

CHOICE

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DEEPPFAKES

& other scams to watch out for in 2026

Plus Add-on shipping costs, your home air quality & more

Brave new buzzwords

Cutting through the noise

I absolutely love soccer video games. I love them so much that, as a games journalist, I used to review them for a living.

Soccer games are almost always released annually, around September or October, and the press releases come loaded with buzzwords. Phrases like “hypermotion” or “impact engine” are designed specifically to get consumers hyped.

Recently I caught up with a friend who used to work on these video games. He had a confession to make: it was all made up.

Nowadays the new buzzword is ‘AI’

Literally, at some point during a soccer game’s development cycle, it was the job of the marketing team to lock themselves in a room and brainstorm names for the “features” they would push on the media and public, in order to sell them something that – for all intents and purposes – was almost the exact same video game released 12 months prior.

Sports games do improve annually, but those improvements tend to be incremental. New features like “hypermotion” or “impact engine” are usually little more than improved in-game animations, or tweaked

in-game physics. Hardly revolutionary, but these buzzwords made them sound game changing.

The games and tech industry is swamped with this type of marketing nonsense. In 1999, Sony called its central processing unit for the upcoming PlayStation 2 an “Emotion Engine”. In 1992, Sega claimed its Mega Drive console was superior to the Super Nintendo because it had “Blast Processing”.

For a while the tech industry’s favourite buzzword was “smart”. Smart fridges, smart TVs... In the 2010s, every device was smart, and if it wasn’t smart you might as well toss it in a landfill. I remember at a tech show in Las Vegas being given a demonstration of a smart toothbrush that taught its users how to brush their teeth as they were brushing. That same year I saw a smart toilet designed to analyse the contents of your poop as soon as it made impact.

Nowadays, the new buzzword is “AI”. Marketers are desperate to tell folks their new products are “powered” by AI, although no-one really knows what that means. Phones are powered by AI, software is powered by AI. You can’t turn on a single tech device without being bombarded with invitations to use AI functionality that, for the most part, no-one asked for.



The Consumer Electronics Show in January this year was dominated by AI. During his keynote, NVIDIA CEO Jensen Huang said the word almost 200 times. On the show floor you could find AI-powered washing machines, holographic companions and panda toys. The appliance brand Goveelife unveiled a \$750 ice maker that apparently uses AI to make the process of producing ice “quieter”.

The words change, but the game remains the same. One of the reasons CHOICE exists is to cut through this noise. To truly test the claims of companies and their endless parade of buzzwords.

Will AI features, supposedly integrated into the devices we test, be a game changer? Maybe. But until our testers get their hands on them we won’t know for sure. Until then, I suggest we proceed with caution.

Mark Serrels
CHOICE Editorial Director
Email: mserrels@choice.com.au

CHOICE

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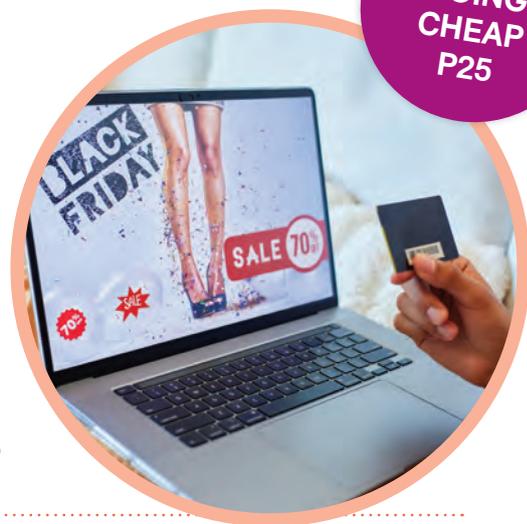
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CHOICE magazine provides a selection of our top product reviews. We can't always include all the models we've tested, but you'll always find the products that scored the best. To view complete results for all our tests, go to choice.com.au, or call Customer Service on 1800 069 552 to add digital access to your subscription package.

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New scams prevention law a step forward, but gaps remain

Australia's leading consumer advocacy organisations, including CHOICE, have lodged a joint submission on the federal government's new Scams Prevention Framework draft law, saying it's welcome progress, but warning that major gaps remain.

Stephanie Tonkin, CEO of Consumer Action Law Centre, one of the signatories, warns that without major fixes and faster implementation, Australians will remain exposed to scams for years to come.

