



Online Privacy: Focus Group Testing with Youth

FINAL REPORT

Submitted to:

Office of the Privacy Commissioner

EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES INC.

March 2012

EKOS RESEARCH ASSOCIATES

Ottawa Office

359 Kent Street, Suite 300

Ottawa, Ontario

K2P 0R6

Tel: (613) 235 7215

Fax: (613) 235 8498

E-mail: pobox@ekos.com

Toronto Office

181 Harbord Street

Toronto, Ontario

M5S 1H5

Tel: (416) 598 8002

Fax: (416) 533-4713

E-mail: toronto@ekos.com

www.ekos.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Executive Summary	v
1. Introduction	1
1.1 Background and Objectives	1
1.2 Methodology	1
1.3 A Note on Qualitative Research.....	2
2. Findings.....	3
2.1 Online Privacy	3
2.2 Website.....	7
2.3 Graphic Novel	10

APPENDIX A: Email invitation and online registry

APPENDIX B: Parent consent form

APPENDIX C: Moderator’s Guide

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of this research was to explore the issue of online privacy with youth across Canada and learn more about what they are doing to protect themselves. It was also undertaken to seek feedback on a draft graphic novel the OPC is developing to educate youth about online privacy and to gather opinions about the OPC's youthprivacy.ca website.

Online focus groups were held with 34 youth between the ages of 12 and 17 from across Canada. Prior to attending the focus group, participants were asked to spend some time on the youthprivacy.ca website, and to read a short graphic novel in order to provide their feedback on these two methods of reaching youth with information about privacy. Two focus groups were conducted in French, and three in English. Participants were recruited through Probit, EKOS' online hybrid panel of Canadians. Recruitment involved the sampling of Probit panel members who are parents of a child or children under the age of 18.

The primary benefit of focus group discussions is that they allow for in-depth probing with participants on perceptions and attitudes related to the subject matter. The focus group technique is used as a means of developing insight and direction. The findings, therefore, should be treated as suggestive rather than definitive and representative of the government student loan borrower and non-borrower populations as a whole.

Teens and Privacy

Focus group participants indicated that they think of online privacy as protecting their identity from others who may access it online. Largely, for teens privacy is about keeping those things private that they would not want a stranger to know, including their age, where they live, where they go to school, their date of birth, social insurance number, phone number, passwords, banking and credit card information, and pictures of them. When it comes to who they are most concerned about misusing their information, it's typically strangers that are the biggest cause for concern – strangers such as stalkers, identity thieves, pedophiles, or hackers. Ex-friends and ex-boy/girlfriends are also of some concern, but to a lesser extent.

Focus group participants feel that protecting their privacy online matters, as it protects them from harm, from embarrassing situations, and from annoyances like receiving spam email. However, many also said that they are not particularly concerned about online privacy. Some feel like they are already doing what they can to protect their privacy, or that the amount of online activities they engage in is already quite limited. Many are not too concerned that what they do online might have implications for the privacy of others: some say they don't post much online about others anyway, or that they have good enough judgment not to post anything hurtful or damaging. Participants are generally aware of ways they can protect their privacy, and most report having taken some precautions to do so, such as adjusting their privacy settings on Facebook, using pseudonyms, limiting the amount of information they share, and checking with their parents.

Opinions of the youthprivacy.ca Website

Overall, participants found the website attractive, informative, easy to navigate and age appropriate. Some said the site made them aware of things they did not know before, and the information on the site has made them think and act more carefully about protecting their privacy. Most participants agree that the website is generally age appropriate for teens between the ages of 12 and 16.

Most focus group participants have not searched on the Internet for information about online privacy before, but a fair number of participants said they would be interested in a website such as youthprivacy.ca if they saw information online about it. Focus group participants said that they are quite cautious about advertising and links, so promoting the site online would have to be done in a careful way that wins their trust and interest. However, some feel that a website may not be the best way to reach them: some said they would be more likely to view a video about online privacy on YouTube, rather than click a link directly to a website.

Participants confirm that school is an important channel through which to reach kids with messages about online privacy. Classroom activities and discussions, school assemblies, and guest speakers are all good ways to address privacy issues with youth. Particularly effective for getting their attention is the use of “scare tactics”, such as talking about the worst consequences and dangers of online privacy.

Opinions of the Draft Graphic Novel

Overall, the graphic novel was received positively by focus group participants as a clear, effective and interesting way of delivering a message about online privacy. However, participants expressed a variety of opinions about the storyline: some felt it was relatable and realistic, while others felt the opposite (e.g., scenarios were exaggerated or contrived). Though many found the novel to be interesting, there were some that found it boring and something they'd be unlikely to read for fun. Participants generally felt the graphic novel was meant for a younger audience – pre-teens to young teens, or even elementary-aged children.

Participants suggested the novel should be accessible online through lots of links from various sites, particularly from social networking sites that young people use often. Participants suggested it would also be a good idea to use the novel as a tie-in to classroom lessons and school presentations in privacy. However, when asked whether would be likely to share a novel such as this with others, opinion was split: some would, but others feel they and their friends already know what they need to about online privacy.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND AND OBJECTIVES

The Office of the Privacy Commission of Canada (OPC) is an advocate for the privacy rights of Canadians. As Canada's privacy guardian, the OPC engages in public education and outreach to help Canadians better understand their privacy rights, how those rights are being tested and what they can do about it. The purpose of this research was to explore the issue of online privacy with youth across Canada and learn more about what they are doing to protect themselves. It was also undertaken to seek feedback on a draft graphic novel the OPC is developing to educate youth about online privacy and to gather opinions about the OPC's youthprivacy.ca website.

