

# science & TECHNOLOGY

## INTERNET SAFETY EXPERT SPEAKS AT MEREDITH

By Julia Houtchings  
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Internet Safety: an area most might think they have covered...but do they really? This exact question is what online safety expert Linda Criddle examined when she spoke in Kresge Auditorium on Wednesday, October 15, at 5 p.m. But for those who were unable to attend, do not think that she simply gave the usual "do's and don'ts" for online safety we have all heard a dozen times; instead, Criddle provided the audience with a crash course in what can only be described as "How to Think Like a Predator 101."

The first issue Criddle addressed was how and why Internet risks occur. This list of explanations includes lack of knowledge, carelessness, unintentional exposure of others (or by others), and flaws in technology. Online predators use all of the good and bad characteristics of this crime medium to their advantage. Criddle informed the audience that what an online predator might see in a photo or body of text is entirely different than what an ordinary internet user might see. Informing ordinary users

of these differences is crucial for effective online protection.

In her presentation, Criddle used as an example two seemingly innocent photos that a 15-year-old girl named Brittany had posted on a social networking site profile. The first photo was of Brittany sitting on her front porch and the other of her dad sitting inside the family car parked in front of their house. The uninformed eye might look at these photos and see only the description that I have just given you. However, predators, Criddle informed us, see much, much more. They see that Brittany's shoulders are up so high they almost touch her ears – a sure sign that she is shy and unsure of herself. They see the house number 101 by the door, which means her house is located on the corner of two streets. They see the hand-railing by the steps – a sign that a disabled or elderly person lives with her family.

From Brittany's clothes and the outside appearance of her house in the background, they can deduce

her socio-economic status. But perhaps most importantly in the first picture, predators notice the broken plant holder with holiday flowers. Why the broken plant holder? Why would a plant holder be broken? Brittany and her family hide the house key underneath it, and it has broken from constant movement.

Pictures can say a thousand words and Brittany has TWO. In the second photo, predators would take notice of the business across the street from her house and be able to note business hours. From there, they would be able to observe Brittany and her family inconspicuously. They would also detect the street signs at this intersection; if the predators only knew her house number at this point, her second picture gave her address away completely. What about the city Brittany lives in? If she did not disclose this information on her profile, her second photo even has city event banners hanging on the light post, right above the street signs. In merely two photos, 15-year-old Brittany has unintentionally

revealed her exact address and given full access to anyone that discovers her profile online.

Criddle gave the audience well over 15 minutes to observe the two pictures while she continued to talk and, yet, she still had to tease most of these observations out of the audience. The time it takes for criminals, she says, to discover all this information? Approximately 9 minutes. The next time you, or someone you know, post a photo online, think about any revealing qualities the photo might have and also adjust the privacy settings.

Criddle stressed that any internet user should not be afraid of posting photos online. Instead, she should simply think about two things: WHAT she is saying online with text and photos and WHO she is sharing this information with. As long as internet users keep these two ideas in mind, they can dramatically increase their level of online safety. ■

## A BLAST FROM THE PAST: TAMAGOTCHIS!

By Julia Houtchings  
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Do you remember those handheld virtual pets and people called Tamagotchis? I had two of them once upon a time, but by the time I had worn them to the breaking point, they were no longer to be found in stores. Then, lo and behold, the other week I was in Target looking for my three-year-old niece's birthday present, and guess what I found?! Tamagotchis!

I debated for a few weeks over whether I should indulge in my inner child and buy one. I finally decided the other day that I just had to have one of those cool toys from my childhood, and, although I was a little disappointed about how much they had changed, I was really im-

pressed with all the cool features that they have now.

New Tamagotchi's are called Tamagotchi Connection, and Bandai (the maker) means it. Every Tamagotchi Connection has an Infra-Red Communication function to interact with other Tamagotchi. Plus not only do you get one Tamagotchi, you get a whole family that you raise from the time they hatch. Once they become adults, you can marry them via the Infra-Red Communication function and they start all new Tamagotchi families. Generations upon generations can be created while the battery lasts.

To interact and play with your Tamagotchi, there are initially four

games available: Tama Fans, Pool Play, Tennis, and Safe Box. Playing games (and winning, of course) earns "Gotchi" points that you can buy extra things with, including new food items, souvenirs, and others. Secret passwords can be found at [www.tamatown.com](http://www.tamatown.com) to collect unique items or get discounts for purchases with your Gotchi points. There are three TV shows that the Tamagotchis can watch; one for TV shopping, one for traveling, which doubles as the "pause mode," and a dating show where adult Tamagotchis can meet each other and get married. With the Infra-Red Communication, you can become Tamagotchi friends with your friends

who also have Tamagotchi Connections. I named my Tamagotchi family the Huggs, but my three Tamagotchis are only children, so I have a lot to look forward to! (And I'm excited, which probably makes me a little bit of a dork, but hey, I like reminiscing.)

To get your own Tamagotchi family, find one at Target (where I bought mine) for \$14.29. ■