"The government must be genuinely ambitious. Fix the gaps, mandate real action across the scam ecosystem, and guarantee fast and fair compensation when businesses fail to meet their obligations," says Tonkin.

The submission notes that major scam channels such as email services, online marketplaces, dating apps, app stores, gaming platforms, job boards and web browsers are excluded by the proposed law, despite well-known and growing risks. Tonkin also says the government's proposal sets out an overly complex dispute resolution system that is stacked against the consumer.

"It is critical that scam victims have a fair and functional pathway to seek compensation when something goes wrong. The current proposal does not come close to delivering that," she says.

JARNI BLAKKARLY

Good news: Businesses on notice for sneaky tricks

The government has released its decision paper on banning unfair trading practices, marking a big step forward for everyday consumers. At its core, this reform is about closing the loopholes that let businesses get away with behaviour that feels wrong but isn't quite illegal; things like confusing pricing, hidden fees, manipulative online design or making it far too hard to cancel a service. These practices can push people into worse outcomes without ever outright lying to them and, until now, regulators have had limited tools to stop them.

The decision paper confirms that the government will introduce a new, economy-wide ban on unfair trading practices. This means regulators can step in earlier, focus on real consumer harm, and stop unfair conduct before it becomes widespread. The ban follows years of CHOICE advocacy, including our Make Unfair Illegal campaign, which put unfair business behaviour firmly on the national agenda. It is a significant step for consumers – and it's one you helped make happen.

HARSHINI SHANMUGAKANI



Lithium-ion battery fires: 290 in NSW last year

The rapid uptake of lithium-ion batteries – which power products ranging from e-bikes, e-scooters and electric vehicles down to cordless vacs, household tools, toothbrushes, shavers and vapes – has led to increased safety problems. Fire and Rescue NSW says the batteries are causing approximately six fires a week in the state, mostly stemming from e-bikes, e-scooters and smaller household items.

In 2025 there were around 290 lithium-ion battery fires in NSW, leaving 53 people injured – double the number of the year before.

Late last year, Deputy State Coroner Kasey Pearce conducted a hearing on lithium-ion battery risks that included

Fire and Rescue NSW, the Environment Protection Authority and NSW Fair Trading.

The inquiry will resume in August to examine the specific circumstances of fires at Guildford, Teralba, Cabarita Beach and Annandale between 2023 and 2025, two of which were fatal.

“It is important that public awareness is raised, so future deaths and injuries might be prevented,” says Pearce.

She offers some sound safety advice: “Make sure you only buy products that comply with the Australian standard. Use an approved charger, charge while you're at home and awake, and unplug when the battery is full. Store lithium-ion battery devices away from exits and sleeping areas so you have time to escape if a fire does start.”

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

“Store lithium-ion battery devices away from exits and sleeping areas so you have time to escape if a fire does start”



New gas customers to pay upfront connection costs

Consumers getting a new gas connection will soon be forced to pay the upfront costs of their connection in some jurisdictions as the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) moves away from the old system, where costs were shared across all gas customers.

The move comes amid declining gas demand and the AEMC's focus on supporting customers and the electricity system's transition to net-zero emissions. AEMC chair Anna Collyer says the changes will protect lower-income households, renters and apartment dwellers from bearing the costs of new connections for other users.

"The existing approach was designed for growing networks, but it's no longer fit for purpose in a context where the outlook for gas demand is uncertain and is projected to decline," Collyer says.

The rule will apply to new retail customers connecting to the main gas distribution networks in the ACT, New South Wales, South Australia and parts of Queensland from 1 October this year.

JARNI BLAKKARLY

Proposed new rule to address 'same-name' energy plans

In December last year, the Australian Energy Market Commission (AEMC) released the draft report for its pricing review, exploring what changes could be made to the energy market to better meet consumer needs and expectations.

A key takeaway is that an end to confusing 'same-name' energy plans may soon be on the horizon. One of the draft recommendations from the report is for energy retailers to be "required to charge all customers on the same plan the same price, to address the 'loyalty tax' on customers who

don't switch and ensure every customer is always on the best price".

This change could help tackle the confusing practice of retailers using the same name for two plans with different prices, which CHOICE called out in our designated 'super complaint' to the ACCC last year. It also has the potential to address some of the underlying unfairness in the retail energy market that leaves most consumers paying a 'loyalty penalty' for not switching plans as often as every few months.

JORDAN CORNELIUS



Australians paying for more mobile data than they need

A new report has found mobile customers are increasingly being offered more data than they need, even while plans become bigger and more costly.

