

FTC Consumer Alert

Federal Trade Commission ■ Bureau of Consumer Protection ■ Office of Consumer and Business Education

Cost of “Free” Adult Content Adds Up

You’re surfing the web and come across an adult entertainment site that claims to offer content for “free” and doesn’t require a credit card number for access. All you have to do is download a “viewer” or “dialer” program. What to do? Since you’re at the site to view content, downloading a “viewer” program might make sense. A “dialer” program? What’s that? And who cares? You’re getting free content.

But the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) warns that there’s a catch: Once the program is downloaded on to your computer, it disconnects the Internet connection you had and reconnects to an international long-distance phone number, at rates between \$2 and \$7 a minute. You could end up with a phone bill for hundreds of dollars for calls to places like Vanuatu in the Southwest Pacific, Chad, Guyana or Madagascar.

FTC officials say that because these scams are so lucrative for the operators, it may be only a matter of time before they appear on sites that feature games, psychics, gambling and other services.

Here’s how you can minimize your chances of downloading a “viewer” or “dialer” program that could turn “free” content into an expensive mistake:

- Be skeptical when you see opportunities to view “free” content on the web. Free doesn’t always mean free.
- Clicking “OK” isn’t always okay. Don’t click OK unless you know exactly what you’re agreeing to. Read online disclosures carefully. They may be buried several clicks away in pages of small print. In addition, read the language in the gray boxes on your screen.
- Beware of any program that enables your modem to re-dial to the Internet. If you see a dialog box on your computer indicating that it’s dialing when you didn’t direct it to, cancel the connection and hang up. Check the number you’re dialing and continue only if it’s a local call.

If the content you want to view leads to a “viewer” or “dialer” program or you find unauthorized charges on your phone bill, file a complaint with the FTC. The FTC works for the consumer to prevent fraudulent, deceptive and unfair business practices in the marketplace and to provide information to help consumers spot, stop and avoid them. To file a complaint or to get free information on consumer issues, visit www.ftc.gov or call toll-free, 1-877-FTC-HELP (1-877-382-4357); TTY: 1-866-653-4261. The FTC enters Internet, telemarketing, identity theft and other fraud-related complaints into Consumer Sentinel, a secure, online database available to hundreds of civil and criminal law enforcement agencies in the U.S. and abroad.