

What Parents & Educators Need to Know about POP-UP ADS

Pop-up advertisements have been a staple of the internet since they were first introduced in the late 1990s. This form of advertising causes a small window or banner to appear in the foreground while someone is browsing a website. Although these adverts are merely irritating for most people, pop-ups can present more severe risks to younger users.

WHAT ARE THE RISKS?

DECEPTIVE TACTICS

Children sometimes don't understand that adverts (including pop-ups) are designed to sell a product – and can't distinguish between a legitimate feature of a site and an advertisement. Video games, for example, can be full of pop-up ads that tempt users into spending money, yet they might take the form of a mini-game or extra level.

INAPPROPRIATE CONTENT

While some adverts are targeted based on a user's interests and activity online, that isn't always the case. This means that children may unfortunately be exposed to ads for age-inappropriate goods or services such as tobacco products, alcohol and gambling sites.

MALWARE RISK

Most pop-ups from reputable advertisers are safe. However, in some cases, pop-ups can trick you into downloading malware – whereby cybercriminals install software on your device, allowing them to access your sensitive data. It can be difficult to know if malware has been installed on your device, so your best option is to avoid engaging with these pop-ups altogether. Be wary of sites that suddenly bombard you with ads or try to prevent you from leaving.

PRIVACY RISK

Many app and game developers will collect their users' personal data, such as their name, address, email address, geolocation information, unique numerical identifiers, photos and payment information. If a child clicks on an illegitimate pop-up laced with malware, all this information could be put at risk.

RACKING UP BILLS

If a child has access to a payment card on their device – be it a smartphone, laptop, or tablet – they could very quickly rack up a massive bill by interacting with pop-up adverts and buying products shown to them. Try to keep a close eye on their spending.

BEHAVIOURAL IMPACT

Research has found that pop-up ads can even have an impact on children's behaviour. Some of these adverts use manipulative tactics that take advantage of children's developmental vulnerabilities, intentionally or otherwise. This approach may cause a child's mood to shift: becoming more stubborn, for example, if they begin wanting their parents to buy a specific product for them.

Advice for Parents & Educators

START A CONVERSATION

It's important to have regular conversations with children about online advertising so that they understand the risks of interacting with pop-ups. For example, if a child asks for a product which has been advertised to them online, ask them why they want it and how they found it: this will present an opportunity to talk youngsters through the tactics used in online marketing.

SPOT THE SIGNS

If you're concerned that a child may be following pop-up ads to make online purchases or viewing content that could be harmful, it's important to be able to spot the signs. Due to the often-manipulative nature of these adverts, children who interact with them regularly may show signs of distraction, stubbornness and an increasingly materialistic worldview.

MONITOR CONTENT

It can often be difficult to spot when a pop-up advert is malicious – even more so for impressionable younger users. It's important to monitor the content they're consuming to prevent them from clicking on something dangerous. If a pop-up ad seems too good to be true – promising a free iPad, for example – it probably is.

PRIVACY SETTINGS

Most modern devices have privacy settings that let you limit the amount of advertising a child is subjected to while using apps or browsing the internet. You may also want to speak to teachers about avoiding sites and apps with advertising, as well as adjusting digital privacy settings on any education technology they use.

LIMIT SPENDING

Try to stay aware of what children are spending and ensure that payment details aren't linked to or saved on the gaming platform that they use. Most video games and internet-enabled devices have settings that can help you manage what children can or cannot purchase online.

CUT DOWN ON SCREEN TIME

Given the prevalence of pop-up ads (which can appear on everything from smartphones and tablets to internet-connected toys and games), it might be beneficial to limit the time children spend on digital devices to curb their exposure to digital advertising.

Meet Our Expert

Carly Page is an experienced technology writer with more than 10 years in the industry. Previously the editor of tech tabloid The Inquirer, she is now a freelance technology journalist, editor and consultant who writes for Forbes, TechRadar and Wired, among others.



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