The ACCC's latest communications market report found that while the median monthly data allowance advertised for plans by telcos had hit 42GB, Australians were on average still using much

less than that. The report covering 2024–25 found the median data offer had increased by 40% from 30GB in 2020–21. Meanwhile, Australians' average monthly usage had remained below 15GB, up from 9.8GB in 2021–21.

“Many consumers may not value having a greater data allowance,” the ACCC noted in its report. “Despite increased usage in recent

years, consumers do not use the higher data allowances that have been offered over time and may instead prefer lower data allowances for a lower price.”

Despite this conclusion, mobile plan prices continue to increase – the ACCC found the median mobile plan price had risen by 6.4% (or \$2.40 per month) since 2023–24.

LIAM KENNEDY

More competition needed in Australia's telco market: OECD

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) says a lack of choice in Australia's mobile telco sector has led to higher prices and fewer service improvements than other countries. The international body used a recent economic survey to argue that competition has waned over the last two decades, singling out the telco, aviation, banking and supermarket sectors as being particularly dominated by a small number of businesses.

The OECD says the dominance of mobile network operators Telstra, Optus and Vodafone/TPG has led to Australians paying more and receiving fewer service upgrades than consumers in other countries. The OECD recommends forcing telcos to share infrastructure and reserving spectrum capacity for new competitors.

Spectrum capacity refers to the range of radio waves that devices like mobile phones operate on. These airwaves are

managed by the communications regulator, which auctions some of the limited available space to telcos.

The OECD says that its recommendations would encourage the return of a fourth network operator, which in turn would lead to lower prices and better service. (Australians previously had four network operators, until the merger of TPG and Vodafone in 2020.)

LIAM KENNEDY

Car rental platform hit with fine for misleading pricing

Car rental platform EconomyBookings has been slapped with an almost \$40,000 penalty from the consumer

EconomyBookings

watchdog over two infringement notices for allegedly breaching consumer law in the way it displayed prices on its website. The business, which is owned by SIA Booking Group Corporation, allegedly failed to prominently display the total price for car rental services as a single figure and made misleading representations about whether pre-selected optional extras were included in the rental price.

“All businesses, including online providers, should ensure that their pricing displays do not mislead consumers, or they may face enforcement action,” ACCC Commissioner Luke Woodward says.

Pre-selected optional extras included “Last Minute Cancellation”, “Roadside assistance” and “Full coverage” for insurance. The ACCC says in one instance the initial car price displayed was \$147.10, but the total price charged with the pre-selected optional extras was \$315.04. EconomyBookings is an online car rental platform that provides price comparisons and bookings for third-party car rental companies. The ACCC does not allege the third-party companies were involved in the alleged conduct.

JARNI BLAKKARLY



Government consults on improving price transparency and displays

In late January, the federal government announced a set of proposals designed to improve price transparency and displays in supermarkets. These would require all supermarkets, including those in remote communities, to publish prices instore. Large supermarkets would be required to publish prices online and make them available for third-party price comparison websites to share. They would also be required to provide six-monthly information summaries for loyalty programs and adhere to minimum information requirements for discount price promotions.

If introduced, these changes will be significant. People living in remote communities would know how much things cost before they reach the checkout. Shoppers could compare items in advance and figure out the cheapest prices before they hit the shops, and price displays would give consumers the information they need to verify promotional claims at the time of purchase. Consumers need transparency and clarity to make informed decisions and get the best value on food and groceries, and these proposals could make that happen. CHOICE will be making a submission to the consultation to strengthen the proposals and continue advocating for fairer and more transparent supermarket practices.

BEA SHERWOOD



The screenshot shows the EconomyBookings website with the following elements:

- Header: EconomyBookings, Travel Blog, Flights, EN | AUD, Help Center, List your cars, My bookings, Sign in.
- Main heading: Find and compare cheap Car Rental deals.
- Stats: 18 Years of Operation, Over 4 million users, 20,000+ locations.
- Navigation: Flights (active), Car rental.
- Filters: Same drop-off location (checked), Driver's age between 30-65 (checked), Promo code.
- Search form: Where to pick up, Pick-up date (Tue, Feb 10, 10:00 AM), Time (10:00 AM), Drop-off date (Sat, Feb 14, 10:00 AM), Time (10:00 AM), Search button.
- Rating: Excellent (4.4 out of 5 based on 127,492 reviews), Trustpilot.
- Footer: We connect you with 600+ trusted suppliers. Suppliers listed include Sixt, Europcar, Hertz, Avis, Thrifty, Alamo, Dollar, Budget, Goldcar, and Green Motion.



