sheriff, our parent advisory group, and presented to the Chamber of Commerce.

### Homework required

Clearly, if there is a gap in this area, the public policy pundits need to assess whether there is enough need to merit an effort to fill it. If, as has been predicted by many that there will soon be one public camera for every 3 or 4 people in the EU, and many more public CCTV systems (with facial recognition systems) in the US, it may become clear that surveillance of children needs to be regulated.

Surveillance of teens potentially has a price. Sonia Livingston, London School of Economics, is a specialist in Social Psychology, and focuses on children and media, including the Internet and other communication media. In a 2003 interview with the BBC, Dr. Livingstone cautioned against parents hovering over their children while the children were on the Internet. Research suggests parents need to be careful in balancing supervision with respect for their children's privacy. "Children value privacy and liken over-monitoring by parents to having their pockets searched," she said in a recent BBC interview. [4] Most of the children I know, when they feel their privacy is being violated, simply move their activities out of sight and discovery by their parents.

This is borne out by anecdotal and qualitative data regarding decreasing crime rates in England after the 2001 Government grants to enable most if not all villages to install CCTV systems in their public areas. According to police and local borough politicians, crime hasn't decreased, but rather has moved to other, less monitored, places.

Let's go back to that DriveCam product, which may some day soon show up in family cars to monitor teens' driving habits. DriveCam's customers report improved driving habits and fewer accidents when the product is installed in trucking fleets. Teens may well react similarly, by improving their driving habits because they know someone is watching. But would there be a public policy problem?

My suspicion is that as the teens monitored would be using systems owned by the driving school or their parents, their privacy rights wouldn't come up. However, some careful policy setting and consideration should happen now. What happens when that tape is given to the insurance company to prove fault in an accident? The best practice or industry standard procedure for that kind of event hasn't been established. If we develop policies now, the consequent test cases and regulatory action would benefit the community *and* the teenagers when the levels of surveillance increase. With the prospect of future Patriot Acts and similar laws to come, it would be a good idea to have precedent already established to protect the civil rights of our children before those laws are enacted. That'd help us meet our goal: fun and yet not dangerous!

[1] Boyce, Nell. "In-Car Cameras Keep Tabs on Teen Drivers" *All Things Considered*, March 2, 2005. <http://www.npr.org/templates/story/story.php?storyId=4520099>

[2] Parker, Randall. "People Are Rushing To Embrace The Surveillance Society," FuturePundit.com, 21 March 2003.[http://www.futurepundit.com/archives/cat\\_surveillance\\_society.html](http://www.futurepundit.com/archives/cat_surveillance_society.html)

[3] Dubbeld, Lynsey. 'People Watching People' (ed. Wood), Surveillance & Society 2(4): 546-563. 2005.  
<http://www.surveillance-and-society.org>

[4] "Parents 'confident' in Net safety." BBC News Online, 16 November 2003. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/technology/3271361.stm> . Dr. Livingstone's bio is available at <http://www.lse.ac.uk/collections/media@lse/whosWho/soniaLivingstone.htm>.

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23 THOUGHTS ON "TEENS AND SURVEILLANCE: IS PRIVACY A PROBLEM?"

**hostgator coupon 50**

on **January 29, 2014 at 11:11 PM** said:

You cannot expect a top quality service for free so I would always recommend going for one of the top companies like Bluehost, Host - Gator etc. Flooding the web template with different images, colors or fonts will not help make your site appealing. Today, there are several various types of web hosting available for different consumer needs and requirements.

**Herbal highs**

on **January 30, 2014 at 3:52 AM** said:

We're a bunch of volunteers and opening a brand new scheme in our community. Your site provided us with valuable info to work on. You've done a formidable process and our entire neighborhood will probably be grateful to you.

**best inversion table**

on **January 30, 2014 at 6:39 PM** said:



Excellent post. I used to be checking continuously this blog and I'm inspired! Very useful information specially the closing section 😊 I deal with such info a lot. I was looking for this certain information for a very lengthy time. Thank you and best of luck.

**satellite direct**

on **February 3, 2014 at 4:12 PM** said:

First of all you will have to get a good internet connection that is able to stream live video without any buffering.

If you are fun of sky games get yourself t software today.

Such devices have intelligent message routing capabilities to switch between cellular and satellite networks seamlessly, operating on cellular networks whenever possible and switching over to satellites when cellular coverage goes off.

