

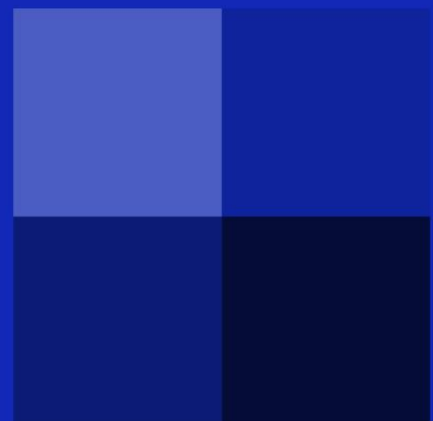


Nothing is “Free”

(Why social media HAS to cost something)

E-Sussex, E-Safe

Safeguarding all children in East Sussex all the time



What? Nothing?

No – well, very little. For example, Social Networking – things like Facebook aren't free. They can't possibly be free.

Think about all the money Facebook has spent in setting up over 13,000 servers all over the world. This is what a Facebook server farm looks like.



Do you think this kind of technology is cheap? It's not that they won't let you play with it for free – it's that they can't.

This sort of equipment costs millions of pounds – and it's not the only server farm they have. Then there are staff, buildings to heat and cool, internet connections to pay for – it goes on and on.

The **only** thing they have to trade in is access to your information. So, when you sign up for Facebook, while it won't cost you hard cash, they can and do use your information.

How do you feel about that?

Actually, there's no need to guess – everything they will do is in their Acceptable Use and Data Use policies. But be warned, they can be very long and written in legal language – they can be hard for people to understand, and very few people ever bother to read them – let alone check to see that that the company concerned is doing what it says!

Have YOU read AND understood the Terms of Use and Data Policy of the social media you use?

No? You're not alone. It is estimated that only 5 people in every 1000 actually bother to read it and talk through what it means. That doesn't mean it's not important! You are entering into a formal, legally binding agreement with whoever provides your social media. They will expect you to act in a certain way, and they will tell you – often in very complicated legal terms – what they will do with the material you post.

Sometimes you find that they can do whatever they like with it, and sometimes you may find that they actually OWN what you post too!

Information is money, and to many social media sites, this is how they pay for themselves by sorting, parceling up and selling the information they have. This may not mean that they sell your email address or phone numbers, but you should read the Data Policy (sometimes called the Privacy Notice) to make sure.

OK – but that's Facebook – what about something like Snapchat?

Same answer. Snapchat has costs too, and not only costs, it needs to make money for the people who created it. Snapchat only stores images. What do you think they are doing with those images to generate income?

Do you mean that nothing is free?

It depends what you mean by "free". If you mean you don't have to pay, then yes, it's free if that's what it says, but if you have to give something in return – an email address, or a mobile phone number, for example, then you have made an exchange, and it's not free.

I don't care who has my email address – so what?

Then you are likely to get far more junk email than others, and may find yourself targeted for scams too. Remember, people buy and sell email lists on line – sometimes for thousands of pounds – it tends to depend on how well sorted the data is.

For example, if I had 10,000 email addresses, that would be worth about 1p per address, but if I had 10,000 email addresses of men between the ages of 25-30, or women who were athletes, then that is worth far more.

It really depends how comfortable you are with other people trading your information or what you post.

Remember, actions have consequences, and if you throw caution to the wind and let anyone do what they like with your information, it is likely to come back to bite you.

What about Apps – there are LOT'S of free apps.

Really? Tell me the name of **ONE** App that doesn't need either your email address or mobile phone number to get. The moment you have to give something – even if its only information – then the App is not free. Some Apps also have costs built into them. They may need a lot of bandwidth to run – bandwidth that you are paying for in hard cash –especially if you go over your allowance.

Then there are apps that are not what they seem. There was an app that allowed users to buy coins – what was not made clear was that it is real money they were spending. For every £1.00 coin they bought - £1.00 was charged to their phone bill. One young boy ran up a £2,000 bill like this. How popular would you be with your mum or dad if YOU spent £2,000 of their money without telling them?

So, all Apps are bad, then?

Not at all. All we are saying is you really need to understand what you are getting into. If you are having trouble, ask a teacher or your parents/carers to look into it for you. Remember, anyone can design an app these days. Some designers are good, and some are less honest than we may hope.

I see prizes given away on the internet every day. What's wrong with that?

It is impossible to win a competition you have not entered. No one is just going to hand you an iPad free of charge, and many so-called “free” competitions are scams in disguise. The item is usually “free” right up until they charge you for postage and packing. In many cases, you will never see the “free iPod”, and in others they take far more than the postage and packing fee.

Don't fall for it.

So I need to be wary of anything that is “free”.

Yes. Your parents and carers are, and so should you be. They have seen people stung by scams – they may even have been stung themselves, and it isn't nice.

Why aren't these people prosecuted by the police if they rip people off?

Some are, but the internet is a big place. Sometimes people who make scams do not live in this country and that can make it difficult to find them or make sure they are brought to justice. The police or trading standards may be able to help, but the best possible defense is **YOU**. You need to train yourself to be a little bit skeptical and if something seems too good to be true, then it usually is.

To end with Facebook – they offer you unlimited storage – that's UNLIMITED storage. You can put whatever you like onto your Facebook account and never EVER run out of storage space. So, why do other companies charge? How can Facebook possibly do it for free? Computer memory costs – ask anyone who has upgraded a hard drive if it was free. And your stuff on Facebook isn't just on one computer (server), it's on many. Data is backed up, and stored in different places around the world. That is because Facebook, like many providers has a “contingency plan” in case one set of servers fails – they can just switch to another set. It still means your data is stored in multiple places, and Facebook, like all large organisations is and has been the subject of online attacks.

Be careful what you post online – and never post anything important that you don't have your own backup of. Sometimes social media sites just close down – taking everything on them with it. That is why it's important to have your own copies. Don't post your family photographs onto a “cloud” and think that there is a 100% guarantee that they will be there for life. Always, ALWAYS have a backup.

A guide for young people

You can learn from their mistakes (or the mistakes of others) if you are smart enough.

Scammers are clever people. They target children because they know children have access to money, these days, and they think children are a soft touch. Don't let them catch you out.

The same thing goes for phone calls out of the blue that tell you you have won something. You haven't. You can't possibly have won something that you didn't enter for.

Sometimes these phone calls can be quite aggressive, telling you that you must complete the call within 10 minutes, and that usually means handing over an address or bank card number along the way.

Scamming is horrid – don't let it happen to you.