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August 27, 2010

The Honorable Edward J. Markey  
The Honorable Joe Barton  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, DC 20515

Re: About, Inc.'s Response to your Request for Information Regarding  
our Privacy Practices.

Dear Representatives Markey and Barton:

I write in response to your August 5, 2010 letter to Cella Irvine requesting information regarding About.com's privacy practices and the online data collection policies that help support its free content business model. About.com is a wholly owned subsidiary of The New York Times Company.

About.com delivers high quality content on approximately 70,000 different topics that is personally relevant to its visitors. With more than 40,000,000 average monthly unique visitors in the United States (per comScore), About.com ranks among the country's top websites. As you will see from the specific answers below, About.com's privacy practices and online data collection policies are uniformly consistent with industry best practices.

**1. What specific information about consumers does your company collect, either through your own website or through business relationships with third parties?**

**Non-Personally Identifiable Information.** ("Non-PII") We use cookies that we drop on all visitors to our site to collect the originating site from which visitors enter About.com (the "Site") (in cases where the visitor clicked through from a search engine), the visitor's computer IP address and their usage patterns, including browser, operating system, date and time of visit, and Interest verticals visited.

**Personally Identifiable Information.** (“PII”) The only PII we collect has been willingly and explicitly given to us. We never use PII for the purposes of targeting advertisements.

**Email Address.** Our visitors who would like to have an email newsletter delivered to them are required to provide their email address. We also request email addresses from forum members for password management purposes, and, if the user has requested that notification service, to notify forum users of posted responses.

**Name.** Visitors who elect to contribute content to our Site are required to provide their name. We use this information to correspond with them about their submissions.

**Age.** Visitors who elect to participate in forums are required to provide their age so that we may confirm that we are compliance with the Children’s Online Privacy Protection Act.

**Gender.** Visitors who elect to join our forums are given the option to fill out a limited profile for public viewing and may chose to provide gender information for inclusion in that profile. It is entirely optional to provide this information.

**2. If you have business relationships with third parties, please list the names of those third parties, including analytics firms.**

We have many business relationships with many third parties. We assume you are enquiring about business relationships that are connected to ad serving, data collection and targeting, and limit our answers to those relationships.

**Advertisers and Advertising Agencies.** Certain of our advertisers and their advertising agencies serve advertisements onto our Site directly through their own ad servers.

**Advertising Networks.** Certain of our advertisements are not sold directly by us, but through advertising networks. Our primary ad network relationship is with Google for AdSense. We use DoubleClick’s DART ad platform for managing and occasionally serving ads. We also participate in AOL’s Audience Network (formerly known as the Tacoda Network).

**Analytics Service Providers.** We do not run third party analytics.

**Data Collection.** We allow AOL’s Audience Network to place a few lines of code on our pages that enable AOL to identify the interests of visitors to our Site and target relevant ads to these visitors when they visit another site in the Audience Network. For example, if a visitor views the About.com Automobiles/Cars channel, an hour later she may be served an automobile ad on a different website. It is important to underscore that the information passed contains no PII and consists solely of the general topic of interest.

**3. How does your company collect consumer information (e.g., direct consumer input, cookies, beacons, Flash cookies, other surveillance technologies)?**

As discussed below, we collect visitor information only through direct consumer input and cookies.

**Direct Consumer Input.** Anyone can view the Site without providing PII, but if a visitor wishes to take advantage of certain free services, we require certain PII. This is discussed in more detail in our response to Question 1, above.

**Cookies.** We use “cookies” and other technologies to recognize return visitors and how much time they spend on the Site, as well as to help us understand where our visitors came from and are going. Visitors whose computers do not accept cookies from us will not be able to access certain areas of the Site.

**Beacons.** We do not use beacons. We ceased using a pixel tracker in December of 2009 but retain mention of it in our Privacy Policy in the event we elect to do so again.

**Flash Cookies.** We do not use Flash Cookies.

**4. How does your company use the information it collects, both directly or through third parties, if applicable?**

**Personally Identifiable Information.** We use PII only to provide the services for which the visitor provided the information. See our response to Question 1, above.

