



## BIG BROTHER POPS UP ONLINE AT ABC

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By Sue Lowe

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Watching where employees go on the internet used to be something companies did discreetly, but no longer. Big Brother is coming out of hiding.

Staff at the ABC are among the first to face pop-up dialogue boxes informing them that the websites they are about to access appear to be unrelated to their work and that if they continue they may be questioned by management.

"The ABC does not regard the material contained in this site as reasonable for personal use, and if requested, you must be able to be to justify that your use of this site properly relates to ABC business," the warning reads.

"Breach of this policy may result in disciplinary action, including the termination of your employment."

The pop-up is prompted by a wide range of sites, not just porn, gambling and poor-taste jokes.

"It caused a lot of aggravation to begin with," said one employee, who asked not to be identified. "People felt they were being treated like three year-olds."

But ABC management says the decision to be "in-your-face about it" was deliberate.

"We need to let people know what is acceptable," said human resources director Colin Palmer.

At the end of each month, departmental heads get a print-out of apparent violations of the policy and can request a confidential report that drills down to an individual.

Mr. Palmer said one staff member had been sacked over a server violation, and others had received warnings to "get back to work".

Michael Michalandos, a partner at law firm Barker & McKenzie, said it was taking internet monitoring "to a new level of sophistication."

The employee's defense when faced with disciplinary action over internet abuse is usually ignorance, he said, adding that it would be hard for any ABC employee to argue that.

"It does raise ethical issues though. What is the distinction between this and monitoring personal calls?" he said.

But it could be that ABC is just ahead of the curve.

Under new legislation being drafted by the NSW Government, all employers would be required to be similarly open in any surveillance of staff.

"In a way (the ABC) is doing staff a favor in being so over," said Charles Heunemann, Managing director of software monitoring company, SurfControl.

According to UK consulting firm K-Legal, internet abuse is now one of the most common causes of staff dismissal in Britain – higher than dishonesty, violence and health and safety breaches combined.

Internet monitoring firm WebSpy says internet surfing cost business \$1 billion each year.

This story was found at:

<http://www.theage.com.au/articles/2003/11/07/1068013395800.html>