



MyBee

rationale and criteria

Introduction

The Dutch foundation My Child Online (stichting Mijn Kind Online) has launched a new children's browser, MyBee. MyBee is based on white listing. My Child Online was founded by telecom-company KPN and the online community for parents, Parents Online (www.ouders.nl). The foundation, one of the leading expertise centre in The Netherlands on youth and media, can work independantly and has an imporant mission: improve the quality of online media for children.

What is MyBee?

MyBee is a browser (the 'Bee' stands for 'Browser') intended to allow children up to the age of about 10 to surf the web safely and easily. After reaching this age they should learn how to use a normal browser such as Internet Explorer (IE), Safari or Firefox.

The basic principle of MyBee is that children can only visit websites suitable for their age.



When you install MyBee you are asked to fill in the age of your child



This is achieved by means of a so-called 'white list'. All other sites are automatically blocked. MyBee therefore also serves as a filter although this does not do the actual nature of the programme any justice. Filters tend to be associated with the prevention of harmful material (porn, violence, undesired commercial trade, etc) while, contrary to this, the essence of MyBee is that suggestions are given as to what is suitable.

Professional editors play a part in determining whether sites are suitable for children and if so, for what age. In addition, parents' judgement play an important role.

When compared to all other children's browsers, filters, etc., MyBee is unique in the role parents play. Besides being a browser (the programme on your own PC) MyBee is, as it happens, also a so-called Web 2.0 application. The white list seen by the child is downloaded from the server which also automatically keeps count of what other parents find suitable for their own children. A distinction is made between tolerant parents, average parents and strict parents. This will be discussed in more detail later on. Naturally, you can also take part yourself. It is, however, not compulsory.

The white list principle

MyBee's white list principle is the opposite of a black list. A white list contains the names of sites that may be visited while a black list mentions the sites that are not to be visited. There are two important reasons for having chosen the white list principle:

1. The white list principle forces you to consider what you think is suitable for your children at this point in time. This is in accordance with modern pedagogy, in which you are expected as much as possible to connect with the children's perception of the environment.
2. A black list is impractical. The number of undesired sites is larger than the number of desired sites and this number increases daily. It is simply impossible to keep track of.

Two white lists

There are in fact two white lists, namely, the list made by the professional MyBee editors and the list made by parents. When installing and configuring MyBee you will be asked which of the lists you wish to use. You will of course be able to alter your choice at a later stage.

Some parents find it difficult to make a choice. Ideally, they would prefer to use both lists, thinking this would give them 'the best of both worlds'. This is possible because when you choose the public list (made by parents) you automatically receive some editing. In order to prevent misuse the editors, moderate the parents' white list.

The choices are, therefore, as follows:

- the white list made by the professional MyBee editors, to which no one else has had access;
- the white list made by the parents (divided up into tolerant, average and strict) to which for reasons of security the editors have also had a look at. The excesses are removed.



Note: every user (parent) is free to add their own websites to the list of acceptable sites. So if your child asks if he/she can use website X and you agree, then he/she may use it. Whether this site can then also be used by others depends on several factors, namely, whether you have given permission for your judgements to be used publicly, whether a sufficient number of parents have approved this site and whether the editors have approved the addition.

Three types of parents: tolerant, average and strict

Those who wish to make use of the suggestions made by other parents will have to specify which parents. You can make a choice from: tolerant parents, average parents or strict parents. These qualifications are based on statistics.

As soon as a child or a parent has found a suitable site, this site can be added to the white list. The site is then immediately available for own use. The parent also indicates the age range for which the site is suitable and also whether other parents may make use of this information. If the latter is the case, then the information is automatically forwarded to the MyBee server. Statistical analysis is then carried out on the incoming information. It is assumed that the parents' opinions will show a so-called 'normal distribution' around an average age. The average age of say 'suitable for children aged 7 upwards' is then mentioned most often. There will, however, also be parents who feel the site is suitable for children aged 6 upwards. These are the 'tolerant parents'. On the other hand, there will also be parents who consider the site unsuitable for children younger than 8 years of age. These are the 'strict parents'.

The following calculation method is used by the MyBee server software:

- tolerant = average age minus (1.28 * standard deviation)
- average = average age
- strict = average age plus (1.28 * standard deviation)

The factor 1.28 is derived from the normal distribution table.

