Filters

How Filtering Software Works:

Web filters help solve the problem of unwanted content by constantly monitoring and blocking inappropriate sites. Once installed on a computer, the filtering software runs in the background. It does not interfere with the user's online experience, unless the program detects sites deemed inappropriate or potentially harmful to the computer.

Methods

The many different web filter tools work in similar ways. Filtering algorithms determine if material should be blocked. The algorithm is a set of rules that the software uses to check content. For example, one rule might identify foul language, another page links that lead to adult sites. The software looks at URL web addresses and search engine keywords, comparing them to a list of flagged items. When access is attempted to an inappropriate site, the filtering software stops the connection.

Some filters include reporting tools that generate lists of attempted visits, online chats and blocked content. Parents or other authorized users can view these lists.

Many Internet filtering tools also use port blocking. Ports are the virtual connections a computer uses to communicate. A web browser may use one port, while chat and music-sharing software uses other ports. Effective filter software checks these additional ports as well, scanning every piece of information passing in and out of the computer. This provides coverage beyond the web, shutting down the connection if harmful content is accessed.

Other Factors

While web filtering software packages are powerful tools, they rely on proper use in order to be effective. None is foolproof and all require some human intervention. An administrator customizes the settings. Some parents, for example, may choose to allow content on sexual education, while others will want to block any sex-related sites.

Selecting filtering software can be confusing. There are many programs and they have many different features. Most filtering software blocks by one of three ways:

- By scanning the document and looking for unacceptable words or terms.
- Having a list of banned sites decided by the company.
- Having a list of acceptable sites that your child can visit.

Some of the variables with each type of program are:

- Customizable filtering.
- Whether it filters other software applications.
- Blocks chat rooms and forums.
- Whether it stops you from sending personal information in email.
- Produces activity logs

There are also programs that will monitor your child's activity while online and take pictures of the activity.

The following companies offer software packages that block objectionable websites. Some packages also block chat and email. Check each manufacturer's website for details on features and prices.

- K-9 Web Protection http://www.k9webprotection.com/
- Safe Eyes http://www.safeeyes.com
- Spector Pro http://www.spectorsoft.com
- BSecure http://www.bsecure.com
- Cyber Patrol http://www.cyberpatrol.com/
- FamilyClick http://www.familyclick.com/
- Net Nanny http://www.netnanny.com/
- Web Watcher http://www.webwatchernow.com/monitoring-software/consumer/index_40off.html
- Security Software Systems Cyber Sentinel http://shop1.laservers.com/
- Security Software Systems Predator Guard http://shop1.laservers.com/
- Solid Oak Software Cybersitter http://www.cybersitter.com
- SurfControl SurfWatch http://www.surfwatch.com
- We-WebCorp We-Blocker http://www.we-blocker.com
- Be Safe http://www.crownministries.org/besafe
- Browse Safe http://www.browsesafe.com
- Character Link http://www.characterlink.com
- Norton Internet Security http://www.norton.com/
- NetBarrier for Mac, Windows or Palm http://www.contentbarrier.com/

Comparison of popular filters can be found here: http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/