

Morrison & Foerster Client Alert

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California Mandates ‘Delete Button’ and Restricts Certain Online Advertising to Minors

By Julie O’Neill and Patrick J. Bernhardt

Right on the heels of game-changing revisions to the federal rule implementing the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act, and almost immediately following another change to the California Online Privacy Protection Act (“CalOPPA”)¹ regarding Do Not Track disclosures, California has passed a law that further complicates the landscape for companies’ online interactions with children: On September 23, 2013, the state amended CalOPPA to include a section titled “Privacy Rights for California Minors in the Digital World.”²

Most significant, the revised law will require an online company to permit a registered user who is under 18 to remove content that he or she has posted to the company’s website or app. The law will also prohibit online companies from advertising “adult” products to minors and from collecting, using or disclosing minors’ personal information for such advertising – or allowing others to do so. With these revisions, CalOPPA moves from being purely a disclosure law to actually imposing substantive requirements on certain companies that do business online.

As a practical matter, the revised law has nationwide reach because it applies to any “Internet Web site, online service, online application, or mobile application” (each, a “Site”) that collects personal information about California minors and is “directed to minors” or has “actual knowledge” that a minor is using the Site.³ As a result, Site operators should be aware of these developments and adjust their business practices to comply with the revised law before it takes effect on January 1, 2015.

¹ Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 22575 *et seq.*

² Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 22580-82.

³ Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code §§ 22580-81. Like CalOPPA’s original provisions, the law does not apply to third parties that operate, host or manage, but do not own, websites or applications.

UNITED STATES

California

Tiffany Cheung	(415) 268-6848
Rebekah Kaufman	(415) 268-6148
Christine E. Lyon	(650) 813-5770
David F. McDowell	(213) 892-5383
James R. McGuire	(415) 268-7013
Daniel F. Muto	(858) 720-7959
Purvi G. Patel	(213) 892-5296
Andrew Serwin	(858) 720-5134
William L. Stern	(415) 268-7637
Nancy R. Thomas	(213) 892-5561
David M. Walsh	(213) 892-5262

New York

Cindy Abramson	(212) 336-4178
Melissa Crespo	(212) 336-4354
John F. Delaney	(212) 468-8040
Sherman W. Kahn	(212) 468-8023
Mark P. Ladner	(212) 468-8035
Peter McLaughlin	(212) 336-4290
Michael B. Miller	(212) 468-8009
Suhna N. Pierce	(212) 336-4150
Marian Waldmann Agarwal	(212) 336-4230
Miriam H. Wugmeister	(212) 506-7213

Washington, D.C.

L. Richard Fischer	(202) 887-1566
D. Reed Freeman, Jr.	(202) 887-6948
Julie O’Neill	(202) 887-8764
Obrea O. Poindexter	(202) 887-8741
Cynthia J. Rich	(202) 778-1652
Andrew M. Smith	(202) 887-1558
Nathan David Taylor	(202) 778-1644

EUROPE

Brussels

Joanna Łopatowska	32 2 340 7365
Karin Retzer	32 2 340 7364
Alja Poler De Zwart	32 2 340 7360

London

Ann Bevitt	44 20 7920 4041
Anthony Nagle	44 20 7920 4029
Caroline Stakim	44 20 7920 4055
David Varney	44 20 7920 4058

ASIA

Beijing

Gabriel Bloch	86 10 5909 3367
Jingxiao Fang	86 10 5909 3382
Paul D. McKenzie	86 10 5909 3366

Hong Kong

Gordon A. Milner	852 2585 0808
------------------	---------------

Tokyo

Daniel P. Levison	81 3 3214 6717
Gabriel E. Meister	81 3 3214 6748
Jay Ponazecki	81 3 3214 6562
Toshihiro So	81 3 3214 6568
Yukihiro Terazawa	81 3 3214 6585

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CALOPPA'S NEW RIGHT TO REMOVE CONTENT

Perhaps the most significant new change to CalOPPA is its requirement that a Site operator permit a registered user who is under 18 to remove content that the user had posted to the Site.⁴

Specifically, a Site operator must:

- Permit covered minors to remove or to request and obtain removal of content or information “posted” (i.e., accessible to others) by the user on the operator’s Site;
- Provide clear instructions on how the minor may remove or request removal of the content; and
- Provide notice that the minor may remove or request removal of the content, but that the removal does not ensure complete or comprehensive removal of the content.

To this last point, the law’s scope is somewhat limited because it does not require removal of content posted or reposted to the Site *by third-party users*.⁵ Moreover, the law does not require a Site operator to permanently delete the content from its servers. Rather, the operator may comply by taking steps to dissociate the content from a particular user or to render it invisible to other users while retaining it on its server.

NEW LIMITS ON ADVERTISING TO MINORS

CalOPPA’s expansion also prohibits Site operators from advertising adult-oriented products, such as alcohol, tobacco and firearms, to minors *and* from collecting, using or disclosing minors’ personal information for such advertising – or allowing others to do so.⁶ Like the right to remove content, this provision will apply to any Site that is directed to minors or that has actual knowledge that the advertising will be targeted to a minor. Importantly, the revised law creates a safe harbor for a Site operator that uses an advertising service provider to serve its advertising: If it notifies its advertising service provider that the Site is directed to minors, then the responsibility to comply with the law rests with the advertising service provider.⁷

WHAT DO THESE NEW PROTECTIONS FOR MINORS MEAN FOR SITE OPERATORS?

The revised law’s effective date is not too far off. Site operators should therefore start thinking about whether they fall within the law’s coverage and, if they do, what new procedures are necessary to come into compliance.

⁴ Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 22581. The law explicitly does not require an operator to collect age information about users, but Site operators would still need to comply if the Site had actual knowledge that the user was under 18 or if the Site was created for the purpose of reaching an audience that is predominately composed of minors and not intended for a more general audience composed of adults.

⁵ Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 22581(d).

⁶ Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 22580. The full list of such products is: alcoholic beverages, firearms or handguns, ammunition, handgun safety certificates, etching creams or aerosol containers of paint that are capable of defacing property, tobacco and cigarette products, BB devices, dangerous fireworks, ultraviolet tanning services, certain dietary supplements, lottery tickets or shares, Salvia products, body branding or permanent tattoos, drug paraphernalia, electronic cigarettes, obscene materials and certain weapons.

⁷ Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 22580(h)(1)-(2).

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