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Spelling It 'Dinsey,' Children on Web Got XXX

By BENJAMIN WEISER

Be sure to spell Britney Spears's name correctly when you type it into an Internet browser.

Federal prosecutors in Manhattan charged a Florida man yesterday with violating a new law that makes it illegal to use misleading Internet domain names to entice minors onto pornographic Web sites.

Prosecutors said that as part of the scheme, the defendant, John Zuccarini, had registered 3,000 domain names that included misspellings or slight variations of popular names like Disneyland, Bob the Builder and Teen magazine. Mr. Zuccarini used more than a dozen variations of the name Britney Spears, the prosecutors said.

A child who accidentally mistyped a name into an Internet browser would be directed to a Web page controlled by Mr. Zuccarini and barraged with X-rated advertising, the authorities said. The child would also be "mousetrapped," they said; that is, unable to exit from the Web site.

"Few of us would imagine that there was someone out there who was, in effect, reaching through cyberspace to take that child by the hand to one of the seediest corners of the Internet," said James B. Comey, the United States attorney in Manhattan.

Mr. Zuccarini was arrested yesterday morning by federal postal inspectors in a hotel room in Hollywood, Fla., where he had been living for the last few months, Mr. Comey said. He is being held in Florida pending further court proceedings, a spokesman for Mr. Comey said. A lawyer for Mr. Zuccarini could not be immediately identified yesterday.

Mr. Zuccarini is the first person in the nation charged with committing a crime under the Truth in Domain Names Law, Mr. Comey said. The provision is part of a comprehensive legislative package signed by President Bush in the spring that included the creation of the national Amber Alert network for child abduction cases.

"Children make mistakes," Mr. Comey said. "The idea that someone would take advantage of that, of a young girl, for example, trying to go to the American Girl Web site to look at dolls or a child trying to visit the Teletubbies Web site, and mistypes, to take advantage of those mistakes to direct those children to pornography sites is beyond offensive."

Mr. Zuccarini has long been the subject of complaints, including lawsuits, over his use of domain names, records and news reports show. In about 100 complaints raised in arbitration proceedings to resolve domain name disputes, panels have ruled against him almost every time, prosecutors said, and ordered him to transfer the names at issue to the legitimate holder.

In 2002, the Federal Trade Commission got a permanent injunction against Mr. Zuccarini, ordering him

to end his activities, dismantle certain Web sites and pay a \$1.9 million judgment. But he continued to use misleading domain names to promote advertising for pornography to minors, according to a criminal complaint filed in Federal District Court in Manhattan.

It added that Mr. Zuccarini got a referral fee of 10 to 25 cents each time a visitor to one of his Web sites moved to the site of one of the advertisers. He earned \$800,000 to \$1 million a year through the scheme, the complaint said.

Representative Mike Pence, a Republican from Indiana who wrote the domain names law, said by telephone that he saw the issue less as one of indecency than as one of fraud. "I found in sitting down with my kids to do their homework on the Internet," he said, "that you could type in the most innocuous phrases, and that you literally had to cover their eyes before you activated the Web site."

In the misspelled domain names, Mr. Zuccarini used spellings like "Dinseyland," "Bobthebiulder," "Teltubbies" and "Britnyspears," prosecutors said.

Once a person was directed to a pornographic Web site, Mr. Comey said, "the usual tools that we use to close a Web site would not work."

Clicking on the X in the corner, or pressing the back button, he said, would "simply open more screens, bombarding the user with an endless stream of hard-core pornography."

"Zuccarini did this so he could profit from the fact that people, and especially children, frequently misspell or mistype names on the browser line on their computer," Mr. Comey added.