1.2 METHODOLOGY

Online focus groups were held with 34 youth between the ages of 12 and 17 from across Canada. Two focus groups were conducted in French, and three in English. Participants were recruited via an email invitation, which provided details about the nature of the online discussion and age requirements, as well as a description of how privacy of personal information would be protected. Parents of interested youth between the ages of 12 and 17 were provided with a link where they could register their child for one of the five discussion sessions and obtain a parental consent form. Once consent forms were returned, parents were sent a link where they could access a list of the questions to be posed in the discussion, a link to youthprivacy.ca and a copy of the draft graphic novel. Participants were instructed to read the novel and review the website in advance of the group. The email invitation, online registry and consent form are provided in the appendices of this report. Participants were told that they would be discussing online privacy in general, as well as providing their feedback on the website and the graphic novel and that quotes would be taken from the discussion for the purposes of reporting and for possible use in future OPC materials. Participants were also assured that no personal identities would be used in the discussion or in the use of quotes or reporting of findings. At the initial recruitment stage, 65 youth were recruited and registered to participate. Of these, 39 returned consent forms and were given access to the graphic novel and questions.

The table below provides a summary of attendance at the focus groups. In total, there were an equal number of girls and boys participating; 10 aged 12 to 13; 14 aged 14 to 15; and 10 aged 16 to 17. Participants were recruited through Probit Ekos' online hybrid panel of Canadians. Probit is assembled using a random digit dial (RDD) process for sampling from a blended land-line cell-phone frame. This provides full coverage of Canadians with telephone access, mirroring the population in Canada, and therefore, can be considered representative of the general public in Canada. Recruitment involved the sampling of Probit panel members who are parents of a child or children under the age of 18.

Table 1: Summary of Focus Groups

	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2	Focus Group 3	Focus Group 4	Focus Group 5
Date	March 1	March 5	March 5	March 6	March 7
Language	English	English	French	English	French
No. of Participants	7	6	6	9	6

1.3 A NOTE ON QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

The primary benefit of focus group discussions is that they allow for in-depth probing with participants on perceptions and attitudes related to the subject matter. The focus group technique is used as a means of developing insight and direction. The findings, therefore, should be treated as suggestive rather than definitive and representative of the government student loan borrower and non-borrower populations as a whole.

2. FINDINGS

2.1 ONLINE PRIVACY

Focus group participants indicated that they think of online privacy as protecting their identity or identifying information about themselves from others who may access it online. They tend to think of “privacy” as a way of protecting themselves from threats. The majority of threats that participants described as being of concern, in terms of protecting online privacy, are those that could put them in physical danger, such as, a person being able to find them in their home or stalk them. To a lesser extent, they also think of privacy as being able to protect them from others misusing their personal information to harm their reputation, to steal from them, or to steal or assume their identity. Primarily, they think of online privacy as keeping those things private that they would not want a stranger to know, or things that a stranger should not be able to know, including their age, where they live, where they go to school, their date of birth, social insurance number, phone number, passwords, banking and credit card information, and pictures of them. They recognize that online privacy has implications for what they broadcast/post online, such as to social networking sites, as well as for more seemingly one-on-one transactions, such as email conversations or online shopping.

Does privacy matter to teens?

Focus group participants, for the most part, feel that protecting their online privacy matters, as it protects them from harm. The possibility of someone using their information against them was commonly cited across all groups. “I don’t want creepy people to be able to find me, or mean people to be able to use my information against me,” said one. Some have also had undesirable things happen to them or someone they know – like a bad picture being posted of them, a family member’s credit card number being stolen, or a friend’s Facebook or gaming accounts being hacked – and they have learned from these situations why privacy matters and what personal information can be dangerous to share. In the words of one participant “mon amie s’est faite pirater son compte, quelqu’un lui a voler son identité et a commencer à parler de manière incorrect à nos amis”. Others spoke of having embarrassing photos of them posted on the Internet. Protecting privacy is also a matter of convenience for some: protecting privacy means reducing the incidence of “random people who try to contact you”, the amount of spam they get, and annoying targeted advertisements.

Are teens concerned about privacy online?

Focus group participants indicated concern over some aspects of online privacy. They mentioned concerns such as:

- Changing privacy settings on sites such as Facebook, requiring them to be vigilant and check their privacy settings.
- Automatic geo-tagging of photos posted to Facebook, which can reveal their immediate location to anyone who can view their online profile.
- Strangers knowing things about them and being able to look up basic information about them online and use it for malicious purposes.
- People they know being able to use personal information against them.
- People “getting into their business” by generally knowing what they are up to and where they are.
- Companies getting hold of their information and misusing it (e.g., spam, marketing).
- Putting other people in danger (friends, family) or hurting their feelings because of something they posted.
- Having someone post something embarrassing about them online.
- Risking future employment because of information a potential employer may be able to access on them.

To a lesser extent, participants also expressed concern over employers seeing their information and the government’s access to their information.

However, many also said that they are not particularly concerned about online privacy. Some said that depending on the circumstances, they may be more or less concerned; for example, they feel comfortable with Facebook because they are able to control what personal information others see about them. Some feel like they are already doing what they can to protect their privacy, or that the amount of online activities they engage in are already quite limited, so they are not concerned; for example, some said they are not on Facebook so they do not have to worry much about their information getting out there. They also said they do not share anything they don’t want everyone to know, they do not share their password, they do not share information they might later be embarrassed about, and they do not reveal identifying information about themselves or about other people they are close to, such as friends and family.

Who do teens trust online?

When it comes to who they are most concerned about misusing their information, it's typically strangers that are the biggest cause for concern – strangers who might want to cause them harm, including stalkers, identity thieves, pedophiles, or hackers. Youth perceive themselves to be fairly diligent in not sharing private information with people they do not trust, but some also feel that strangers may also have a way of finding out information about them no matter what they do to protect themselves, making strangers the bigger threat. Many also said they are concerned about businesses, particularly online stores, misusing their information by handing it over to third parties who may gain access to their accounts, or target them with unwanted emails and advertising. Ex-friends, rivals, or ex-boy/girlfriends or people who know them but who they do not trust are also a threat, although somewhat less so, and one participant talked about bullies.

In a minority of cases, respondents said that friends may occasionally, accidentally reveal something about them, not realizing the potential dangers. But generally, friends are people they trust and, unless it were a friend they had a falling out with, they do not think they have to worry about their friends when it comes to privacy.