Privacy

All parents' opinions are naturally processed anonymously. MyBee's server does not recognize names of participating parents. The only thing that is saved is the IP address of the contributor, so as to prevent misuse. If, for example, it appears that a certain IP address constantly contributes sex sites, this IP address needs to be able to be blocked.

MyBee editors

MyBee editors are responsible for:

- spotting new websites and changing existing websites
- updating the professional editors white list
- moderating the parents' white list (preventing misuse and excesses)



Where possible, the editor's work is based on scientific research. In addition, however, the editor's experience and expertise play an important role as research is still in its infancy. The editors are supervised by a media educationalist.

In contrast to the parents, who only give a 'suitable from' age, the editors also stipulate a 'suitable up to' age. This means that children aged 9 or 10 are not confronted with a website of say Nijntje (Miffy).

The criteria employed by the editors are discussed below (these can naturally also be used by the parents to judge websites.).

What is a good children's site?

A website for children up to the age of 10 does not contain any harmful or in any other way undesired elements such as sex, violence, commercial messages, unsafe parts (for example, unmoderated chats), misleading parts (for example, 'free' ring tones that are in fact not free), etc. That is the initial sieving process.



The portal-site within the MyBee-browser for the small children: with only images

Then it has to be decided whether the site is in line with the level and interests of children in a specific age category. A site for children who cannot yet read should not, for example, contain any text (unless the text is meant for the parents as explanatory note) and a site for the very little should have large enough operating keys as their fine motor skills are insufficiently developed to be able to click very small buttons, etc.

With regard to interests, the contents of a children's site should be in line with the subjects and themes that, in general, engage the children of a certain age. Young children are, for example,



busy discovering and learning to name the world around them. They do this by trying out things and repeating this often. Older children are busier discovering themselves and creating an own identity. They do this in particular through maintaining social contacts and by experimenting with role playing.

Finally, a children's site needs to be attractive. This is obviously a subjective criterion that is difficult to realize. What's attractive for one is unattractive for another. Tastes differ. However, it is definitively worth saying something about attractiveness. Within the scientific world the principle of intersubjectivity is used for this. In other words, it can be discussed and a distinction can be made between that what many people consider to be attractive on the one hand and that what fewer people find attractive on the other. This is why Mijn Kind Online will continue to encourage the public debate on the quality of children's sites in general and their attractiveness in particular. The principle of intersubjectivity is also secured by the (statistical) processing of the opinions of parents and the accuracy of the editors.

In the judging of children's sites the MyBee editors employ the following quality criteria (previously published on the Mijn Kind Online site and supplemented by the results of recent scientific research):

- the site is accessible, understandable and clear;
- the site contains no offensive or subversive material;
- the site is not crammed with advertisements;
- the site is challenging, original, exciting, interesting and stimulating;
- the site is interactive and socially inviting;
- the site is technically sound and quick;
- the site is well maintained;
- if there is a forum or chat room then this needs to be permanently moderated;
- the site is not aggressive or forceful in the eliciting of privacy sensitive information;
- the site has a clear privacy policy with an acceptable explanation on the handling of visitors' personal details;
- the site mentions the developers of the site and how they can be contacted.

The above mentioned criteria have been further elaborated by the jury of De gouden @penstaart (annual award for the best children's website in the Netherlands) [link: <http://www.goudena-penstaart.nl>]. The MyBee editors make use of this elaboration.

Age criteria

0 to 3-year-olds

- the control elements (including buttons) need to be large enough;
- a game should not last longer than 3 minutes;
- the 'story line', if there is one, should be short (no more than 2 actions);
- the site should contain no text (except maybe for the parents);
- the site should tempt children to discover and try out.



3 to 7-year-olds

- games should be 'fun' (no realistic images of fighting);
- games may be exciting and challenging but not too difficult;
- a game should last no longer than 15 minutes;
- the site should tempt children to discover and try out;
- any possible information should be in line with the interests of pre-school children and children in the lower classes of primary school (animals are always popular) and be available as images.

7 to 10-year-olds

- the site may contain text but not too much;
- games may have a more complicated 'story line';
- games may last more than 15 minutes provided that there is a 'pause' or 'save' option available;
- any possible information should be in line with the interests of pupils in the middle classes of primary school (animals, sports, cars, etc) and contain sufficient images;
- if the site has facilities for social interaction (forum, chat room, etc) then 'from the age of 9' has to be clearly indicated. In addition, the forum, the chat room, etc has to be permanently moderated.



The portal-site within the MyBee-browser for the children who can read

