

Content Advisor

A supplement to Chapter 10 of “Windows Vista: The Missing Manual”

Content Advisor was an earlier Microsoft stab at giving parents a way to control what their children view on the Web. You can specify sites you approve, as well as sites you want to block. If somebody tries to visit a Web site that you’ve declared off-limits using this feature, he’ll see a message saying that the site isn’t available.

Today, there’s not much point in learning about the Content Advisor. It’s not as useful or easy to figure out as Parental Controls, described in the book. Not as effective, either; part of it relies on Web site ratings, which are something like movie ratings except that Web sites are supposed to rate themselves. As you can well imagine, the resulting ratings feature isn’t exactly a foolproof (or even half-finished) system.

Still, if you’re interested, here’s how it works.

Turning on Content Advisor

To activate the Content Advisor, open Internet Explorer. Choose Tools®Internet Options. Click the Content tab, and then click the Enable button. (Along the way, you’ll be asked to authenticate yourself—to supply your password and click Continue to prove that you’re not, say, a virus.)

The Content Advisor dialog box, shown in Figure 1, presents four tabs, called Ratings, Approved Sites, General, and Advanced. The two most important, described here, are Ratings (Figure 1) and Approved Sites.

Ratings tab

In theory, you can click a raunchiness category (like Language, Nudity, or Sexual Material) and then move the slider bar to the left or right to loosen or tighten the restrictions. (Hint: You can't actually drag the slider's handle. You must click a notch on the slider with your mouse.)

This slider works by looking for the ratings associated with each Web page, as defined by the Internet Content Rating Association (www.icra.org). Unfortunately, the Content Rating Association doesn't actually rate Web sites; Web sites are supposed to rate *themselves*. As you can well imagine, the resulting Ratings feature isn't exactly a foolproof (or even half-finished) system.

Tip: The Content Advisor feature comes set to block *all* Web sites that don't have a rating—which is to say, 99.99 percent of them. If you do decide to turn on this feature, therefore, consider clicking the General tab and turning on "Users can see sites that have no rating." Otherwise, Internet Explorer will "protect" you and your kids from virtually the entire Internet—including perfectly innocent sites.

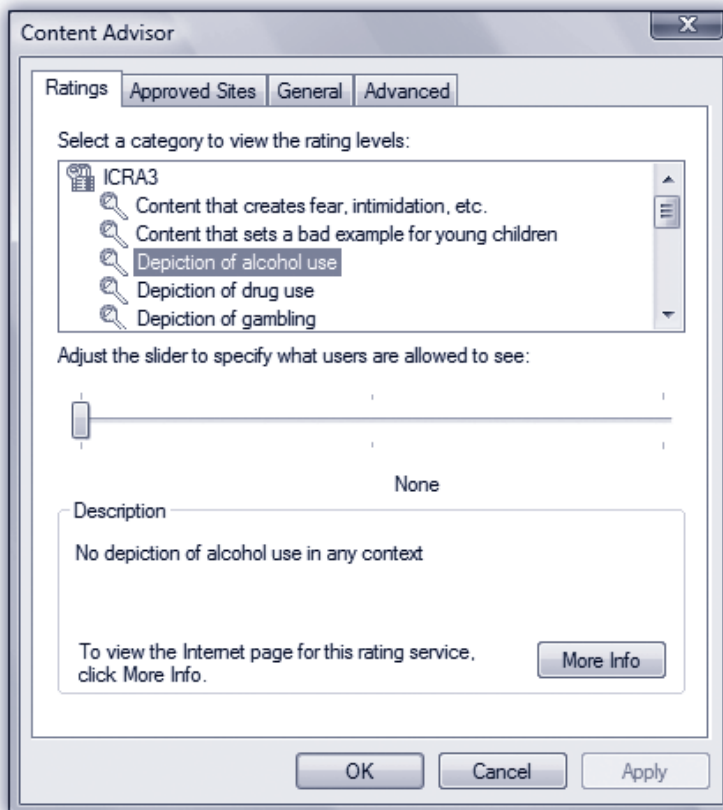


Figure 1: The ratings tab of the Content Advisor lets you control the kind of content your children can see when they browse the Web. You can customize this quite a bit, for example, loosening up on letting them see depictions of gambling, while tightening up on whether they can view violence.

Approved Sites tab

Use the Approved Sites tab to enter the addresses of particular sites you either want to permit or block. (It's normal for this list to show up empty, since it's designed to list Web pages *you* specify.) After you enter a URL, select Always to make the site available to your Web browser, or choose Never to make it unavailable.

The listings in the Approved Sites tab take precedence over the Ratings tab. If you type in a Web address and then click the Always button, your kids will be able to view that site regardless of where it falls in the ratings scheme.