First look: Breville Eye Q Auto two-slice toaster

The Breville Eye Q Auto toaster uses optical sensors to brown your bread rather than a conventional timer. It “scans” the shade of bread you start off with, and toasting will stop once the sensors see the colour change to your chosen shade.

The idea is that you don’t need to tweak the timer settings or check the bread mid-toast if you’re using different types of bread.

Settings include one central button to stop and start toasting, or a long press for sourdough mode. The plus and minus buttons let you select one of seven shade levels. There’s also a crumpet mode (which also works on bagels), and a “bit more” button if you do want to add a bit of extra crunch.

The sensors are only on one side of the toaster, and the appliance will toast for a certain amount of time depending on the shade on one particular side. So if you’re toasting just one slice of bread, you must use the slot with the sensor or it’ll think the toaster is empty.

PERFORMANCE

We tested the two-slice model, and while the crumpet mode worked well, when toasting white bread the results were fairly uneven, with some spots darker than others.

Using the sourdough mode worked well on similar shaped slices. But when we put a smaller piece of sourdough into the side without the sensor, and a larger piece into the side with the sensor, there were inconsistencies. The larger piece that the sensor was detecting was browning at a slower rate than the small one in the other slot. So toasting slices with large variation won’t work well.

There’s also a timer mode (accessed by double-pressing the start button and choosing a level) for foods that only require re-heating and not browning. Breville’s tips video explains that the first button is approximately one minute and five seconds, with each subsequent button adding around 16 seconds to the toast.

There’s no frozen bread or defrost setting. The toaster is designed to recognise change in shade no matter how cold the bread was to start with.

EASE OF USE

While it works differently to other toasters, the Eye Q is

still pretty straightforward to use. Many features of modern toasters aren’t on this model by design. There’s no option to “lift and check”; the toaster’s meant to do away with that necessity. There’s also no countdown timer, though there is a flashing progress light.

The large crumb tray is easy to remove and empty. The carriages are quite wide and designed so crumbs fall straight through without getting caught in the slots. The top of the toaster is ceramic-coated and easy to wipe down.

CHOICE VERDICT

While the Breville Eye Q has a sleek, timer-free design, we still ran into some of the same issues we find with regular toasters. Because the optical sensors only assess browning levels on one side of the toast, we experienced inconsistent, uneven results, particularly with sourdough that varies in size and shape. A cheap toaster could do the same job after experimenting with your preferred timer settings. (Watch out for our full review later in the year, when we compare its performance alongside other toasters.)

KIM GILMOUR



BREVILLE EYE Q AUTO TWO-SLICE TOASTER

PRICE \$459 (\$629 for the four-slice model)

CONTACT breville.com.au





Six gambling companies breached self-exclusion rules, regulator finds

Six licensed gambling companies breached self-exclusion rules in 2024, according to investigations recently concluded by the Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA). The ACMA investigations found Tabcorp, LightningBet, Betfocus, TempleBet, Picklebet and BetChamps all failed to comply with rules designed to protect problem gamblers from gambling harm. People who register with BetStop, the National Self-Exclusion Register, are meant to be prevented from opening wagering accounts or accessing betting services or marketing.

“These rules have been in place for more than two years and wagering providers should be taking their responsibilities seriously,” ACMA member Carolyn Lidgerwood says.

“When people decide to self-exclude themselves from online and telephone gambling, they trust the system to protect them from gambling harm. These investigations have found that these companies broke that trust and let people down.”

Tabcorp Holdings paid a penalty of \$112,680 and agreed to enter into a court-enforceable undertaking, while the other betting companies faced either “remedial directions” or “formal warning”.

ACMA says if they don’t comply, it may take stronger enforcement action in the future, potentially including Federal Court proceedings to seek civil penalties.

