By Diane Bartz

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - Two consumer groups asked the Federal Trade Commission on Tuesday to create a "do not track list" that would allow computer users to bar advertisers from collecting information about them.

The Consumer Federation of America and the Consumers Union also urged the FTC to bar collection of health information and other sensitive data by companies that do business on the Internet unless a consumer consents.

The call echoed those of other privacy advocates who filed statements with the FTC on Internet companies' use of "behavioral advertising." That is the practice of tracking a computer user's activities online, including Web searches and sites visited, to target advertisements to the individual consumer.

In December, the FTC approved Google's (GOOG.O) purchase of advertising rival DoubleClick over the objections of some privacy groups.

At the same time, the agency urged advertisers to let computer users bar advertisers from collecting information on them, to provide "reasonable security" for any data and to collect data on health conditions or other sensitive issues only with the consumer's express consent.

In comments to the FTC on online behavioral advertising, advertisers made clear a strong preference for self-regulation rather than government dictates on how personal data are collected, what disclosures are made to computer users and how long the information is stored.

Consumer groups said on Tuesday they were skeptical of self-regulation.

"Self-policing schemes are not enough to protect consumers' privacy and offer no enforcement against improper behavior," said Chris Murray, senior counsel for...
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"While companies like Google are trying to put pretty good practices in place, we don't want to rely on the good graces of the companies because they might change their minds," he told Reuters in a telephone interview.

Several child advocacy groups, including the American Academy of Child and Adolescent Psychiatry and American Academy of Pediatrics, urged the FTC to bar advertisers from collecting information on or advertising to anyone under the age of 18.

Several advertisers also questioned whether the FTC and privacy groups had established that any harm had been done by the data collected and pointed out that the advertisers subsidized the free information often sought on the Internet.

"The associations (of businesses and advertisers) strongly believe that self-regulation and leading business practices comprise the most effective framework to protect consumers and further innovation in the area of privacy and behavioral advertising," the American Advertising Federation, Association of National Advertisers and other organizations said in a statement.

"We believe that any additional principles or guidelines should be issued only after the commission specifically identifies harms and concerns so that business is in a position to consider and address them," the group said in its comments to the FTC.

(Reporting by Diane Bartz; Editing by Gary Hill)
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Yahoo! News, Apr 11

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