

Servers and sites often display privacy notices explaining how usage patterns or transactions are being collected and used. But even the most stringent privacy policies offer limited protection. Any transaction is routed through various browsers and servers and can be intercepted along the way.

In the U.S., electronic monitoring of employees is becoming standard practice. Some types of workplace monitoring arguably have legitimate purposes; page 348, for example, lists arguments for monitoring of email. Employers also claim to have valid reasons for monitoring workplace Web sites:

Claims in support of monitoring workplace Web sites

- **Troubleshooting.** Monitoring software (*AlertPage*, *Net.Medic*) can scan a company site for broken links, and identify server glitches, software bugs, modem problems, or faulty hardware connections (Reichard 106).
- **Productivity.** Companies track intranet use for the number of queries per employee, types of questions, and the time required for people to find what they need. These data help Webmasters decide whether the search mechanism (user interface) can be improved or whether online documents can be written more clearly (Cronin, “Knowing” 103). Monitoring can also reveal software bugs or recurring errors by employees who might require further training.
- **Security.** Software can track employees’ visits to other Web sites, as well as files opened for recreational or personal use, email sent and received, and can even provide snapshots of an employee’s computer screen (Karaim 73). Such monitoring can be a justifiable precaution against employee theft, drug abuse, security violations (such as publishing trade secrets on the Internet)—or wasted time. After losing millions of worker hours yearly to computer game-playing, corporations increasingly are addressing the problem by investing in corporate training video games.

Privacy abuses in workplace monitoring

Beyond its legitimate uses, monitoring also carries potential for privacy abuses. Employers have more freedom to violate employee privacy than the police (Karaim 72). Andre Bacad, author of *The Computer Privacy Handbook*, notes that supervisors can “tap an employee’s phones, monitor her e-mail, watch her on closed-circuit TV, and search her computer files, without giving her notice” (qtd. in Karaim 72).

### ✓ Checklist: Usability of Web Sites

(These criteria are discussed on pages 318–20 and on pages 432–34.)

#### Accessibility

- Is the site easy to enter, navigate, and exit?
- Is required scrolling kept to a minimum?
- Is the information chunked for easy access and quick reading?

- Is downloading speed reasonable?
- If interaction is offered, is it useful—not superfluous?
- Does the site avoid overwhelming the user with excessive choices?

**Content**

- Are all needed explanations, error messages, and help screens provided?
- Is the time of each update clearly indicated?
- Is everything accurate and up-to-date?
- Are links connected to high-quality sites?
- Does everything belong (nothing excessive or needlessly complex)?
- Is an email button or other contact method prominently displayed?
- Does the content accommodate international users?

**Arrangement**

- Is the document organized top-down?
- Are navigation bars, hot buttons, help options, and links to PDF files clearly displayed and labeled?
- Are links easily navigated—backward and forward—with links back to the home page?

**Writing and Page Design**

- Is the text easy to scan, with short sentences and paragraphs, and do headings, lists, typography, and color highlight important material?
- Is overall word count roughly one-half of the hard copy equivalent?
- Are all sentences short enough to facilitate reading and understanding?
- Are links structured according to a logical hierarchy of importance?

**Graphics and Special Effects**

- Is each graphic easy to download?
- Is each graphic backed up by a text-only version?
- Is each graphic or special effect necessary?

**Legal and Technical Considerations**

- Does the site display a privacy notice that explains how transactions are recorded, collected, and used?
- Does each page of the site display a copyright notice?
- Has written permission been obtained for each link to other sites and for each borrowed graphic element?
- Has all posted material received prior legal approval?
- Has the site been tested to ensure that it is functional and usable?