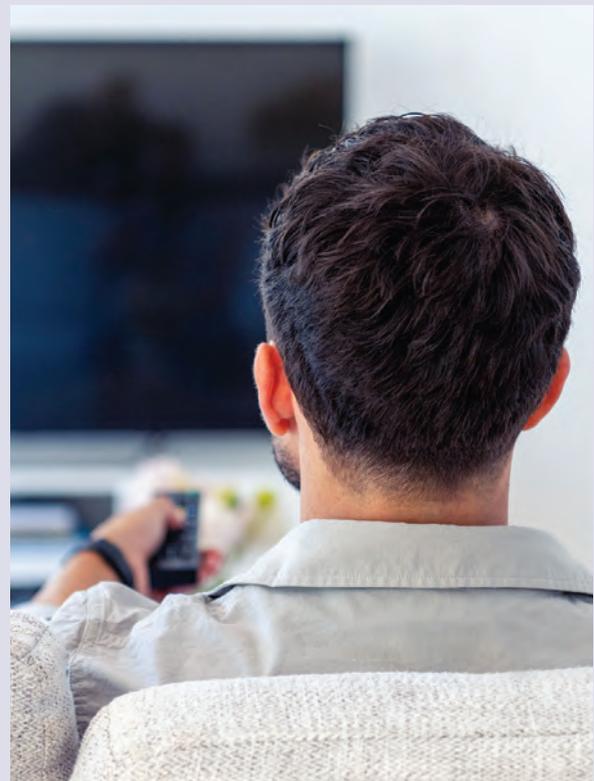
JARNI BLAKKARLY

Boost for local content on smart devices

Manufacturers supplying smart TVs to Australia must now make sure the apps and streaming platforms of the nation’s free-to-air broadcasters are clearly visible on their devices. The requirements are the result of Australia’s TV prominence framework, which came into force in January. The Australian Communications and Media Authority (ACMA) is monitoring new devices arriving in the country to ensure they’re compliant. The framework is designed to improve the visibility of local free-to-air TV services on devices that often come with multiple international streaming platforms pre-installed.

Manufacturers now have to make sure a selection of Australian free-to-air broadcasting apps are pre-installed and prominently displayed on the home screen of their products. Devices that can receive a TV signal must also have a live TV icon visible on the same screen. The framework was first announced in 2024, when the federal government said the large array of TV services available on smart devices, including those from overseas, was “creating a more challenging environment” for local content providers.

LIAM KENNEDY



Which creditors are forcing Australians to go bankrupt?

A recent report from Financial Counselling Australia (FCA) – *Who's Making Australians Bankrupt? A follow-up report: six years on* – reveals more and more businesses are compelling debtors to file for bankruptcy, especially in sectors where consumer protections are weak and both hardship relief and dispute resolution are hard to come by.

Most of the forced bankruptcies were at the hands of a small number of creditor types. One

of those is the Australian Tax Office – the creditor that drove the most bankruptcies over the reporting period (13% of the subjects of ATO petitions).

The ATO was followed closely by strata bodies and non-bank lenders, which each forced 12% of the subjects of their creditor petitions to file for bankruptcy. Strata-related bankruptcies went up 33% nationally since 2021–22.

In previous years, debt collectors and major banks drove the bulk of

the bankruptcies. Both sectors have mandatory consumer protections.

“Forced bankruptcy is one of the most serious tools available to creditors and should only be used as a genuine last resort,” says FCA CEO Dr Dominique Meyrick. “Our report shows that without stronger safeguards and modernised laws, Australians risk losing their homes and livelihoods unnecessarily over relatively modest debts.”

ANDY KOLLMORGEN



New website helping those affected by Shield and First Guardian collapses

Superannuation is designed to provide you with an income in retirement. For many Australians who work throughout their lives to build it up, their super will end up being one of their biggest assets. Recently, around 11,000 people were caught up in the collapse of the First Guardian and Shield master funds. Most of those who lost money may be able to get at least some of their money back, as long as they act fast, as there are important deadlines involved. The problem is, some people may not know that their money was invested with Shield or First Guardian, because they invested in them through an online investment platform where the investments were chosen by their financial adviser.

To help people take the steps they need to take to try to get their money back, Super Consumers Australia has created a website: takeyoursuperback.com. If you think you or

anyone you know may have been affected by the Shield or First Guardian collapses, head to the website to find out what you need to know.

ANTOINETTE DYCE

TAKE YOUR SUPER BACK

ABOUT US WHAT HAPPENED WHAT TO DO GET HELP PROTECT YOUR SUPER FAQs

Take Your Super Back
Thousands of people have lost their life savings because of the collapses of Shield and First Guardian.
Are you one of them?
↓

We're here to help.
About 11,000 people may have lost their hard-earned



Suppliers not allowed to set retail prices

A wholesale drone supplier has been caught instructing retailers to not sell its product below a specified price, an illegal practice known as resale price maintenance. Between April 2024 and at least June 2025, EE Group directed its resellers to not sell DJI drone products below the recommended retail price and resellers were required to agree to comply with EE Group's pricing strategy. If they didn't agree, EE Group wouldn't supply the drones in some cases.