Many are not too concerned that what they do online might have implications for the privacy of others. Some said that protecting the privacy of others is a concern of theirs, while others do not think about it much. Some said that they do take care to protect the privacy of others. One noted “je ne publie pas de photos sans demander à la personne sur la photo avant”. Another said “je fais très attention avant de parler de ma vie privée ou de celle de mon entourage”. A few described getting into situations that they realized were bad after it was “too late”, for example, posting a negative comment about a friend. The consequences they perceived as arising from these slips included hurting someone's feelings, damaging someone's reputation, or losing a friendship. Many participants, however, denied posting anything that could identify their friends or family. Some said they do not post much in the first place; some said they have good enough judgment not to post anything hurtful or damaging, and one said they speak to their friends or family before posting something like a picture or a video of them.

What do they do to protect themselves online?

Participants are aware of ways they can protect their privacy online, and most seem to be taking some steps to protect themselves.

- Several said they use privacy settings on sites like Facebook to block or hide their personal information from the public or certain people and only sharing information online with people they trust. Said one participant, “I frequently check my Facebook privacy settings, in case they've changed.”
- A few said they will only accept friend requests from people they know personally.

- Some avoid posting details they regard as very private, including their phone number and address; instead they choose to use less specific location names, like a city, province or country.
- Some even said they do not put their personal information online at all, and do not join social networking sites.
- Some said they use caution right away when they visit a site that does not seem right to them; for example, one participant said, “If I’m on a website I don’t trust, I’m obviously not going to give my real name, and age... etc.”
- Some generally use pseudonyms, fake birthdates and different email addresses to protect themselves online anywhere, whether they’re using a reputable site or not. Said one, “When I sign up for a site I [say] that I’m over 20”.
- Some said they check with their parents before signing up for accounts; one even said that only their parents can log in for them on sites requiring a registration. Another participant noted, “My parents have moderate access to all I’m on, and I’m not on any networks they didn’t approve of” and another said, “I always check with my parents before I do anything, just to make sure it’s safe for me, and they tell me to be careful of who I talk to.”
- Some use different passwords for different accounts, make their passwords difficult, and change their passwords often. Some described less diligence, however, about using passwords on their mobile phones. Some participants stated that they would place passwords on their phone, or learn how to, as a direct result of the focus group or information they obtained on the website.
- A few described checking for viruses or using ad blocking software as a means to protect their privacy.
- A few mentioned only making online purchases from reputable sources and checking up on businesses; said one: “[I] always crossreference businesses to know if I should trust them.”

For the few who acknowledge that they do not do anything to protect their privacy, the main reason provided was a lack of personal information worth hiding (one suggested not having a credit card account gives them nothing to hide), or they do not make much information available about themselves online in the first place. “I only give certain information to certain people that I whole-heartedly trust,” said one.

2.2 WEBSITE

In preparation for the online discussion, participants were asked to explore the information and materials posted on the youthprivacy.ca website. Overall, participants found the website attractive, informative and age appropriate. One participant said, “I liked the variety of things available on it, and the overall style of the website was very appealing to teens.” Participants described the site as easy to navigate, with information being easy to find. “I liked it because it was easy to find the information that I needed and it had an appealing aesthetic,” said one participant.

Although most provided favourable comments about the site, a few were less impressed with the site, and provided suggestions for improvements. A few found it to be somewhat boring and suggested it could be livened up. One said, “The website was pretty boring. It had a lot of detailed information to read. This is good if kids have to do a project but otherwise probably would not read it. It was just too long and not flashy.”

Content/Information

Several participants said the website presented a lot of information, which they found to be a positive aspect of the site. One participant said: “It helped further my knowledge on privacy online and how I can help myself stay safe online.” Some commented that the information on the site was very comprehensive, and that it covered everything they thought they needed to know about privacy and more. “Je crois que le site web est très bien conçu, rempli d’informations utiles sur le sujet. Il m’a aidé a voir des facettes de ma vie privée sur Internet auxquelles je n’avais pas pensé”. Some said the site made them aware of things they did not know before, including the concept of their personal information being sold. Several participants indicated that the website contained some information that they found to be useful, new or otherwise informative for them, such as:

- Tips for managing personal information;
- How to avoid having your information stolen;
- The quiz;
- The “top tips” blog posts; and,
- The section “My privacy everyday”.

Some said that the information on the site has made them think and act differently. One explained that they would be more careful about what they publish about themselves online from now on, and more critical about the advertising directed at them. Others planned to take action to protect themselves, such as introducing passwords. “Je cherchais a savoir comment mieux protéger mes informations et le site m’as montré plusieurs façons”.

Several participants described the site as being “complete”. Though many found the site to be informative, one participant found the website to be too “generalized”. One commented, “I didn’t see anything [in] particular on how to protect yourself on certain sites,” and others would like to see information about what kind of personal information is dangerous to share and what to do if you are a victim of a scam or identity theft. A few indicated that they were already aware of much of this information, having been educated on these issues by parents and at school. A few participants in one French group suggested adding material on online purchasing.

Still others suggested the site might be *too* detailed, or at least, a bit too much information to take in at once: “There was a lot of information to go through ... I think I may go back later to look at it again,” said one. “Le texte aurait pu être plus bref”, said another. A few suggested that the content could be presented in smaller chunks (i.e., lists and boxes) to make the information more digestible for this age group.

Age appropriateness

Most participants agree that the website is generally age appropriate for teens. They felt the site was speaking to them directly, and found the content and visual design well targeted to youth. In the words of one participant “le design du site est parfait pour les jeunes”. Participants noted “the energetic colour palette and simple navigation” and “the way everything is explained”, as aspects that are appealing to and targeted to teens. Several suggested the website is very good for targeting teens between the ages of 12 and 16. A minority think the website may even be appropriate for teens up to 20. Some think that it is not as appropriate for early adolescents and younger teens because of the amount of text. For instance, one said that though the blog format is interesting, it is perhaps too text-heavy for younger teens and even some older teens. Another said that though the amount of reading might be a challenge for younger audiences, the information itself is definitely relevant to teens. A few feel, however, that the content of the site makes it more appropriate for parents of teens: the language used, the text-based emphasis, and the absence of pictures indicated to a minority of participants that the website is targeting an older audience.

