

For Immediate Release

ARTIX ENTERTAINMENT MODIFIES WEBSITES FOLLOWING CARU REVIEW

CARU Examines Artix Sites To Assure Compliance with Guidelines, COPPA

New York, NY–April 23, 2009– The Children’s Advertising Review Unit (CARU) of the Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc., has recommended that Artix Entertainment modify the Websites www.aqworlds.com, www.battleon.com, www.dragonfable.com, and www.mechquest.com to assure compliance with CARU’s self-regulatory guidelines for children’s advertising and the federal Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act (COPPA.) The company has taken steps to do so.

The Websites came to the attention of the Children’s Advertising Review Unit through its routine monitoring of the Internet. CARU monitors Websites for compliance with CARU’s *Self-Regulatory Program for Children’s Advertising*, including guidelines on Online Privacy Protection, as well as with COPPA.

The Websites offer users an opportunity to create free user accounts in order to play different online games. Individuals with active user accounts are then able to sign up for forums to discuss the games with other players. CARU determined upon its initial review that users who signed up for forums could post personally identifiable information, such as first and last name, email address, home address, and phone number.

After reviewing the Websites for compliance with CARU’s *Guidelines* and COPPA, CARU was concerned with the following practices:

- The lack of a neutral age-screening process.
- The lack of tracking mechanism in accordance with the neutral age screening process.
- The collection of personally identifiable information from children under 13 without any prior parental consent.
- Allowing children to post PII on the site’s forums without prior parental consent.

In response to CARU’s inquiry, Artix asserted that it would modify its practices. Specifically, the company asserted that the age-verification page no longer is written in a way that may lead children to falsify their age and now employs a neutral age-screening process. If a prospective registrant indicates that she is under the age of 13, she is channeled into an age-specific registration process, which does not collect or require disclosure of any personal information, such as an email address.

The operator noted that if it obtains actual knowledge it has inadvertently collected personal information from children under the age of 13, it will immediately delete such information from its database.

With respect to the Websites’ forums, Artix asserted that the optional first and last name fields during registration were removed. Additionally, Artix advised CARU that it would require verifiable parental consent in order to register for the forums.

With regard to Adventure Quest Worlds MMO, www.aqworlds.com, a real-time, multiplayer game that includes chat features, the operator maintained that children under the age of 13 are now restricted to “canned chat,” which allows them to access a list of fixed phrases and does not allow them to freely enter information. The canned chat feature assures that children under the age of 13 cannot post or share personal information through the chat feature.

ARTIX, in its operator's statement, said the company "values CARU's role in safeguarding children's privacy and that it looks forward to participating in CARU's self-regulatory process in the future."

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CARU's inquiry was conducted under NAD/CARU/NARB Procedures for the Voluntary Self-Regulation of National Advertising. Details of the initial inquiry, CARU's decision, and the advertiser's response will be included in the next NAD/CARU Case Report.

About Advertising Industry Self-Regulation: The National Advertising Review Council (NARC) was formed in 1971 by the Association of National Advertisers, Inc. (ANA), the American Association of Advertising Agencies, Inc. (AAAA), the American Advertising Federation, Inc. (AAF), and the Council of Better Business Bureaus, Inc. (CBBB). Its purpose is to foster truth and accuracy in national advertising through voluntary self-regulation. NARC is the body that establishes the policies and procedures for the CBBB's National Advertising Division (NAD) and Children's Advertising Review Unit (CARU), as well as for the National Advertising Review Board (NARB) and Electronic Retailing Self-Regulation Program (ERSP).

NAD and CARU are the investigative arms of the advertising industry's voluntary self-regulation program. Their casework results from competitive challenges from other advertisers, and also from self-monitoring traditional and new media. The National Advertising Review Board (NARB), the appeals body, is a peer group from which ad-hoc panels are selected to adjudicate those cases that are not resolved at the NAD/CARU level. This unique, self-regulatory system is funded entirely by the business community; CARU is financed by the children's advertising industry, while NAD/NARC/NARB's sole source of funding is derived from membership fees paid to the CBBB. Funding for ERSP is derived from membership fees paid to the Electronic Retailing Association. For more information about advertising self regulation, please visit www.narcpartners.org.