"Recommended retail prices are only a recommendation or suggestion and cannot be mandated by a supplier or distributor," says ACCC Commissioner Luke Woodward.

"Resale price maintenance is illegal because it stops retailers from competing with each other on price, leading to higher prices for consumers," says Woodward.

In a court-enforceable undertaking, which has been accepted by the ACCC, EE Group has admitted to breaching the Competition and Consumer Act. It agreed to issue corrective notices advising resellers that they are free to set their own prices.

"We are warning all businesses that we will continue to take enforcement action against companies who engage in this illegal practice," Woodward says.

ANDY KOLLMORGEN

Loyal customers drive up car insurance prices

The average comprehensive car insurance premium rose 8% through to the end of June 2025. This was about half the average increase in the previous year, but still almost four times the inflation rate.

Premiums for new customers largely stayed the same or were even lower in price, which means the 8% price rise came entirely from policy renewals by loyal customers.

Roy Morgan research shows that over 40% of people shop around for better policies, but almost 90% of people still renew with the same insurer. Meanwhile, a University of Melbourne study found that people who sounded like they'd done their research when they called their energy provider were far more likely to get a cheaper price than people who didn't.

If you're a loyal insurance customer who hasn't changed your insurance provider in a while, it could pay to do some research and find a better deal, instead of simply donating to your insurance company's bottom line. CHOICE insurance reviews are a good place to start. Visit [choice.com.au/insurance](https://www.choice.com.au/insurance), or if you're after a better health insurance deal, turn to page 38 for our latest review.

JODI BIRD





RANTS AND RAVES

Everyone is wrong about the social media ban



Actually, let me clarify the above headline. Everyone is wrong about Australia's social media ban... Except me.

For context, I'm talking about the Labor government's attempt to protect kids under 16 from the well-documented ills of platforms like TikTok, Instagram, Snapchat and YouTube, among others.

For me, Australia's social media ban is a well-meaning, but ultimately ill-advised piece of legislation that has the potential to hurt those it's designed to protect. We've ignored the experts, rushed this ban into existence, and the long-term consequences could be dire.

Put aside the fact many children are now simply watching YouTube and TikTok without logging on – potentially gaining access to more damaging, inappropriate content. Put aside the fact it's laughably easy for tech savvy teens to bypass it...

Top to bottom, it's a mess. And almost every single teenager that I know is still using social media on a daily basis.

But, as mentioned above, on some level it feels as though everyone is wrong about the social media ban. Those who support the ban are wrong, because the ban isn't functional, but those who downplay the impacts of social media and say the very concept of a ban is fundamentally flawed? They are also wrong.

Because if you're not a parent, you might not see the full scale of the issue. Social media is messing with kids in an extremely

negative way, often in ways that regular parents aren't capable of reckoning with. But even if you're well-versed in the dark arts of tech, teenagers are ahead of the game in ways you can't yet comprehend. Most if not all parents are playing catch-up when it comes to Snapchat, TikTok and emerging platforms.

And when it comes to video games like Roblox, most are woefully unprepared to manage the risks.

Another counter argument I hear constantly is teens, particularly LGBTQ+ teens, seek community online, and removing them from these spaces is potentially damaging to their mental health.

This is misguided.

These folks must be thinking of a different type of internet, an ancient, dust-covered 2010s internet, where vulnerable kids could flock to platforms like Tumblr and find like-minded communities to support

them. This version of the internet is a relic. It simply does not exist.

Today's internet is something far more insidious: a handful of maniacal tech conglomerates whose sole intention is to harvest every last second of our children's attention in increasingly unsavoury ways.

There is no depth to which they will not plummet.

This is not your mama's internet. That internet is dead and buried, lost to the annals of history.

So unfortunately we're left with a social media ban that upsets everyone, solves nothing, and potentially makes things worse.

Not ideal!

What's the solution? That's harder to grapple with. But let's begin by holding these platforms accountable for the damage they do. And making sure the tools they use to exploit our children are a helluva lot more transparent.

That would be a decent start.