Other site components

- The tagline “My Privacy. My Choice. My Life” is generally thought to be tolerable: some said it is “somewhere in between okay and good” and perhaps “a bit cheesy, but overall pretty good.”
- The layout is described as “bright and cheerful” and “simple and functional”. Participants like that the layout makes it easy to find things without getting too distracted or lost.
- Several agree that the website should have a search field on the main page for visitors to be able to navigate to what they want.
- Some commented that the links are interesting, although one thought this section needs to be better organized.

- Some of the empty space could be filled to make the site more aesthetically interesting, perhaps with photos and point-form bits of information. One suggested there could be photos of real people in real situations to give the site a human touch.
- Several commented that they liked the video component of the site, saying the main page video was interesting, and the videos produced by teens were creative and representative of the ideas of people their age. The videos were short and to the point and “not too cheesy”, said one.
- A few participants were somewhat critical of the language. A few suggested the use of “cool” was overused and was an attempt to make things sound too simple. One suggested more complex language could be used.
- One participant described having trouble viewing some features on their iPod, and suggested that the site needs to be more compatible with mobile devices that teens often use for web browsing.
- One participant suggested, and a few others agreed, that a forum on the site may be a good way to engage visitors and keep the conversation going.

How to reach youth about privacy issues

Most focus group participants have not searched on the Internet for information about online privacy before. Some said the reason for this is that they are “already pretty aware”, it had not come to mind before, or they do not think they need to look into it because they are not involved much in social networking or other online activities. One said they would not normally look for that sort of information if it were not “newsworthy.” A minority said they had looked into the issue. One participant said, “I hear all the time about privacy issues and go to different news sites to find info about them.” One indicated being aware of a Canadian website dedicated to cyber security, and one also indicated they had looked information on the U.S. ACTA and SOPA bills. Another said, “[I’ve] looked up ‘privacy’ on Google, and [I’ve gone] to Google privacy settings.”

Though most have not looked into the issue before, a fair number of participants said they would be interested in a website such as youthprivacy.ca if they saw information online about it. One said that they would be interested in the site if they saw a link or ad for it, “Car c’est toujours utiles d’en savoir plus sûr le rôle d’Internet dans la vie privée.” However, some said their interest would mostly have to do with whether they had something on their mind at the time about privacy issues. In order to be enticed to click on it, the link would need to look official (perhaps featuring a Government of Canada logo), display credentials indicating it is a legitimate website and not a virus or scam, and perhaps show up as a link provided in the search results by a search engine such as Google. A number of focus group participants said they would be sceptical of clicking any link, saying that they do not just click on “random links” and it would depend what website the link was seen on. With the viruses that are out there, said one, you never know where that link

might actually take you. On the other hand, some participants said that they just would not be interested. One participant said “ce n’est pas un sujet qui me préoccupe.”

Focus group participants said that they are quite cautious about advertising and links, so reaching them with messages about online privacy would require using connections that they trust most online. Some said they would not be likely to go to website like youthprivacy.ca, even if it were recommended by parents or teachers; it would be better to attract their interest with something eye-catching on a site they already go to frequently, like Facebook or YouTube (as long as the link looks reputable). Videos posted to YouTube were suggested by a number of participants as a more desirable way to access information online as an alternative to getting information from a website. Some said they would be more likely to view a video about online privacy on YouTube, rather than click a link directly to a website.

Participants confirm that school is an important channel through which to reach kids with messages about online privacy. Integration with school curricula that can allow for projects, activities in class and classroom discussions can reinforce messages. Participants also feel that school assemblies are an appropriate venue to talk about online privacy: these could feature presentations, guest speakers or videos. One participant suggested bringing in a well-known guest speaker that young people admire (such as a hockey player). Representatives of the police are also seen as appropriate guest speakers, particularly if they describe real dangers and crimes they have seen. A few suggested that mentoring programs could get older students to share their knowledge with younger students. A couple of participants also suggested that well-designed games and quizzes could help them learn.

The way the message is framed in any of these contexts is very important, said focus group participants. Particularly effective methods of getting their attention may be the use of “scare tactics”, such as talking about the worst consequences and dangers of online privacy. True stories about “privacy disasters” from people who have been affected by an online threat and attention-grabbing, sensational slogans or catchphrases would make the information memorable, according to several participants. One participant said, “Scaring people is the best way to [raise] awareness.” But the information also has to be relevant in order to stick with them, they stipulated. Another said, “Make it involve real teen scenarios so we know it is not only adults giving us a lecture.” Another said “[Give] us information in a serious way to incline us to think for ourselves.”

2.3 GRAPHIC NOVEL

Overall appeal

As already described, participants were given access to a print copy of the graphic novel in draft form in advance of the discussion. This novel features a storyline with teenage characters dealing with issues of online privacy. Overall, the graphic novel was received positively by focus group participants as a clear, effective and interesting way of delivering a message about online privacy. It encouraged readers to consider or reconsider their own practices to protect themselves and their personal information. Some

elements, however, were seen to detract from the graphic novel, including the use of language and the maturity level the novel seemed to be targeting.

Content and message

The overall message of the graphic novel is clear and makes sense, according to participants. One said they “liked that it was straight to the point.” Others said the novel made sense to them from beginning to end. All in all, readers had no difficulty understanding what was going on or following the storyline. The message of the storyline was also said to be effective and made readers think about the ways they protect themselves online and the potential dangers. One participant said, “it made me reflect on my habits and my online life.” The idea of social networking websites selling people’s information caught some readers’ attention as new information. For some, this meant considering that their accounts could be hacked and personal information sold or stolen, altered and shared online. Some said that they will pay more attention in the future to what they share about themselves online, particularly on Facebook. For a few, reading the graphic novel confirmed what they already knew about threats to online privacy and validated some of the measures they are taking: said one, “it actually made me feel pretty proud of the way I was [protecting myself] in the first place.”

