

Report: Internet is changing adoption for better and worse

December 14 2012, by Michelle Healy

The Internet is having a profound, transformative impact on adoption - changing practices and policies, offering new opportunities and resources, and raising ethical, legal and procedural issues, a report out Thursday says.

From social media to search engines, blogs, chat rooms, photo listings and an array of other modern [communication tools](#), [Internet technology](#) offers "positive, negative and complicated" changes for the millions of people who have adoption-related issues and concerns, says the report, from the Evan B. Donaldson Adoption Institute, a nonprofit research, policy and education group.

Among changes that the Web has brought to adoption, says the report, described as the first-of-its kind:

- Increased marketing and sales of adoption-related services, often with dubious practices, and a shift away from the perspective that the primary purpose is to find families for children.

- Greater ease and an increased chance of finding birth relatives, which has major institutional and personal implications, including the likelihood of ending "closed adoptions."

- A growing number of young adoptees are forming relationships with birth relatives, sometimes without their [adoptive parents'](#) knowledge and usually without guidance or preparation.

-Many websites are offering useful, positive resources to help expedite the adoption of children and teens who need families, especially those with special needs, who are older, or are seeking adoption as part of a sibling group.

In many arenas involving the Internet, policymakers, [law enforcement officials](#) and others are deciding how to "both provide protection and provide (the services) so that we get real benefits," says Adam Pertman, executive director of the institute. "That's not happening yet in adoption," but is desperately needed.

Among the report's recommendations is the proposal that policy and law enforcement officials routinely review online adoption-related sites and activity for fraud, exploitation or other illegal and unethical practices and take action as warranted.

About 135,000 children are adopted each year, Pertman says. In 68 percent of cases, the child is adopted from foster care or the child welfare system; 17 percent are infants adopted domestically; 15 percent are adopted internationally.

Chuck Johnson, president of the National Council for Adoption, a nonprofit advocacy group that was not involved in the study, agrees that the Internet has dramatically changed the practice of adoptions.

"By and large, it's become a very useful tool," says Johnson, "but it's not a complete tool, and that's why you can never remove the human connection in the process."

Whether it's finding an adoption agency, an attorney or a support group, you need to invest some time checking out the source "because anyone can be an expert on the Internet or present themselves as an expert," he says.

The field of adoption "is constantly evolving and changing," he adds. Discussions on the best way to use the Internet are needed "to ensure the institution of adoption stays strong and the best interests of (the child) are being served."

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