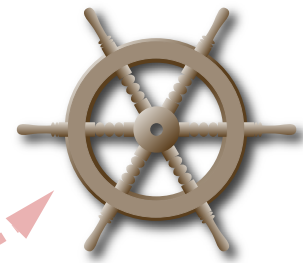


Charting Your Course FOR PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT



Raising a Generation of Data Defenders

by MediaSmarts

How can you help pre-teens understand the value of their personal information and empower them to take steps to manage and protect it? *Data Defenders* (<http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/educational-games/data-defenders-grades-4-6>), an educational game for children ages 10 to 12, lifts the curtain on data collection by showing how apps and games can find out all kinds of things about them and by providing steps they can take to control the collection of personal information online.

MediaSmarts' research has found that the majority of Canadian kids do not understand the bargain they are entering into when they use online services and apps: almost half of Grade 5 students agree with the statement "companies are not interested in what I say and do online" and more than three-quarters believe that "if a website has a privacy policy, it will not share my personal information with others." Even among teens, there is little understanding of how the services they use depend on personal information as a main source of revenue.

That's not to say that youth don't *care* about privacy: our research has shown that they want to have more active control over their personal information. Almost three-quarters of Grade 5 students say that "I would like more control over what companies do with the photos and information I post online," and almost all feel that marketing companies should not be allowed to view material they post on social networks.

Nationwide consultations by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC) have found the economics of personal information to be one of Canadians' biggest privacy concerns. Children's participation is a particular area of concern for the OPC because of questions surrounding whether or not kids are genuinely able to provide informed consent to the exchange of their personal information for the online services they use.

But the fact is that by age ten most Canadian children are active participants in the information economy. As soon as children start using the Internet, they are buying online services with their personal information, a commodity that is in high demand. In fact, apps and websites aimed at children collect more data than those aimed at adults.

Data Defenders helps pre-teens better understand this exchange of personal information for online services while providing them with tools and know-how to manage and protect it. Given the popularity of online games with pre-teens, *Data Defenders* looks and plays very much like popular matching games such as Candy Crush, making it fun, familiar and easy to use. In fact, young players may not realize they're learning anything at all, until the end of the first round when the friendly computer that has been helping them reveals itself as an Ad Broker who has been collecting their personal information and costing them privacy points. Luckily, players are given a second chance to replay the game – this time with opportunities to earn privacy points through quizzes that introduce skills and knowledge that children can apply to protect their privacy both within the game and in real life.

While *Data Defenders* can be played on its own, the best way to encourage the transfer of the skills learned in the game to actual online experiences is for an adult to be present to help young players make those connections. To support teachers and parents in doing this, we have developed guides (<http://mediasmarts.ca/digital-media-literacy/educational-games/data-defenders-grades-4-6#guides>) and a lesson plan (<http://mediasmarts.ca/teacher-resources/data-defenders-understanding-data-collection-online>) to accompany the game.

Of course, it's not just kids who need to learn a bit more about how the "free" services we use online turn our personal information into money. A lot of us probably need to polish our skills on how to manage and protect our personal info, so why not test yourself, and see if you can keep the Ad Broker from finding out what you do online?

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