The graphic novel elicited varying opinions about the storyline. While no one expressed confusion over the storyline or the message, not everyone liked how the story was constructed. Some liked the storyline and content of the novel, saying that it an interesting read and a nice break from homework. Some said they liked the novel because they thought the storyline was relevant and realistic and a couple of participants said they knew of events like those described in the novel happening to people in real life. Specifically, participants said they liked the use of modern social networking websites in the plotline. Participants also especially liked the dancing scene and the storyline of the character’s photo being altered which struck readers as being realistic (i.e., something they could imagine happening to them or someone they know). The drawings and the style of art were a particularly strong point with some participants, although others were caught up in the draft form of the document (e.g., draft drawings and lack of colour) making it difficult for them to comment on the ultimate style and look of the novel. Some also did not think the storyline was all that relatable: one said they could not relate to what happened to the character Dave in the dancing/photoshopping scenario because they would not be so easily embarrassed by having their picture altered and shared. Another also said the storyline was too exaggerated. Some felt the novel was too heavy in its concentration on social networking, to the exclusion of some other popular online activities of young people, including the use of chatrooms and online discussion forums.

Though many found the novel to be interesting, a few said that the novel was not what they would consider to be “fun” or recreational reading. Several said it was boring and “almost as dry as homework”. Though it was interesting and had good information, “no one would read that for fun,” said a few. The dialogue was characterized as “flat” by one. Several described the plotline as predictable, pulling down the quality of the novel: “If the whole thing about privacy was built into another story, it would be better.” Some of the humour also missed the target with this age group, including the light-hearted yet

serious element of Smartie the smartphone, who was a turn-off to several who found the character and the scenario (kids talking to an anthropomorphic phone) to be “cheesy”.

Age appropriateness

A few focus group participants felt the graphic novel was appropriate for teens, but most expressed the view that several aspects of the novel made it not quite appropriate for a teen audience. Participants generally felt the graphic novel was meant for a younger audience – pre-teens to young teens, or even elementary-aged children. Several felt that some aspects of the novel were somewhat childish, particularly the talking phone. One participant said “à 16 ans j’ai trouvé l’idée du cellulaire parlant un peu enfantine mais pour les plus jeunes l’idée est excellente.” Aside from the talking phone, some also felt the scenarios did not feel real enough for teenagers: the situations the characters faced were considered to be too juvenile, and not believable to have high school students in those scenarios. On the other hand, some felt that the scenarios in the novel were true to what could happen to anyone, no matter their age. A few thought it was suitable for teenagers because it seemed like it reflected things that could happen to them.

Aside from stylistic and content choices that made the novel seem too young, a few participants also suggested the message was more relevant to a younger audience. They said that kids in elementary school are using technology and social networking, and need to be taught about online privacy. One said about younger audiences, “It’s easier to change while you’re new at it. If it’s been 10 years you’ve been using it, then you probably would not change.” Because the scenarios in this graphic novel did not feature any drastic consequences, a few modifications to the novel would make it very suitable to elementary school students, some suggested, because the novel would not be “too scary” for them. It could teach them a warning about online privacy just when they need it, according to some. On the other hand, a few said the novel would not be relevant to a younger audience because younger kids do not put a lot of personal info online.

While many thought the scenarios seemed too young, the language at times felt stilted, according to a few participants. One said, “it had that adult-writing-about teenagers feel,” and another said that “some of the language made it seem like it was written by older people”. This language adds the unsuitability of the novel for pre-teens or teens. Participants in several groups pointed to the word “blouse” as a term that young people would not use. “Cool” was another word that participants described as being outside of the lexicon for this age group. Terms used in the gaming scene, such as *frag* and *PWND*, were also said to be sparsely used by teens, and as a result, would not be understood by many. One participant said that ‘even gamers do not use those words that often’, making the language seem contrived. On the other hand, a few appreciated the attempt to use language that integrated slang that is used by young people. One commented that overall they liked how the novel “used slang that our generation uses”, even though the overall sentiment expressed across the groups suggests that the tactic was not successfully executed.

Although many participants found the novel to be targeted to a younger audience, many agreed that youth (particularly younger teens and pre-teens and even older youth) could learn useful

information from the novel. In the words of one participant, “Je ne crois pas que beaucoup de gens savent quelles conséquences leurs utilisation de l’Internet pourrait entraîner”.

How to get the novel out to youth

Participants’ comments about ways to improve the graphic novel reflect earlier comments, including a desire for messages with more shocking content, and more information to drive educated decision-making. Some wished to read a more captivating story with a dramatic, high-stakes plotline. Participants suggested plot twists and consequences that would heighten their emotional investment in the story. For example, participants suggested storylines that involve:

- Having photos of someone taken at a party sent to their boss;
- Insulting a teacher and facing a punishment like suspension from school;
- Online predators, stalkers, serial killers; and,
- Making an online confession about having committed a crime and having the confession seen by police (like the Vancouver/Stanley Cup riots).

Some of those who suggested more drama and high-stakes consequences also suggested using real-life accounts to make the story more poignant for youth. “Many people I know, including myself, prefer for our information to be presented in a more ‘raw’ state,” explained one participant. Stressing that a story about something that actually happened to someone is a more effective way of making a message stick with young people: one participant said, “You can read any amount of fiction about it, but if you hear a real account, that makes all the difference”.

Participants suggested making the graphic novel available to kids online and in schools through a variety of efforts to help get the word out about online privacy. The novel should be accessible online through lots of links from various sites, several suggested, particularly from social networking sites that young people use often. Some also suggested the use of a Facebook page for the novel to be liked and shared and to link to the novel. Another suggested making it available for download on iTunes or online media storefronts. One suggested that online sharing of links to the book could be encouraged through an incentive (perhaps a contest). One participant cautioned that the novel should be kept in image form, because some people might not bother to download a PDF file. Some also suggested the use of a video component to go along with the novel. If the video were “short and gets to the point” it could work very well, because a lot of kids go on YouTube, some participants said; and it could also be effective to use in school assemblies or classrooms. One teen, who listens to the radio, suggested creating an audio segment that ties into the novel, and could be broadcast on radio.

