

DAILY NEWS  
**The Front Page**

**From 'pillars' to pervs  
Net's anonymity cloaks predators**

**Special Report**

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**William Burgess was convicted of masturbating on a live Webcam for supposed teen.**



Schwartz for NEWS

**John Dexter, headmaster of the elite Trevor Day School, was charged with E-mailing porn to minors.**



Roca NEWS

**Rabbi Israel Kestenbaum pleaded guilty to soliciting sex from "teen" on the Internet.**

He had a job in the insurance industry, a home in a leafy suburb, a wife and teenage

children - and a dangerous obsession with the Internet's sleaziest corners.

"You couldn't wait to get on it," the man told the Daily News. "Couldn't wait for whatever new surprise or new friend you would come across.

"It was like being a kid in a candy store, only you never felt the pressure that someone was looking over your shoulder."

Only someone was watching.

When the 53-year-old broker sent a message to a chat-room buddy he thought was a 14-year-old boy, an investigator for the Westchester district attorney was on the other end. And when he showed up for a tryst with the "teen" in April 2002, he was met by cops with guns drawn, arrested and charged with indecent behavior.

The New Rochelle man, whose only other brush with the law was a parking ticket, had just joined a growing list of New Yorkers collared in cybersex stings.

Like the Manhattan prep-school headmaster nailed last week for E-mailing smut to minors, many of those caught trolling for sex with kids online fit a surprising profile.

They're middle-aged white men with no criminal history. They have families, good jobs, higher education, positions of respect in the community.

They're the kind of guys who wouldn't be caught dead in a trench coat at the playground. But armed with a mouse and a modem, cloaked by anonymity in the privacy of their own homes, they risk everything to satisfy their sexual compulsions.

Kenneth Lanning, a former FBI profiler, believes many offenders have harbored - and suppressed — deviant urges for years.

"They may never have acted out. They were able to control it, and along comes the Internet ... which is like pouring fuel on smoldering embers," Lanning said.

David Greenfield, psychologist and author of the book "Virtual Addiction," said the Internet creates a "sense of disinhibition."

"People do and say things online that they never would do otherwise," he said. "The people I see in my office - they're not perverts, but they get online and suddenly, they're sex fiends.

"Before you know it, they are lost in cyberspace."

While experts say sex crimes against children are on the downswing overall, crime blotters are rife with examples of Internet predators:

- Rabbi Israel Kestenbaum, 55, a father of five and a member of the New York Board of Rabbis, pleaded guilty this summer to soliciting sex from an undercover cop posing as a 13-year-old girl in a chat room called "I Love Older Men."

- Sgt. Nelson Pardo Jr., 39, a military police officer at West Point, was busted in August at a Queens restaurant where he expected to meet a 13-year-old girl to whom he sent nude photos of himself, officials said.

- James Irwin, 52, had a sterling reputation as principal of Our Lady of Mount Carmel elementary school in the Bronx until he pleaded guilty after a 2001 sting operation for E-mailing child-porn photos to an undercover agent.

- Father-of-two William Burgess, 43, of Forest Hills, Queens, was convicted this month of sending sexual come-ons and live Webcam images of himself masturbating to a computer user posing as a 12-year-old girl.

Westchester County DA Jeanine Pirro said the 78 suspects she's arrested in stings include doctors, lawyers, priests, school administrators and coaches.

A study due out from the University of New Hampshire found evidence that suspects arrested in Internet stings have higher social status and less deviant backgrounds than other sex offenders.

"On the surface they would appear to be respectable, responsible and law abiding members of our community," said Queens DA Richard Brown.

"But the charges against them indicate that they actually represent a dark and otherwise hidden underside of our society."

The New Rochelle insurance broker - who agreed to tell his story if his name wasn't used — said he began experimenting with the Internet during lulls at work.

At first, it was just chat rooms about skiing and hiking. Before long, he was spending nine or 10 hours a day online, and branching out.

"Once I started scrolling around and going into various sex rooms, I became more and more curious and just got caught up with what was going on," he said.

Heterosexual chat rooms led him to kinkier nooks and crannies of the Web and, fatefully, to the online profile of someone claiming to be a 14-year-old.

"It just got worse and worse," he said.

The deluge of pornographic images and chatter on line is perilous for those struggling to keep their desires in check because it whets their appetite, experts say.

The role-playing culture on the Internet encourages them to test boundaries, and the facelessness of the medium allows a false sense of security, they believe.

But what's mind-boggling to some is that men who would not risk crossing the line elsewhere will jeopardize jobs, families and liberty in the ether of the computer world.

To Pirro, it's simple.

"Let's not fall into the trap that the Internet made them do it," she said. "What the Internet has given them is a bold sense they can avoid getting caught."

The New Rochelle man knows well how false that sense is.

After his arrest, he pleaded guilty in exchange for probation and went into sex-addiction therapy.

Though his family stood by him, his career was wrecked and he had to make humiliating visits to the homes of his children's friends to explain himself. He hasn't been back on the Internet since.

"It's like a red flag with me," he explained. "Even when I just see a computer, it brings back all the shame."

### **Protecting your children**

Research reveals that one in five children between ages 10 and 17 has gotten a sexual solicitation over the Internet - and one in 33 were aggressively stalked. To keep your kids safe, here are some tips from the experts:

**Rules:** Laying down the law about when and how kids use the Internet is crucial. Katya Gifford of the child-safety group Cyberangels recommends children under 14 be barred from visiting chat rooms or adding strangers to instant messaging buddy lists. The National Center for Exploited and Missing Children's Web site features a pledge with safety rules that kids can sign and post on their computer.

**Filters:** Since children don't always follow rules, parents may want to install blocking software - programs that keep youngsters away from sites that aren't child-friendly or lock down the Internet when parents aren't home.

**Supervision and snooping:** The fact is tech-savvy kids who want to get around filters will figure out a way to do it. So some advocates suggest parents keep the computer in the family room, where kids can't use it unsupervised. Ex-FBI profiler Kenneth Lanning said parents might want to invest in tracking programs that let them check what sites their children are visiting and who they're chatting with.

**Communication:** Experts agree this is the most important component. "If you have a teenager and they have a computer and Internet access, you can almost assume they're going to inappropriate sites," Lanning said. "And you need to talk with them about what it all means in a frank and serious way."

**Warning Signs:** The Internet's vast sweep means nearly any child can become prey, though Teri Schroeder of I-Safe.org says when children get to the sixth grade, raging hormones and newfound freedoms put them more at risk. Cyberangels' Gifford warns adults to watch for signs their child might be in trouble - like switching or closing screens when someone walks by, logging on late at night, getting calls from strangers or unexplained gifts.

**Take Action:** Finally, if a child is harassed on line, report it to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children at (800) 843-5678.

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