**best jig saw**

on **February 3, 2014 at 9:41 PM** said:

Hey there! I've been following your web site for some time now and finally got the courage to go ahead and give you a shout out from Houston Texas! Just wanted to mention keep up the good work!

**induction cooktop reviews**

on **February 3, 2014 at 10:16 PM** said:

Hi my loved one! I wish to say that this article is amazing, great written and include approximately all vital infos.

I would like to look extra posts like this .

**best rifle scope**

on **February 3, 2014 at 11:09 PM** said:

Hello, i think that i saw you visited my website so  
i came to "return the favor".I'm attempting to find things to improve my web site!!  
suppose  
its ok to use a few of your ideas!!

**best electric kettle**

on **February 3, 2014 at 11:10 PM** said:

Hurrah, that's what I was looking for, what a information!  
present here at this webpage, thanks admin of this site.

**best vacuum sealer**

on **February 3, 2014 at 11:47 PM** said:

hey there and thank you for your information – I've certainly picked up anything new  
from right here.

I did however expertise a few technical points using  
this site, since I experienced to reload  
the site many times previous to I could get it to  
load properly. I had been wondering if your hosting is OK?  
Not that I am complaining, but sluggish loading instances times will often affect your  
placement  
in google and can damage your high-quality score if ads and marketing with Adwords.  
Anyway I'm adding this RSS to my email and can look out for much more of your  
respective interesting content.  
Make sure you update this again very soon.

**scroll saw reviews**

on **February 4, 2014 at 12:58 AM** said:

Good article! We are linking to this great article on our site.  
Keep up the great writing.

**espresso machine reviews**

on **February 4, 2014 at 1:11 AM** said:

It's an awesome article in support of all the internet visitors; they will take advantage from it I am sure.

**best vacuum for hardwood floors**

on **February 4, 2014 at 1:29 AM** said:

I was suggested this website via my cousin. I am not sure whether or not this put up is written through him as no one else realize such particular approximately my trouble.  
You're amazing! Thank you!

**best home gym**

on **February 4, 2014 at 2:25 AM** said:

Do you have any video of that? I'd care to find out more details.

**clothes steamer reviews**

on **February 4, 2014 at 5:02 AM** said:

Woah! I'm really enjoying the template/theme of this website.  
It's simple, yet effective. A lot of times it's very difficult to get that "perfect balance" between usability and visual appearance.  
I must say that you've done a amazing job with this.  
Also, the blog loads very fast for me on Internet explorer.  
Exceptional Blog!

**garbage disposal reviews**

on **February 4, 2014 at 5:15 AM** said:

Hmm it seems like your site ate my first comment (it was extremely long) so I guess I'll just sum it up what I submitted and say, I'm thoroughly enjoying your blog.

I too am an aspiring blog blogger but I'm still new to the whole thing.

Do you have any suggestions for newbie blog writers?

I'd genuinely appreciate it.

**africa**

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:17 AM** said:

After verify some of the blog content articles on your internet site now, and I extremely like your methods of blogging. I bookmarked it to my bookmark web site list and might be checking back soon. Pls try my web site as well and enable me know what you think.

**nigeria entertainment news**

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:28 AM** said:

This really answered my drawback, thank you!

**nigeria entertainment news**

on **February 4, 2014 at 10:36 AM** said:

your attendees and take pictures.

**best robotic pool cleaner**

on **February 4, 2014 at 4:56 PM** said:

It's an amazing post in favor of all the internet users; they will obtain benefit from it I am sure.

**best crossfit shoes**

on **February 4, 2014 at 6:11 PM** said:

I was suggested this web site by my cousin.  
I am not sure whether this post is written by him as nobody else know such detailed about my trouble. You're incredible!  
Thanks!

**best table saw**

on **February 4, 2014 at 8:11 PM** said:

I absolutely love your blog and find nearly all of your post's to be exactly what I'm looking for. Would you offer guest writers to write content for you?  
I wouldn't mind writing a post or elaborating on most of the subjects you write related to here. Again, awesome web site!

**recumbent exercise bike reviews**

on **February 5, 2014 at 3:20 AM** said:

Saved as a favorite, I love your site!

**cork board ideas**

on **February 5, 2014 at 2:45 PM** said:

Pretty! This was an incredibly wonderful post. Thanks for providing this information.