**Non-Personally Identifiable Information.** We use non-PII to perform statistical, demographic and marketing analyses of our visitors for product development purposes and generally to inform advertisers about the nature of our visitors. We also use such information to allow advertising to be targeted, in the aggregate, to those visitors for whom such advertising is most pertinent.

**5. Does your posted privacy policy fully explain these data collection and use practices?**

Yes. Please see the attached copy of our current Privacy Policy.

**6. Does your posted privacy policy identify for consumers all affiliated and unaffiliated entities with which you share or provide access to consumer data, whether through direct disclosure, cookies, or some other means.**

We do not share or provide access to any PII or non-PII with our affiliates. As discussed in more detail in our response to Question 2, above, we do allow certain third parties to collect non-PII on visitors to our site. Our Privacy Policy discloses these practices and provides opt-out information, but does not identify all third party relationships.

**7. Does your company sell or otherwise monetize the information it collects?**

**Personally Identifiable Information.** We do not sell or otherwise monetize the PII we collect.

**Non-personally Identifiable Information.** We use the non-PII we collect through our first-party cookies to offer more targeted, and thus more valuable, advertising.

- a. If yes, to which companies does it sell or otherwise disclose the personal information it collects?**

Not applicable, as we do not sell or otherwise disclose PII to third parties.

- b. What were the revenues associated with the sale or monetization for the last 12 months, or the most recent year for which your firm has such data?**

It is impossible for us to determine what percentage of our revenues is specifically associated with the increased value of more highly targeted advertising.

- 8. Is your company aware of all third-party tracking devices that may be installed on a user's computer when the user visits your site?**

No.

- a. If yes, what evaluations does your company perform to discover such devices. If no, why not?**

The limitations of technology make this impossible. Due to restrictions of browser security we are not able to read or track cookies that are set on anything but the About.com domain – that is, we are only able to know what information we are collecting through our own cookies. We have no practical way of monitoring or restricting the actions of any advertisers who track visitors to the Site by serving a graphic within their advertisements. Browsers, through plug-ins or add-ons, are also able to track any web transaction accessed while the plug-in or add-on is active, but again, we have no ability to view or limit that activity.

- b. What actions does your company take upon discovery of a previously unknown third-party tracking device?**

In the rare instances where we have been notified by a visitor that an advertiser is engaged in unsanctioned tracking activity, we have removed the offending advertisement or advertising network which served it.

- 9. Does your company serve different pages, content, or advertisements to visitors, based on information derived from tracking devices? If yes, please explain.**

Yes. When we serve advertisements directly, we use the non-PII gleaned from cookies to ensure that a visitor is not presented with the same advertisement again and again, and to sequence advertisements in a set as directed by the advertiser.

We do not serve editorial content based on the non-PII derived from our cookies.

**10. Does your company target individuals based on their health or financial status?**

No.

**11. Are there any user search or use habits that your company will not use for targeting purposes or tracking? If yes, what are they?**

Yes. We use Google's AdSense For Search product in order to deliver contextually relevant text advertisements to local "Site Search" results. We have enabled the "Safe" setting within AdSense to block risqué advertisements when the search results are displayed.

**12. Has your company conducted a legal analysis of the applicability of communications and consumer privacy laws to the targeting and/or tracking practices utilized by your firm? If yes, please explain what this analysis concluded.**

Yes. We have concluded that our practices are in accordance with all relevant laws, as well as industry standards, self-regulatory regimes and best practices.

**13. If your company tracks or targets visitors, how does it notify visitors to your company's site of this practice? If it does not provide notification, why not?**

We explicitly notify visitors of our data collection practices in our Privacy Policy and User Agreement which are linked to in the footer of each web page of our Site.

**14. If a user does not want to be tracked or targeted upon visiting your site, how would the user effectuate this preference?**

As we disclose in our Privacy Policy, visitors can manage the cookies set on their computer by configuring their web browser to limit cookie-setting. We further disclose that visitors may selectively opt-out of receiving third party cookies on the Site by clicking on a clear and prominent link to the National Advertising Initiative and the preference control page for Google's DoubleClick DART Ad-Serving cookie.