Focus group participants agreed that schools are a good place to distribute the novel, as long as it is done in the right way: they could be distributed in class to coincide with classroom/curricular activities about online privacy, or at school assemblies featuring a presentation about online privacy. One also suggested, and several agreed, that the student agendas that are distributed at the beginning of the year,

would be a good place to include the novel. “Good idea about the agendas. Kids get bored in class and might read their agenda if there’s a graphic novel in it,” said one participant. School boards could also be brought on board to promote the novel and make it available on their websites, some suggested. Many felt that school libraries (and libraries elsewhere) would not be a good place to distribute these books; “definitely not libraries,” said one participant, and many others agreed. Another participant said, “I would be surprised to find it in a library because it is more of an informational hand out than a story that you would read for pleasure.” A few did like the idea of this being available in libraries, however, as well as the suggestion of making it available in counselling centres and the administration office.

According to the discussion results, opinion was split about whether teens would be likely to share a novel such as this with others. Many participants indicated that they would probably recommend the novel to a friend. One said the reason they would recommend it is because “It’s more interesting than being lectured about not being irresponsible.” Some others said it would depend on the person, but if they knew someone who they thought could benefit from the message or who could relate to a situation in the graphic novel, they might bring it up. On the other hand, a few would not share it with others: “They’d think I’m insane,” said one. A few others said they might not talk about it because their friends already have this type of information (i.e., ‘they know about online privacy already’).

APPENDIX A
EMAIL INVITATION AND ONLINE
REGISTRATION

RECRUITMENT SCRIPT TO BE SENT TO SELECT MEMBERS OF THE EKOS (PROBIT) ONLINE PANEL

ENG

Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada: Invitation for feedback from 12 to 17 year olds (online discussion about online privacy)

Dear <Probit parent >

The Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC) is holding a series of discussions with 12 to 17 year olds to learn more about their understanding, concerns and practices related to protecting personal information online. OPC also wants young people to provide their thoughts on a draft of a short graphic novel (19 pages) that it is producing on protecting privacy, as well as on its website designed to inform youth, parents and educators about privacy.

The Privacy Commissioner of Canada is an advocate for the privacy rights of Canadians. The mission of the OPC is to protect and promote the privacy rights of individuals. It helps to ensure that the Government of Canada and many of the private-sector organizations that collect personal information do so with the greatest of care and respect for privacy. EKOS Research Associates (Probit Inc) has been hired to lead the discussions online with young Canadians between the ages of 12 and 17.

Participation is easy! 12 to 17 year old participants are asked to spend 15 to 20 minutes before the group reading the draft graphic novel and checking out a website for youth (youthprivacy.ca). Your child can review this material and participate in the discussion right from your home computer. As the parent or legal guardian, your permission is required and you are welcome to view along with your son or daughter (as long as it's their opinions and feedback that we are getting). Younger kids may also need your assistance in typing in responses depending on their typing proficiency.

If you have a son or daughter between the ages of 12 and 17 that would be interested, we would really like your help with this research! It's important that the OPC is able to get this kind of feedback so that they can design the best possible tools to inform young Canadians about how to protect their privacy. The mission of the OPC is to protect and promote the privacy rights of individuals. Its job is to see that the Government of Canada and many of the private-sector organizations that collect your personal information do so with the greatest of care and respect for your privacy.

This is an online discussion in a secure and confidential environment. Your child will be asked to read the questions as they come up, type in answers and read along in the discussion. **All personal identities will be protected**, through the use of initials, first names or other nicknames, so no one else in the discussion will know who they are. Although you are a member of our Probit panel, your child's name and other personal information will **not be kept** as part of your file, **nor will we add** your child to our Probit panel. The OPC will receive a final report, which will contain excerpts or quotes from the discussion, but these quotes will only be identified as having come from a boy or girl of a certain age. **Absolutely no answers will be given out with names attached** and only EKOS will know what your child said.

Please be aware that the OPC may use these unattributed quotes in future materials it produces. Your child will be joined by about seven other young Canadians from all over the country in the online discussion (the chat will take about 1 hour and 15 minutes) All participants will receive a **\$50** incentive for their participation. The participants can choose to receive their incentive in the form of a cheque (delivered by mail) or as an Amazon.ca e-gift card (delivered via email).

The group discussions are scheduled for March 1st through 7th at 7PM each day. To register your child, click on the following link to choose a time and to get a few more details:

CLICK HERE

If the link does not work for you, please copy the following one into your browser:
XXX

Once you register, you will receive a confirmation email right away, including a consent form for parents to sign and return. Once that form is returned to us by fax or email you will receive two emails. One will contain your login details and the other will provide a secure link where you can print a copy of the questions that will be asked in the discussion, a copy of the draft 19-page graphic novel and the link to the website (youthprivacy.ca). Your child will be asked to read the novel and visit the site briefly before the discussion. You will be sent an email reminder the night before the group. We will send out the participation incentive the day after the group.

If you have any questions, contact James Gricken at EKOS Research: 1-877-338-1070 or jgricken@ekos.com.

EKOS Research Associates Inc. is committed to maintaining the security and privacy of the information we collect from the public, and we protect your personal information through appropriate physical, organizational and technological measures. For more information about our privacy practices, please read our [Privacy Policy](#). For questions regarding access to personal information held by Ekos, the accuracy of this personal information, or complaints related to Ekos' privacy practices, please contact our Privacy Officer at pobox@ekos.com

Thank you in advance for your interest. We hope your child can join us for the fun!

