

Web ad group launches privacy education campaign

The Associated Press

A group of leading Internet publishers and digital marketing services is launching an online campaign to educate consumers about how they are tracked and targeted for pitches on the Web.

The Internet Advertising Bureau, based on New York, on Thursday unveiled its "Privacy Matters" Web site. The site explains how Internet marketers track where people go and what they do online and then mine that data to serve up targeted ads. The practice, known as behavioral advertising, has raised concerns among privacy watchdogs and lawmakers in Congress.

A number of IAB members plan to run banner spots on their Web pages linking back to the Privacy Matters site. Those include Internet-only players such as Yahoo Inc. and Google Inc. and traditional media outlets such as Walt Disney Co. and The New York Times Co.

The goal of the program, explained IAB Senior Vice President David Doty, is to describe "in plain English" how online advertising works. Among other things, the Privacy Matters Web site offers explanations of demographic targeting, interest group targeting and data-tracking files known as cookies.

The new campaign is part of a broader self-regulatory push by the Interactive Advertising Bureau and other advertising trade groups that want to head off federal regulation.

Rep. Rick Boucher, D-Va., chairman of the House Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Communications, Technology and the Internet, is currently leading an effort to draft a bill that would impose broad new privacy obligations on Web sites and online advertisers. His proposal will aim to ensure that consumers know what information is being collected about them on the Web and how it is being used, and to give them control over that information.

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