MARK SERRELS

Let's begin by holding these platforms accountable for the damage they do



ASK THE EXPERTS

Got a niggling question our team can help with?

ASK US

Email your question to asktheexperts@choice.com.au or write to Ask the Experts, CHOICE, 57 Carrington Rd, Marrickville, NSW 2204. You can also tap into the 'brains trust' at www.choice.community.

Q I recently took my 9-year-old daughter to the orthodontist and I was told that she will probably need braces next year.



I'm wondering if it makes sense to sign up to an extras policy now to try to save on the cost?

A CHOICE health insurance expert **Daniel Graham:** The most important thing to remember with extras insurance is that it's only worth having if you claim back more than you spend on premiums. Extras policies typically have a 12-month

waiting period for orthodontic cover, and since a typical course of orthodontics lasts between one and two years, you will need cover for two to three years. Extras policies that include cover for orthodontics typically cost around \$2100 a year for a family extras policy – more if your household income is higher than \$202,000, due to the lower government rebate. So, over three years you might expect to pay about \$6300 in premiums. Our research has found that claiming against only one course of

orthodontics won't be enough to cover the premium over three years.

Even if you include rebates

for twice-yearly dental check-ups for two parents and a child, most policies don't stack up financially.

In almost all cases the only way to make your extras worthwhile

is by also claiming on things like optical and physio.



Q I have an air purifier that I use in my bedroom to keep my allergies at bay and it usually works well so that I can sleep

overnight without a runny nose and sneezing. But we recently had a couple of weeks of solid rain and ever since then it seems like my air purifier isn't working properly – all my allergy symptoms have come back overnight. Has the moisture somehow broken my air purifier?

A CHOICE air purifier expert **Chris Barnes:** I wouldn't say that the high humidity has broken your air purifier, but you are likely right that the high humidity is what is causing you issues. Air purifiers generally don't perform very well in high humidity environments

because the moisture interferes with particle capture and airflow. Many purifiers move less clean air in humid environments, reducing their efficacy. I would recommend taking steps to reduce the humidity in your bedroom – ideally with a dehumidifier. But if you don't have one, and if the outside humidity has returned to normal

now that the rain has stopped, you could try increasing airflow by opening the windows and running a ceiling or pedestal fan. Additionally, if your air purifier's filters have become degraded or clogged (the humidity combined with dust in the room can create clumps that clog the filters), I would recommend cleaning or replacing them.





Q I'm looking to buy a pedestal fan for my son's bedroom but he's very sensitive to noise and some of them make such terrible noises. How do I choose one that is less likely to irritate him?



A **CHOICE household appliances expert Kim Gilmour:** There are a few factors at play here and of course what is considered "annoying" might vary from person to person, but I can give some general guidance. Look for a model with a solid base, rubber feet, well-balanced blades, a sturdy adjustable mast and a tight grill mesh (this is often where a rattling noise comes from). You may need to pay a little extra for these features, but don't look at price alone. More expensive fans can still be annoying: we measure noise levels on high and low settings, and turbo fans (which are often pricey) can reach levels of 60dB at times (about the same as a conversation). You could also consider a model with sleep mode, which aims to reduce noise, or a tower fan or bladeless model, which tend to give a more gentle, natural breeze. Some remote-control fans do make beeping noises when you're changing settings, which can disturb sleep, so look for models that don't do this. Finally, it's worth considering where in the room you are placing your fan. If you're putting it too close to the wall, it can amplify the noise (it's also worse for the fan's performance) – try to place it at least 50cm or so away from any wall.

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Q I'm looking at laptops for my teenage daughter and considering they're so expensive and teenagers are not known for being careful with their belongings, I'm wondering if you think it's worth buying an extended warranty?

A **CHOICE laptop expert Peter Zaluzny:** The first thing you need to know is that most extended warranties will not cover you for accidental damage. So if you're concerned that your daughter might damage or lose her laptop, then you'd be much better off looking at either a standalone single item insurance policy or checking if your home contents policy includes cover for portable contents (check the fine print to see if taking the laptop to school voids the cover). Additionally, I would highly recommend getting a good quality, water-resistant protective case and you can take some simple steps to make her laptop easier to recover if she loses it. For example, you could add a name tag, enable device tracking and generally establish good habits about how and where the laptop is stored and used. As for whether an extended warranty is worthwhile (accident cover aside), it really depends on the individual policy, and how valuable the offerings are to you. Make sure you always compare the warranty with your free rights under Australian Consumer Law.

