

Voodoo SAS

Age Appropriate Design Code Executive Summary Report

October 2022



Executive summary



Background & Scope

Under section 123(1) of the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA18), the Information Commissioner produced a code of practice on standards of age appropriate design (“the Code”). The Code applies to “relevant information society services which are likely to be accessed by children” in the UK. This includes many apps, programs, connected toys and devices, search engines, social media platforms, streaming services, online games, news or educational websites and websites offering other goods or services to users over the internet. It is not restricted to services specifically directed at children.

The Code sets out 15 headline standards of age appropriate design that companies need to implement to ensure their services appropriately safeguard children’s personal data and process children’s personal data fairly. The Code came into force on 2 September 2021.

More widely, the Information Commissioner is also responsible for enforcing and promoting compliance with the UK General Data Protection Regulation (UK GDPR), the Data Protection Act 2018 (DPA18) and other data protection legislation. Section 129 of the DPA18 allows the ICO to carry out consensual audits. The ICO sees auditing as a constructive process with real benefits for controllers and so aims to establish a participative approach.

Voodoo SAS (Voodoo) agreed to a consensual audit of the measures, processes and policies they have in place to demonstrate conformance with the Code and data protection legislation.

The purpose of the audit is to provide the ICO and Voodoo with an independent assurance of the extent to which Voodoo, within the scope of this agreed audit, is complying with the Code and data protection legislation.

The scope areas covered by this audit are determined following a risk based analysis of Voodoo’s processing of children’s personal data. The scope may take into account any data protection issues or risks which are specific to Voodoo, identified

from ICO intelligence or Voodoo's own concerns, and/or any data protection issues or risks which affect their specific sector or organisations more widely. The ICO has further tailored the controls covered in each scope area to take into account the organisational structure of Voodoo, the nature and extent of Voodoo's processing of children's personal data, and to avoid duplication across scope areas. As such, the scope of this audit is unique to Voodoo.

It was agreed that the audit would focus on the following area(s):

- A: Governance, Transparency and Children's Rights
- B: Due Diligence and Data Protection Impact Assessments (DPIAs)
- C: Data Minimisation and Sharing
- D: Age Assurance
- E: Detrimental Use
- F: Privacy Settings and Parental Controls
- G: Geolocation
- H: Profiling and Cookies
- I: Nudge Techniques

Audits are conducted following the Information Commissioner's data protection audit methodology. The key elements of this are a desk-based review of selected policies and procedures, on-site visits including interviews with selected staff, and an inspection of selected records.

Where weaknesses were identified recommendations have been made, primarily around enhancing existing processes to facilitate conformance with the Code and data protection legislation. In order to assist Voodoo in implementing the recommendations each has been assigned a priority rating based upon the risks to children that they are intended to address. The ratings are assigned based upon the ICO's assessment of the risks involved. Voodoo's priorities and risk appetite may vary and, therefore, they should undertake their own assessments of the risks identified.

Overview of Service and Processing

Voodoo SAS was set up in France in 2013 and its headquarters are in Paris. The company says it employs over 700 staff across nine offices worldwide. Voodoo specialises in creating, developing and publishing mobile gaming applications (apps) and says its mission is to 'Entertain the world'. As well as developing games internally, Voodoo also works with external independent game development studios around the world.

Voodoo's mobile games are considered in the gaming sector to be 'hyper-casual'. This type of game is designed to be simple, easy to understand and free-to-play and has a relatively short lifespan. Users of iOS and Android mobile devices can download Voodoo's games via the Apple App Store and Google Play Store respectively. Some of Voodoo's best-known and popular games include Helix Jump, Hole.io, Aquapark, Paper.io and Roller Splat.

Voodoo has also launched Wizz, which it says is a social entertainment mobile app aimed at 'Generation Z' which Voodoo considers to be users between the ages of 13 and 24. Voodoo views Wizz as an alternative form of entertainment to its hyper-casual mobile gaming apps and says that Wizz is a space where users can meet new people, chat, play games and make friends. Voodoo says it has intentionally designed the Wizz app to avoid any user ranking or social competition between users.

