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Organization launches certification plan

By ANICK JESDANUN
AP INTERNET WRITER

NEW YORK -- An organization that monitors Web site privacy and e-mail practices for businesses has launched an initiative to certify advertising software as consumer-friendly and non-invasive.

The idea behind the Trusted Download Program is to create a list of acceptable applications to help companies like Time Warner Inc.'s AOL, Microsoft Corp. and Yahoo Inc. make decisions about where to advertise and with whom to partner.

The program covers software used for advertising or tracking user behavior. Certified adware and other software must obtain consent before downloading, be easy to uninstall and cannot modify computer settings to cause damage or harm.

Yahoo is among the major Internet companies that have been accused in the past of benefiting from adware companies with questionable installation practices. The company has said the certifications could prove useful in determining whether to make Yahoo's search results available to other companies as a component of their toolbars and other software products.

TRUSTe had announced the program late last year. Last week marked the opening of submissions, though the program remains in a test phase. TRUSTe is requiring participants of its regular certification programs to submit their applications to the Trusted Download Program before renewing their seals.

"Advertisers now can demand that their brand advertising is displayed only in software that is certified by Trusted Download," Ari Schwartz, deputy director of the Center for Democracy and Technology, said in a statement. "This is clearly a giant leap forward for transparency."