Susan Galley
Project Manager
EKOS Research Associates, Inc.
www.ekos.com

TEXT FOR THE REGISTRATION SITE FOR THOSE WHO WANT TO PARTICIPATE IN THE PANEL

INTRO

Thank you for visiting the registration site for the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada's (OPC) online focus groups with youth (ages 12 to 17). As explained in the email invitation, EKOS Research Associates has been hired by the OPC to lead a series of discussions with young people across Canada to get their views on protecting privacy online, as well as feedback on a graphic novel and website for youth (youthprivacy.ca) on this topic.

The chat sessions are scheduled to run for 1 hour and 15 minutes on March 1st through March 7th and we will be providing participants with a \$50 incentive for their participation.

Each group will have roughly eight youth, aged 12 to 17, from across the country. The questions will be asked by a member of EKOS (Probit Inc). Some sessions will take place in English, others in French.

After you sign your child up and send back the signed consent form, you will get an email confirming that your child is registered. A day or so later you will receive two emails. One will provide you with details on how to log in to the chat session and your password to log in. The second email will provide a link where you can read and/or print a list of the high level questions we will be asking, the website address (youthprivacy.ca) and a copy of the graphic novel in draft form for review. This can be done by email or by fax. If you don't have access to a scanner or fax, you can call us at 1-855-288-4932.

INTRO2

What is your child's language preference?

- English 1
- French..... 2
- No preference 3

What is your child's age?

- 12.....
- 13.....
- 14.....
- 15.....
- 16.....
- 17.....

Is your child:

A boy.....

A girl.....

What is your child's first name, initials or a name (e.g. a nickname) that we can call them in the group that they will remember? Your child's name and other personal information will **not be kept** as part of your file, **nor will** your child be added to our Probit Inc panel.

Enter

CHOOSEGRP

MAX 15

Which group would your child be available to attend?

NOTE that times are listed as eastern standard time and may not necessarily be in your own time zone

THNK3

GROUP NOT AVAILABLE

If... CHOOSEGRP = 99

If you are able to select one of the other available focus groups, please use the **Back** button to return to the previous screen and change your selection. Otherwise, thank you for your time.

PHONE

Please confirm that this is the best telephone number to reach you and your child at if we need to reach you before the discussion?

- Yes 1
- No (provide other number) 2

Last, when the discussion is complete, we would like to provide your child with a \$50 incentive for their participation. Please select the preferred method for receiving this incentive.

- By cheque, mailed to the home address
- As an electronic Amazon.ca gift card, sent by email

If by cheque
Who should the cheque be made out to, and where should it be sent?

{record name and address here}

If by Amazon.ca gift card
What email address should we send this to?

<enter current email address>
OR Enter new email address

It's important for you to know that the full transcript of the chat session will be provided to the OPC so that they can understand what youth think about this issue, and their views on the website and graphic novel. It will help them create the best tools they can to inform young people on the issue of privacy and how to protect themselves online. In our report we will also use some quotes taken directly from the discussions, but they will only be identified as having come from a boy or girl of a certain age. **Absolutely no answers will be given out with names attached** and only EKOS (Probit Inc) will know what your child said. EKOS will only use this personal information to host these discussions. We will not give this information to anyone else or use it again for any other reason.

It should also be understood that some of the materials that will be reviewed for the discussion are in draft form and are **not** to be copied, printed, shared or distributed for any purpose other than for this discussion.

If you have any questions, feel free to call James Gricken, EKOS Research, at 1-855-288-4932 or email him at jgricken@ekos.com.

EKOS Research Associates Inc. is committed to maintaining the security and privacy of the information we collect from the public, and we protect your personal information through appropriate physical, organizational and technological measures. For more information about our privacy practices, please read our [Privacy Policy](#). For questions regarding access to personal information held by Ekos, the accuracy of this personal information, or complaints related to Ekos' privacy practices, please contact our Privacy Officer at pobox@ekos.com

CONFIRMATION MESSAGE FOR THOSE WHO SUCCESSFULLY REGISTER IN THE FOCUS GROUP

ECONFIRM

Office of the Privacy Commissioner Of Canada: Confirmation of online registration for group discussion

Hello, (IMPORTED NAME),

This is to confirm that your child is registered to attend an online discussion taking place on March < > at < >PM. The discussion will be in <language>

Thank you for agreeing to participate. Attached is a copy of the consent form that must be signed by a parent or legal guardian. Once that form is returned to us by fax to (613) 235-8498 or scanned and sent as an email attachment, we will send you two emails. One will have login instructions. The other will have a link that can be used to access and print the graphic novel for review, the questions and the link to the website youthprivacy.ca. We **MUST** have that signed consent form or we will not be able to send you these details for your child to participate in the discussion.

If you want to contact us about this group, please call James Gricke at 1-855-288-4932 or email him at jgricken@ekos.com.

EKOS Research Associates Inc. is committed to maintaining the security and privacy of the information we collect from the public, and we protect your personal information through appropriate physical, organizational and technological measures. For more information about our privacy practices, please read our [Privacy Policy](#). For questions regarding access to personal information held by Ekos, the accuracy of this personal information, or complaints related to Ekos' privacy practices, please contact our Privacy Officer at pobox@ekos.com

THNK

Thank you for your registration. We will send you a confirmation email shortly.

THNK2

Unfortunately, this discussion group is already full. If you want to select a different time, please use the **Back** button to return to the previous screen and change your selection. Otherwise, thank you for your time.

APPENDIX B
PARENTAL CONSENT FORM



**Online Focus Groups with Youth for
Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada**

The purpose of these group discussions is to explore privacy issues with youth, as well as obtain feedback on a draft of a graphic novel and on an existing website designed to inform youth, parents and educators about privacy.

The Research is being conducted by EKOS Research (Probit Inc) and is commissioned by the Office of the Privacy Commissioner of Canada (OPC).

Your child has been invited to participate in a 1 hour and 15 minute discussion online during the week of February XX, 2012, and is asked to review in advance a draft of a graphic novel (19 pages) and visit the website youthprivacy.ca. Both have been developed by the OPC. There will be no auditory component to the discussion. Respondents will be asked to type in all responses. Participants will be entitled to a \$50 incentive for their participation in the discussion. They can choose to receive this incentive by cheque from EKOS (delivered by mail) or in the form of an Amazon.ca e-gift card (delivered via e-mail).

