The Best Available Option

Recent Debut of NetFree Filter Galvanizes Yeshivaleit and Laymen Alike

Shaindy was getting frustrated. With her husband spending year after year in Kollel, Shaindy was the proud breadwinner for her family of 6. Her occupation? Graphic design was something she was not only good at, but also something she loved to do. Life was great.

She quickly discovered that it was not that simple, however.

Due to the job pressures and tight deadlines, Shaindy had to spend many nights on the computer, while the little ones slept peacefully. She needed online access, and with guidance of the family's Rav, they had a filter installed. The problem was however, that when she opened a site up to be able to search for pictures, any skin colored pictures were blocked. She contacted the filter company and was told that the only other option is for the entire site to be opened, with the millions of pictures that were available, leaving the website completely unfiltered. This left Shaindy extremely uncomfortable. But more than that, she felt lost, alone.

Akiva, a former kollel yungerman, had recently taken upon himself the responsibility to cover the growing expenses of his family, and headed directly to where it seemed everyone was making money -selling on Amazon. The filter on his computer allowed the site, and he started learning the ropes pretty quickly. One day, with business not quite as busy as most days, Akiva started going through Amazon looking for opportunities. To his shock and dismay, items that were completely inappropriate for a Ben Torah kept coming up! Was there a way out? Was he alone in facing this issue?

No. Shaindy and Akiva were not alone. Hundreds of frum families face similar challenges with their internet filters. They were not alone, but they were not forgotten either. A new phenomenon is taking the torah world by a storm, one which has everyone excited!

Internet.

You can't live with it, you can't live without it. At least that's what they say.

With the world becoming increasingly dependent on technology, many frum families are finding themselves with no option other than to be connected to the internet. At the same time, mindful of the terrible pitfalls of the net, these families have, with the encouragement and guidance of the *gedolim* of our times, installed filters that are intended to allow one to continue using the internet, while blocking out the negatives that are there.

But as many internet users are surely painfully aware, no filter is foolproof.

Most filters rely on site-by-site categorization, which in simple terms means that the filter determines categories that are acceptable and those that are not, and then allows access to those sites that were deemed ok. The problem with this is that it leaves sites that are mostly "clean" available even though there are parts of these sites that should not be seen by one who guards his eyes. A careful person is therefore barely happy with the standards these filters have, if unintentionally or by default.

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Another common issue that filters present is the inability to properly screen websites item by item. Take photographs for example. Someone who works as a graphic artist for instance, will be hard pressed to get pictures from online sites, only to find that when the site is opened, all pictures, appropriate or not, are available for viewing.

It seems like a lose-lose situation for anyone who needs to access the internet.

Enter NetFree.

NetFree, originally launched in Eretz Yisrael a couple of years ago, is the only filter sanctioned by all major kehillos in Eretz Yisrael, from *Gur* to *Belz*, from the *Eida Hachareidis* to *Viznitz*, and everyone in between. It has received widespread accolades across the spectrum, with leading *Litvishe roshei yeshivos*, *chassidishe rebbes*, and *sfardishe manhigim* alike strongly suggesting anyone who needs the internet to use this filter.

The problem was obvious, and a solution was paramount. There had to be a way to go through each and every item on each and every webpage to see if it should be allowed to be viewed by users or not.

The idea in itself is simple. The work behind it, less so.

With innovation and constant feedback from users and expert technicians, NetFree set out to create a first of its kind - a filter that really, really works to allow through whatever can be allowed, and only that. A team of women work round the clock with clear guidelines and search through each site requested before rendering a decision whether or not to allow the site.

Although NetFree is non-profit, there is a minimal fee of $8 a month to cover the basic expenses of this mammoth operation.

Once a site is determined to be kosher by NetFree,it is opened to all NetFree users. This feature enables websites that are completely risk free, such as banks, commerce, and frum sites to be accessed by users with no delay at all, with the extra option for users or kehillas to add more limitations. Currently there are close to 350,000 sites that are already reviewed and approved and are currently available. Other sites that were not approved yet are available upon request (they can be opened in as little as 5 minutes depending on urgency), once the NetFree team goes through it to assure its content is ok too.

If only part of the site is "kosher", only that part of the site gets approved. All other content remains completely off limits.

Pictures are subject to a similar process. As soon as a photo that hasn't been reviewed is loaded by any user it is automatically sent for review by a team of gentiles, who analyze it carefully and give their verdict. Just like the websites, once a picture gets approved, it is available to all users immediately. To date, NetFree has approved over 850 *million*(!) pictures. Thesephotos are already available without the need for review. These images that haven't been reviewed must wait for review (usually appx 15 seconds) and until then they are blurred.

One of the other exciting features of NetFree is its word screening ability, which means that even if an article is allowed, parts that are not appropriate are filtered as well resulting in a completely clean piece. If a Google search results in inappropriate material, that gets filtered too.

Recent worldwide occurrences have only led to a greater awareness of the issues of internet usage. With people taking every precaution with regard to their health, many are thinking of what needs to be done to protect their *neshamos* too.

Hagaon R' Elya Ber Wachtfogel recently said that just like the internet is spread across the globe, so too Corona has traveled across the world, in a clear sign from Shamayim of the problem we face with the web. Other gedolim, including Rav Moshe Hillel Hirsch and Rav Asher Arieli, implored Bnei Torah to make a serious kabbalah in the area of technology. Indeed, countless *kabbalos* have been made by people across the globe. *Rabbanim* all over the world are encouraging Frum Yidden to take the best option, with many of them specifically mentioning NetFree by name. Rabbi Forscheimer also joined in urging Bnei Torah to use NetFree as the best available filtering option.

Subscriptions are rising, tens of thousands of people signed up to date. It behooves any ehrliche Yid who needs internet use to take a serious look at NetFree to see if it is an option that works for him. If you have any questions about netfree, call 718-400-8838 or visit www.netfree.link /wiki.