The agreed scope of the AADC audit will incorporate Voodoo's hyper-casual mobile gaming apps as well as the Wizz social entertainment mobile app as specific use cases.

Voodoo says that it has launched over 100 games which have been downloaded more than six billion times by iOS and Android users, and the company has around 300 million monthly active users. All Voodoo's mobile games are built with and run on the same game engine, Unity, and are embedded with Voodoo's software development kit (SDK) Voodoo Sauce, which is used for advertising and analytics purposes. Additionally, all personal data processed by Voodoo's mobile games is done by the company's personal data management system.

Although the simplistic design of Voodoo's mobile games may make them attractive to younger children, Voodoo says that its games are not intended to be used by children under the age of 16 and it does not specifically target children when running

user acquisition campaigns for its mobile gaming apps. On first launch of a Voodoo mobile gaming app, users are asked to confirm that they are 16 or over via a self-declared age-gate.

By design, users of Voodoo's mobile gaming apps are not able to play against or otherwise interact with other users at any point. Voodoo's mobile games process online identifiers such as a user's mobile device IP address and their mobile device's advertising ID. Technical data relating to each user is also processed to understand how the user interacts with the gaming app and the adverts served, as well as to improve the overall gaming experience by detecting bugs and crashes.

Voodoo reports that it generates around 95% of its revenue through in-app advertising. This involves Voodoo sharing a user's mobile device advertising ID (IDFA for iOS users and Google AAID for Android users) with the user's consent with selected third party advertising partners who serve targeted adverts to the user within Voodoo's mobile gaming apps. Where users do not consent for their data to be shared for this purpose, they will still be served with the same amount of adverts but these will not be targeted at the individual user. The remaining 5% of Voodoo's revenues are generated through in-app purchases, which are handled by the Apple App Store or Google Play Store depending on the user's device.

The Wizz app had a soft launch in the United States (US) in January 2020 and was made available on iOS devices only via the Apple App Store. Voodoo says the Wizz app now has around 350,000 active daily users and has been downloaded more than four million times. At present, UK iOS device users can download the Wizz app from the Apple App Store and Voodoo says the app will be available to Android device users in the near future via the Google Play Store. The app is also available in Canada and Australia.

As of August 2022, Voodoo reports that around 90% of Wizz app users are based in the US, 3% are in the UK, 2.5% are in Canada and 1.5% are in Australia.

The Wizz app is currently free to download and use, however Voodoo says additional features will soon be made available to UK users for a subscription fee which can be purchased via the Apple App Store. Pricing for UK users will be set at £6.49 for one week, £8.99 for one month and £17.99 for three months.

Voodoo works with Yoti to deploy an age-estimation solution when a user first sets up their Wizz account. Users are required to take a photograph, or selfie, which is shared with Yoti whose artificial intelligence (AI) technology estimates the user's age with a reported 98.89% level of confidence. Should Yoti be unable to estimate a user's age, the photograph is sent to Hive

for manual age-estimation by a human team. Users under the age of 18 are able to connect with other users of the same age or +/- one year subject to a minimum age of 13. Wizz is designed so that child users are not able to connect with or interact with adult users aged 18 or over. Based on figures provided by Voodoo, 72.6% of Wizz users are aged 13-17 and 27.4% are 18-24. 49.53% of users identify as male, 47.37% of users identify as female and the remaining 1.81% of users identify as 'other'.

The Wizz app processes a range of personal data about users, including children. This includes identifiers such as a user's birth date, phone number and email address (Apple ID) as well as information linked to their device such as time zone, country and technical user data which is processed for advertising and analytics purposes. Special category personal data such as information about or inferring a user's sexual orientation may also be processed when a user joins a specific community within the app or chooses to share this information with other users.

Privacy information for users of Voodoo's mobile gaming apps is provided on Voodoo's main website, and hyperlinks are provided to this when an app is first launched on a user's device. The Wizz app has its own dedicated website that hosts a privacy notice as well as Wizz's terms of use and content policy, which can be accessed through hyperlinks within the user's in-app settings menu. Information about community standards is also provided within the Wizz app at various points of the user's journey. Privacy notices can also be accessed through hyperlinks displayed on app pages on the Apple App Store and Google Play Store prior to download.

