

GOOD OR BAD? FIRM HELPS WEB SURFERS HIDE THEIR TRACKS

A Montreal firm has developed software that allows browsers to move around the Web without leaving an electronic trail that could reveal their identity & invite solicitations – or reprisals for unwelcome comments to chat rooms etc. “Freedom” from Zero Knowledge Systems encrypts & reroutes data packets to privatize online activities, including Web, e-mail, chat, newsgroup & other Net applications.

- The goal is to empower users to manage their privacy & personal information in the digital realm.

“Our customers will control their identities & the amount of information that is created, collected & profiled about those identities,” says the ZKS website. “Our solution is to create authenticated digital pseudonyms that bear no necessary relation to the actual person behind them. This allows our users total freedom to express ideas, communicate & live in cyberspace.”

CIVIL RIGHTS FOR THE 21ST CENTURY

National Journal, one woman who discussed her breast cancer in her chatroom, received promotional material from a funeral home a few days later. “In the real world, no one can monitor which stores a consumer might wander through during a visit to a mall. But, on the Web, consumers carry with them identifying information that lets firms like DoubleClick Inc. track Web-surfing habits,” it reports. Some e-commerce firms are noting where consumers have been on the Web & tailoring their marketing message to suit.

Cyberspying is becoming a thorny issue. According to Canada’s

With “Privacy” putting an end to e-world snooping, and other software automatically erasing web ads, maybe the cyberworld will be far different than many companies are betting on.

“Privacy to the 21st century will be what civil rights was to this century,” says ZKS pres Austin Hill. “I have no problem with Amazon.com knowing who I am. They ship physical goods to me; I assume they’re going to know who I am. What I do have a problem with is I don’t want Amazon to know that I was just hanging out in a newsgroup talking about a health issue.... I do have a problem with the fact that any number of advertising & profiling companies are watching a number of my sites.”

ONE POTENTIAL BARRIER

The problem with the privacy device is that it has been introduced when debate is raging about internet porn & its availability to kids. Freedom could protect predators, some think. But ZKS, which has met with FBI, US Dep’t of Justice and Canadian regulators, says it contains a digital authentication system that helps people prove their real identities.

Freedom comes at a price: \$49.95. ZKS calls Freedom it’s first privacy tool, so there are more to come.

WHO’S WHO IN PUBLIC RELATIONS

HONORS. Marilyn Hawkins (Hawkins & Co., Seattle), named PR Professional of the Year by Puget Sound chapter of PRSA. Award is given

to an individual who has contributed significantly to both the profession & the local community.

WHEN IN DOUBT, GO TO THE VISION/MISSION STATEMENT: BEN & JERRY’S STANDS BY THEIRS DURING DIOXIN FLAP

Last Nov., science activists released the news that a tested sample of Ben & Jerry’s World’s Best Vanilla Ice Cream contained measurable levels of dioxin. They pointed to the hypocrisy of this from a company with such an out-front anti-dioxin position & strong public stance on other enviro issues.

- For a company less trusted & open with their stakeholders than B&J, this might have been front-page news for weeks. For B&J, the issue was short-lived & media stories balanced – proving once again the value of a) corporate reputation & b) a focused & consistent response

B&J’S RESPONSE

“To know how to respond, we had to look no further than our mission statement, says mpr Chrystie Heimert (see sidebar).

“The section on our social commitment talks about finding innovative ways to improve quality of life. We firmly believe you have to make an impact on the environment in whatever way you can – thus, our very public stance on dioxin & other environmental issues.”

Behavioral proof B&J’s walks the talk: their conversion to unbleached packaging paper last year. “It’s one small step in our efforts to eliminate dioxins from the global environment.”

- When asked by consumers & the press about dioxin levels in their ice cream, B&J’s “One Clear Voice” response is:

“According to experts, there’s no food group that’s safe from the harmful effects of chemicals like dioxin, which make their way into the food chain through industrial emissions into our air, soil and water. While Ben & Jerry’s may not directly control these dioxin emissions, we do know that a reduced reliance on chlorine as a bleaching agent will lead to a reduction in dioxin releases from paper mills to our water ways. That’s why we’re taking steps as a small Vermont company to make an impact where we can by converting our pint packaging to unbleached paperboard. We encourage consumers to check with the Environmental Protection Agency & Greenpeace for the facts on dioxin”

HANDLING COPYCAT PRESS

The Junkscience story was picked up by the Detroit Free Press which led with an angle on the silliness of EPA standards for dioxin levels. “We refused to get dragged into that debate. We’re not the experts on dioxin; we just concentrate on making an impact where we can,” says Heimert. B&J’s standard response:

- removes them from the debate on dioxin levels – they’re not the experts, the EPA & Greenpeace are
- bridges to their mantra – they’re one small company doing their part



BEN & JERRY'S STATEMENT OF MISSION

Ben & Jerry's is dedicated to the creation & demonstration of a new corporate concept of linked prosperity. Our mission consists of three interrelated parts.