Eight to ten participants will be included in each discussion. All participants must be between the ages of 12 and 17, and reside in Canada to attend. Participation is voluntary. Your child may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time during the process, or refuse to answer any question. The personal information of youth participants will not be kept, retained or used by EKOS (Probit Inc) in any future research. A transcript of the discussion will be generated and submitted to the OPC. Findings from the discussion will be reported to the OPC, including quotes from participants. No personal identities will be used in the discussion, in the use of quotes or reporting of findings. The OPC may use unattributed quotes from participants in this focus group in materials it develops in the future.

It should be understood that some of the materials that will be reviewed are in draft form and are not to be shared, copied, printed or distributed for any reason beyond the review for this discussion.

EKOS Research Associates Inc. is committed to maintaining the security and privacy of the information we collect from the public, and we protect your personal information through appropriate physical, organizational and technological measures. For more information about our privacy practices, please read our [Privacy Policy](#). For questions regarding access to personal information held by Ekos, the accuracy of this personal information, or complaints related to Ekos' privacy practices, please contact our Privacy Officer at pobox@ekos.com

I hereby consent to _____ (fill in child's first name) participating in this research and agree that his/her unattributed quotes and comments may be used in future materials developed by the OPC.

Full name of parent: _____

Signature of parent: _____

Date of agreement: _____

APPENDIX C MODERATOR'S GUIDE

PROTECTION OF ONLINE PRIVACY

ONLINE FOCUS GROUPS WITH YOUTH (AGES 12-17)

MODERATOR'S GUIDE

1. INTRODUCTION (5 MINUTES)

These discussions are being held with 12 to 17 year olds to talk about privacy and protecting personal information online.

We are doing this for the Office of the Privacy Commission of Canada or the OPC. The mission of the OPC is to protect and promote the privacy rights of individuals. Its job is to see that the Government of Canada and many of the private-sector organizations that collect your personal information do so with the greatest of care and respect for your privacy.

The OPC would like help from you today in 3 areas. They are interested in:

- 1- learning more about what kids your age think about privacy and what you are doing, if anything, in this area when you are online.
- 2- getting feedback on a graphic novel the OPC is finalizing. It's been developed with the involvement of young people and now they would like to run it by you before they start the final steps in the design.
- 3- knowing what you think of their youthprivacy.ca website.

Everything that you tell us here today is completely confidential. Only *Probit* knows who you are. We will use unattributed quotes from what you tell us today to develop a report for the OPC, but no names or other identifying information will be shared with the OPC. Please be aware that the OPC may use or refer to these unattributed quotes in future materials it produces. There are no right or wrong answers. We're just looking for your honest opinions. It's okay to disagree or have a different story.

Here's how it will work:

- We will put the questions out to all of you one by one and wait for everyone to send us back your answers.
- You can answer a question we ask, and you can also add another comment from what you see that someone else has said.
- From time to time we may also send out a question for one individual participant if there was something that we didn't understand or if we would like some more details. In that case, only you will see that question.
- There are a few people from the OPC online who are observing the discussion out of interest, but they do not have any information that identifies you.

2. PRIVACY IN GENERAL (25 MINUTES)

1. When someone talks about online privacy, what do you think this means?
2. Are you concerned about protecting your privacy online?
 - » Why does protecting your privacy matter?
3. What types of things do you consider to be "personal information"?
 - » What types of personal information do you think that you need to protect?
4. When you share personal information online, what are you most concerned about?
 - » Are you concerned about others misusing your personal information online?
 - » Who are you most concerned will misuse your personal information? (e.g., friends/ex-friends, acquaintances, businesses, strangers, thieves ...)
5. Do you ever think about how your actions online affect the privacy of others (for sharing information about your friends or family)?
 - » Do you ever think about protecting other people's personal information?
6. Do you do anything in particular to protect your privacy online? Can you give us some examples of what you have been doing?
 - » If you haven't taken steps to protect your privacy, why?

3. GRAPHIC NOVEL (25 MINUTES)

These questions are about the graphic novel the OPC is producing to help get youth thinking about online privacy.

7. What did you think of it? Did you like it? Not like it? Give us some examples of what you liked or liked less about it, and why.
 - Was it interesting?
 - Was it clear? Did it make sense?
8. Did you find that the book was meant for your age group? Why do you say this?
 - Did it seem like it was meant for someone older or younger?
9. Did it make you think about some of the things that could really happen to you?
 - Do you think other youths would learn anything new from this graphic novel or would it make them think about situations differently?
10. Would you mention this to your friends or share it with them if they seemed interested? In other words, is this a good way of finding out about privacy issues? Why or why not?
11. Is there any information or ideas that you think should be included in the story?
12. Was there anything you found difficult to understand? What was it?
13. Where would you expect to find a graphic novel like this (e.g., in schools, libraries, online).

4. WEBSITE (20 MINUTES)

These questions are about your impressions of the youthprivacy.ca website, which is designed to inform youth, parents and educators about privacy.

What did you think of the website? Did you like it? Not like it? Provide some examples of what you liked or didn't like about it, and why.

- Did you find it interesting, boring, too detailed/not detailed enough, etc?
- Did the site seem like it was meant for youth? Why do you say this?

Was the information useful? Why or why not?

Does the site answer all your questions about privacy?

- What kind of information is missing?

What's the best way to reach youth about privacy issues?

If time permits:

Have you ever used the Internet to look up information about privacy? Can you provide some examples of sites you have been to?

If you saw a link to a web site about privacy (like this one), would you click it? Why?

5. END

20. Does anyone have anything to add to the discussion that we haven't talked about?

21. This is the end of our discussion. I would like to say that everyone's feedback has been really helpful. This information will be very useful for the OPC. Thank you so much for taking the time to participate. I hope you all found it to be as much fun as I did!

I want to remind everyone that some of the materials that will be reviewed for the discussion are in draft form and are not to be copied, printed, shared or distributed for any purpose other than for this discussion.