

## **PRODUCT REVIEW--CYBERSITTER**

by Bruce W. Wilkinson

If you are tired of unsolicited sex and graphic e-mails (and web sites) as I am, you might consider the installation of a filter program which can reduce the incidence of such trash. It seems that once your e-mail address gets distributed (sold) to sources of such material, you may be bombarded with messages. I have tried to send return messages asking to be removed from their list but usually find that the sending address is no longer valid. It is also rumored that sending a return message just informs the sender that you looked at their material and thus, you should be sent even more. With Outlook Express you can block all future messages from that address but, of course, they change addresses regularly so that does not help much.

In an effort to thwart the receipt of these messages, I did a search for filter programs. Most are designed to block youngsters from logging onto web sites that are objectionable and do not help with respect to e-mail. One program, however, will look at the subjects of e-mails and filter out messages that appear to be objectionable. That program is "Cybersitter" sold (\$39.95) by Solid Oak Software, Inc., P. O. Box 6826, Santa Barbara, CA 93160 (see also [www.cybersitter.com](http://www.cybersitter.com)). This program is available for download from the website for a 10 day free trial, so you can try it out before buying. If you decide to purchase, that can also be done from the program. Disk space is only 2 MB so download is not time consuming.

The program is pre-loaded with filters for such things as:

Adult/ ly oriented material

Illegal Activities

Violence

Hate

Illegal guns.

Additional filters are available and can be selected by the user. These cover a wide range of potentially objectionable sites such as cults, gambling, violent games, gay, astrology, etc. (and even pokemon).

In addition, you can specify key words to be watched for in filtering. Some words might cause problems with non-objectionable messages, however. For example, if "sex" is incorporated as a filter word, items containing words such as "sextant" or "middlesex" might be filtered out. I found that adding some of these words does enhance the filtering process, however.

Changes in the program require a password (that you set and know) to prohibit children from overriding the settings. On the other hand, if you want to disable the filter, you can do so either permanently or for a short time (after which it is automatically reinstated).

The program keeps track of the sites filtered out so you can view a log of the sites permitted and the sites filtered at any time. In this way, you can see how effective the filtering process is. In my case, with some 10-20 e-mails being received daily, there are typically two or three sites filtered each day.

Operation of the Cybersitter program seems to slow down the download and e-mail receipt process slightly (as might be expected since it is searching for key phrases and or words). It also seems to increase the rate of fragmentation of the hard drive so defrag needs to be done more frequently.

In summary, if you are sick of receiving trash e-mails and/or internet connections, the addition of Cybersitter