Underlying the mission is the determination to seek new & creative ways of addressing all three parts, while holding a deep respect for individuals inside & outside the company, and for the communities of which they are a part.

Product: To make, distribute & sell the finest quality all-natural ice cream & related products in a wide variety of innovative flavors made from Vermont dairy products.

Economic: To operate the Company on a sound financial basis of profitable growth, increasing value for our shareholders, and creating career opportunities & financial rewards for our employees.

Social: To operate the Company in a way that actively recognizes the central role that business plays in the structure of society by initiating innovative ways to improve the quality of life of a broad community – local, national, and international.

WEBSITE KEY IN COMMUNICATION WITH STAKEHOLDERS

"We did get some questions from customers (or "fans" as we call them). We have a big web readership & dealt with much of our response that way," explains Heimert. The company:

1. **Posted the response on the dioxin issue on their website**
2. **Addressed the issue in their FAQ (frequently-asked questions) section**
3. **Linked the release, on junkscience.com, to the B&J position paper** posted on the web. "We were familiar with Junkscience and applaud their process. We worked well with them"
4. **Posted letters from reputable third party advocates** like Physicians for Social Responsibility & American Council on Science and Health, confirming B&J's ice cream is safe to eat
5. **Directs consumers to check Greenpeace, Physicians for Social Responsibility & other websites** for the facts on dioxin

RESULTS GOING FORWARD

Since the initial release, interest in this issue has died. Or perhaps consumers are on to another more salient issue – whether or not B&J will sell out to a multinational corporation, as rumored last fall.

IF THE INTERNET IS THE MEDIUM DU JOUR, WHAT WILL BECOME OF MAGAZINES? EDITORS & EXPERTS OFFER THOUGHTS

Despite the popularity of on-line news & information services, as well as chatrooms & message boards where on-liners can gather around shared interests & ideas, magazines continue to proliferate.

- According to "Mr. Magazine" Samir Husni (U Miss), in 1985, there were 2200-2300 magazines available to the general public (i.e., "consumer mags"). Now there are about 6,000. "Let's put it this way," he told prr. **"Magazines will always be with us in some form or another."** Husni, who tracks the industry & publishes updates, says that in the cyber era, magazines provide an invaluable link between the electronic media and the consumer. "Readers don't have the time (to be spelunking on-line)." The Internet & magazines are linked because consumers still need to be guided, still need a digest of information.

Folio magazine recently did a round up of what editors & publishers have to say on the question:

- "I'm not worried about the future of magazines," says John Brandt, ed of *Industry Week*. "I can receive a magazine without knowing how to type. And print publications still have **the most convenient distribution system** available: once a month (or whatever) they simply arrive." Also, mags have content selected by editors who know how to weed away what does not matter.
- Dom Rossi, pub vp, *Readers Digest*: selling methods must change in this "priceline.com" era. **Target appeals & build relationships** with readers. "Winners will step beyond lavish entertainment, quick response & creative advertising. They will distinguish the value of a magazine based on audience involvement, not audience size. They will give advertisers a pre-emptive vision of their own threats & advantages, and a solution that builds sustainable relationships with consumers."
- Nothing about purpose has changed, notes Daniel McCarthy, CEO of Primedia Special Interest Publications. "Copies of *Ladies Home Journal* (from the turn of the century) and copies of LHM now have a tremendous cosmetic difference, but share the same essence: They each exist to make women's lives more effective, easier & satisfying." **The fundamental value of magazines remains the same, no matter the era.** But smart pubs will take advantage of tech opportunities to continue to keep them at the center of the media experience. **"Magazines have the highest utility as a guide, a bridge, or a filter to myriad info sources."**
- **"Getting personal will be the new hot thing in 2025, not getting plugged in,"** says *Family Circle* ed Susan Ungaro. Despite tech advances, people will always favor the tactile, touchy-feely nature of magazines, with their inspiring, pretty & provocative stories.
- **Mags will go digital, fantastic opportunity but daunting,** says Scholastic Inc. exec vp Hugh Roome. "Most significant is the prospect of e-commerce for specialized magazines. If you have a solid brand name in a category, you can send your readers to your specialty store." Opportunities abound. "Yes we all missed the opportunity to be AOL, Yahoo! or Amazon, but we lived to fight another day."
- The Internet will change the look, role & business model of magazines, according to Don Pazour, pres, Miller Freeman, Inc. "Magazine editors will continue to bring order to chaos thru analysis & synthesis," a task made more difficult by Internet info overload. But, "those magazines that take the approach of Web-enabling their publications will be true winners." And savvy target marketing & brand-building messages will be part of the mix.

Husni says the Internet doesn't evoke the same sense of trust that printed magazines do. "You don't really know where the information is coming from." And established names like *Scientific American* don't fully satisfy on-line readers. "They whet the appetite." People read bits & want more. Smart publishers, he says, will make both products work for them.