

Kids Social Networking Site Settles COPPA Charges, Includes Civil Penalties of \$100,000

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The FTC has just announced a settlement with the operator of a social networking website for kids. The website, Skid-E-Kids (www.skidekids.com), is directed to children between 7 and 14, and bills itself as the “Facebook and MySpace for Kids.” According to the FTC complaint, a child who visits Skid-E-Kids is able to register and begin using his or her account without parental consent. A child provides his or her birthdate (which can be under 13), and then is prompted to enter an email address (i.e., personal information under COPPA). According to the complaint, at no point does the site reach out to parents to obtain parental consent, and the child can freely use the site, including submitting full name (more personal information under COPPA), uploading pictures, and sending messages to other users. Over five thousand children were able to register on the site, according to the complaint. In settling, the website operator (an individual) agreed to obtain parental consent in the future, to delete information collected, to remove misrepresentations from his privacy policy, and to operate under a five year consent decree. The defendant is also to pay \$100,000 in civil penalties, although the consent decree permits him to pay a lower amount if he can establish that he does not have the financial means to pay the full penalties.

TIP: Since it is unlikely that social media sites would fall under an exception to the need to collect verifiable parental consent, ensure that you have taken measures to either block children under 13 or you obtain verifiable parental consent before allowing children to participate in forums where personal information is collected.

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