

For some years I have been giving people advice on computers, and they have often asked me about the topic of web filtering. Life before the internet certainly had its advantages--one of them being innocence!! I've recommended over time, a couple free filters--both of which worked... generally... but "free" isn't always "best" and I think I've found one of the best, **CYBERSitter**.

Prompting this action on my part was the fact that one of my (grown) kids had to rebuild their computer and wanted ME to install a filter so there could be no monkeying with it--and only I would know the password. I did NOT want to blow this opportunity! I went back to what I already knew on the subject, including some website reviews like:

<http://internetfilters.org/filters.html#reviews>
<http://www.pcmag.com/article2/0,1895,1619351,00.asp>
<http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/?ttreng=1&ttrkey=Internet+filters>
<http://www.filterreview.com/main.asp>
<http://www.filterguide.com/ratings.htm>
<http://www.filterguide.com/filterbenefits.htm>
<http://libraryfiltering.org/?pid=15>

After comparing features again, I bought the latest version of Cybersitter. I've NOT been disappointed!! This product simply works. Is it perfect? No. But it requires very little setup tinkering... and has very few problems.

As a result, I'm going to tell you more (below), and give you a chance to get a copy from me if you're interested. I'm buying multiple copies as a "reseller" from Solid Oak, the company that makes Cybersitter. That way I'll have them on hand as people need them. **BOTTOM LINE:** Rather than you buying it online and downloading it for \$39.95, I can get you a copy of their current version (9.5) for \$25. You can come by and get it from me, or I can e-mail you a copy (2 mb) along with the registration key. (E-mail address near bottom.) I can also "snail mail" it to you if you'll add a couple bucks. You should buy more than one license if you have more than one on-line computer, and if it works well for you, you can get more copies later for friends or family.

I'll also be happy to answer questions beforehand, or after installation. Solid Oak does seem to provide timely (and generally helpful) technical assistance, and you can submit the support request from within the Cybersitter console itself.

And now, My "More Complete" review...

A web search will reveal that there are dozens of different low-cost web filter solutions you can try--all with varying capabilities, and many of which would probably work with young children. But who wants to take the chance?!!

Hence, CYBERSitter.

DISCLAIMER: Filtering software like this works at a very "low level"--like anti-virus programs. Hence, you could have (and people have had) conflicts with some of them. You'll read of dissatisfaction, even with Cybersitter, if you examine the reviews. And when I've tried free downloads of these various (even namebrand) filters, I too have had some of these conflicts, so be forewarned. STILL--protecting ourselves and our families IS IMPORTANT!!

FEATURES:

No recurring fees of any kind.

Mature product: CYBERSitter was the very first Internet filter, introduced in 1995.

Ease of use... just ONE profile to set up--and it works!!!

Automatic updates

One site says: **Guaranteed to block over 97% of all objectionable content!**

New Features! Now records all Instant Messenger chat conversations for AOL (AIM), and Yahoo Messengers. Now you can know who your kids are chatting with to ensure that they are not communicating with strangers. Several new security enhancements have also been added for Windows 2000/ XP users.

CYBERSitter provides over 30 categories of filtering. Filters are updated automatically, and there are no subscription charges. A sophisticated "content recognition" system recognizes and blocks new objectionable web sites even before we know about them.

CYBERSitter allows parents to override blocked sites, add their own sites to block, specify allowable times to access the Internet, and maintains a detailed log of all Internet activity and violations. It will even send a daily report to parents by e-mail.

Filtering Options

- Selectable blocking of WWW, Newsgroups, Chat, Mail, Messaging programs.
- Detailed log file of user violations.
- Control Internet access by day and time.
- Add custom objectionable sites and personal information.
- Add custom "Always Allowable" sites.
- Allow access to ONLY specified sites ("White List") if desired.
- Optional "Family Friendly" search engine redirection.
- Deny access to TCP/IP ports or port ranges.
- Ignore access to TCP/IP ports or port ranges.
- Remote Control program included allows remote configuration.
- Automatic "Repair" function to fix common problems quickly.
- Full proxy server support including authentication.
- Daily activity reports can be sent to parent or administrator by e-mail.
- User configurable redirection options for blocked sites.
- Automatic update of filter files performed secretly in the background.
- New "Suspend" feature suspends filtering for a user defined number of minutes.

Advanced Features: <http://www.cybersitter.com/advanced.htm>

Once installed...

See screen shot of the control console here: <http://internet-filter-review.toptenreviews.com/cybersitter-screenshot1.html>

Set up your CYBERSitter password.

After registering, you will be able to enter a password into CYBERSitter to protect the interface from access. **DO THIS!!!** To enter a password, choose the "Security" tab. Enter the password you wish in the first box and then Tab to the next box and enter the exact same password. Now click the Apply button to confirm entry. The password feature is NOT available until you have purchased and registered CYBERSitter.

Select the filters you want to use?

Start your Internet software to get online - once online, access the CYBERSitter Control Panel and click on the "Filter Files" tab and this will allow you to select the type of content that you want blocked using CYBERSitter. You should update the filter files for CYBERSitter to ensure that you have the most current data. Press the "Update Filters" button and start the filter update. After the filter update is complete, you may want to clear the cache/temporary Internet folder of your browser(s) if you suspected inappropriate material has been visited previously.

After installation, if a site access is attempted and is blocked, you will see one of these:

"no data"

(a blank browser window)

<http://www.winlocate.com/>

<http://www.pick-to-click.com/best-free-stuff.htm>

<http://www.bestwindowsdownloads.com/>

INSTALLED FILTERS

CYBERSitter comes installed with the first 5 filtering options shown below defaulted (turned on--blocked), but I like a minimalist approach and am currently using the options you see checked. You can change these at any time if you have a reason to want to block further material.





One of the categories above, Gambling Sites, may also push a lot of explicit pictures to your browser, so that might be a good one to block as well.

Finally,

ONE IDEA... Have the mother of the house set the password as men are especially vulnerable.

ANOTHER SUGGESTION... You can hide the fact that CYBERSitter is running, but leaving it showing in the system tray makes it easier to access and also lets you know for sure that it is running.

ONE LAST SUGGESTION... Do NOT lose your password or you'll have to pay CYBERSitter to reset it for you.

AGAIN... \$25 is cheap protection.

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More reading here: http://www.woodlawn.org/pages/media_internet_safety.php

How filters work: http://www.computing.co.uk/personal-computer-world/features/2045875/filtering-net-nasties?vnu_l=ctg_art_related_articles

- review by Hu