



# THINK PRIVACY

## Monthly Privacy Advice from the NYS Consumer Protection Board

### ***Advice for Parents of the E-Generation***

Parents or caregivers should be aware of the next generation of electronic tools that can be purchased and added to their children's cell phone and online social networking pages. Sniff and Loopt are two examples of competing applications, sold through partnerships with cellular phone companies that can be found on social networking sites, such as My Space and Facebook. They are designed to inform the user in real-time where his/her friends are located and what they are doing. Loopt "helps friends connect on the fly and navigate their social lives by orienting them to people, places and events." Sniff's catchphrase is never ask "where r u again."

At first blush, these services bring to mind the completion of Orwell's vision, but they are perfectly legal, and are simply part of a growing (and one might say alarming) trend with young people to stay constantly "connected." There is a loss of privacy resulting from this constant connection and parents or caregivers need to understand and educate their children on the implications of using these services.

Parents or caregivers can examine the levels of privacy protections provided by these types of services by checking whether they offer the following elements: permission, choice, access control, frequent privacy reminders, and strong data security. One may also review the privacy and security policies found on a company's website. If the company is affording the elements outlined above, then it is likely that the company is concerned about a user's privacy. However, one should still remain vigilant and regularly review the product's privacy controls and update settings, where applicable.

Fortunately, both of these companies seem to be actively addressing privacy concerns. Loopt informs its users that it "was designed with user privacy at its core and offers a variety of effective and intuitive privacy controls." While Sniff offers, "sniff your friends...but get permission first!" Both applications emphasize the importance of privacy and security by incorporating strident controls, such as permission, choice and access control.

Parents or caregivers should also speak with their children about the use and terms of these programs before purchase, and what it might mean to their own privacy. But, then again, adults might want to use it, to know *where* their children are. If that is the case, perhaps teenagers will then learn a valuable lesson about the value of their own privacy.