**15. Please explain whether your company provides the ability for consumers to "opt-in" to the use of these practices or "opt-out," including whether they have an option to prevent both data collection and use of their data. If your company provides the opportunity to opt-out, how many visitors have chosen this option according to your company's most recent data.**

**Personally Identifiable Information.** Because visitors only provide PII through an explicit and willful disclosure, this is a de facto "opt-in" arrangement.

**Non-Personally Identifiable Information.** Visitors must "opt-out" of the collection of non-PII. If a visitor's browser is accepting third-party cookies then that visitor can opt-out by following the instructions on the links to the third-party "opt-out" in our Privacy Policy or by changing his or her browser settings. See our response to Question 14, above. We

have no way of knowing how many people have changed their browser settings or deleted cookies for this purpose.

\* \* \*

About.com is strongly committed to respecting our visitors' privacy. We provide visitors with a user-friendly explanation of our privacy practices and information on how they may control their online experience. We welcome any further questions and thank you for this opportunity to explain our practices.

Very truly yours,



Kenneth A. Richieri

## ABOUT.COM ONLINE PRIVACY POLICY

### The Short Version

About.com will never share, rent, or sell your personal information without your consent, **unless it is required by law.**

When About.com sends newsletters to subscribers it may allow Advertisers or Partners to include messages in those newsletters but those Advertisers or Partners will never have access to your personal information including your email address. All newsletters will come directly from About.com. At any time a user may unsubscribe from a newsletter (click here).

### The Fine Print

About.com will use cookies, pixel trackers, server logs, and any Internet technology in order to measure the effectiveness of the About service and any Advertising campaigns as well as to target meaningful content and Ads to our users.

About.com uses DoubleClick, Google, and other third-party Ad Servers to serve and display Advertisements on About.com. About.com does not provide personally identifiable information to Ad Servers. They may use cookies, pixel trackers, or other internet technology to improve the effectiveness and targeting of Advertisements to you within About.com and any other place where that third-party is serving Advertisements. You may configure your web-browser to disable this. For more information about these third-party Ad Networks and opting out of tracking, see:

- [http://www.networkadvertising.org/managing/opt\\_out.asp](http://www.networkadvertising.org/managing/opt_out.asp)
- [http://www.doubleclick.com/privacy/dart\\_adserving.aspx](http://www.doubleclick.com/privacy/dart_adserving.aspx)

It is possible that portions or all of About.com may be sold to another company. In that event, applicable user information whether personally identifiable or otherwise may be transferred as part of that sale.

About.com also uses a pixel tracker to track users and measure effectiveness of The New York Times family of companies.

As privacy standards evolve and internet technologies change, About.com will update this policy to reflect those changes. Material changes to this policy will be prominently posted in advance on this site.

## Contact Information

If you have any questions about this Privacy Policy or our privacy practices, please visit us at:

- <http://www.about.com/gi/pages/pform.htm>

Or you can contact us by mail at:

*Customer Care  
About.com, Inc.  
249 West 17th Street*

*New York, NY 10011* Updated October 2009

### **Terms defined in our Privacy Policy:**

**Personal Information** – Information such as your name, address, email address or Social Security number that personally identifies you and could compromise your privacy.

**Advertiser** – A company or organization that purchases advertising space on a website to provide information about their product or service, often to persuade potential customers to purchase or use more of it.

**Partner** – A company or organization that has a business relationship with another company or organization involving the exchange of goods or services.

**Cookie** – A small piece of text that is stored on your computer by the web browser. Cookies contain specific information about your activity on a website, such as your site preferences or the items in your online shopping cart. Cookies are neither spyware nor viruses, although sometimes they are detected by anti-spyware products because they can track your visits to various sites over time.

**Pixel tracker** – A tiny, usually invisible graphic that is embedded on a web page that allows web publishers to track simple performance data, such as how many users have visited a web page in a given time period.

**Ad Server** – A company that provides the technology to display advertisements on web sites and allows publishers and advertisers to monitor ad performance.