Audit Summary

Overall Assurance Rating	Overall Opinion
Reasonable	There is a reasonable level of assurance that processes and procedures are in place, that the organisation is in conformance with the AADC and are delivering data protection compliance. The audit has identified some scope for improvement in existing arrangements to reduce the risk of non-conformance with both the AADC and data protection legislation.

Scope area	Assurance Rating
A: Governance, Transparency and Children’s Rights	Reasonable
B: Due Diligence and DPIAs	Reasonable
C: Data Minimisation & Sharing	Reasonable
D: Age Assurance	High
E: Detrimental Use	High
F: Privacy Settings and Parental Controls	Reasonable
G: Geolocation	Reasonable
H: Profiling and Cookies	Reasonable
I: Nudge Techniques	Limited

Areas for Improvement

- To improve its approach to risk management, Voodoo should create a centralised risk register to record high level information and privacy risks including those that relate to Voodoo's processing of children's personal data. The register should be used to track and monitor the status, severity and ownership of such risks, as well as to monitor the effectiveness of ongoing mitigating controls.
- The privacy information provided to users should be improved to provide assurance that it can be understood by children of different ages and in line with their developing capabilities. Voodoo may wish to undertake ongoing testing of privacy information with child users of their online services, and act swiftly on any feedback to ensure such information is presented as clearly and effectively as possible.
- Voodoo should create and implement a policy to handle Wizz user sanctions in a consistent manner including measures to inform users about any sanctions where it is appropriate to do so. The policy should also cover users' right to appeal and request a human review where they have been banned from accessing the service as a result of automated decision-making. Where automated bans have been applied to a users' account, Voodoo should ensure that there are adequate measures in place to inform users of their right to appeal such a decision.
- Where Voodoo relies on the UK GDPR Article 6(1)(f) lawful basis of 'legitimate interests' to process users' personal data, it should formally document a legitimate interests assessment to ensure that it has balanced its own commercial and other interests against the interests of users, including children.
- During the design and development stages of its online services, Voodoo should undertake a sufficiently detailed assessment to understand the specific appeal of each service to children of different ages. Where Voodoo determines that an online service is likely to appeal to children, it should ensure the service is designed with the best interests of children as a primary consideration and any related design decisions should be documented in full.
- There is an opportunity to introduce measures to regularly review users' personal data, including children's, processed by Voodoo's online services to reduce or delete excessive or unnecessary data.
- The user journey for Voodoo's online services should be reviewed to ensure that child users are not physically or psychologically nudged to provide personal data, lower privacy protections, activate riskier processing, or consent to data sharing. Consent should not be obtained as part of a 'bundle' or in exchange for in-app benefits, as this is unlikely to be freely given and meet legislation requirements.

Best Practice

As part of its approach to prevent Wizz app users from being exposed to potentially harmful content whilst using the app, all user-generated content from all users, including children, is subject to 100% moderation before it can be seen by other users. Voodoo partners with Hive, Two Hat and Keyword Studios who collectively deploy both automated tools and human review teams to assess and moderate all written, voice and pictorial/video content.

Evidence of Two Hat's sophisticated automated text moderation tool seen during the audit is particularly worthy of mention due to the level of detail and scrutiny it provides when moderating written content in English, Spanish, German, French and against an 'international dictionary'. The technology is also able to identify potentially harmful non-standard or slang words and phrases as well as detect the use of inappropriate icons such as emojis that may cause harm to users. Where a user's content is flagged by the moderation tools for breaching the Wizz app's content policy, the user's 'trust' level may be downgraded and a range of sanctions may be applied to the user's account depending on the severity of the breach.

Disclaimer

The matters arising in this report are only those that came to our attention during the course of the engagement and are not necessarily a comprehensive statement of all the areas requiring improvement. The responsibility for ensuring that there are adequate risk management, governance and internal control arrangements in place rest with the management of Voodoo SAS.

We take all reasonable care to ensure that our report is fair and accurate but cannot accept any liability to any person or organisation, including any third party, for any loss or damage suffered or costs incurred by it arising out of, or in connection with, the use of this report, however such loss or damage is caused. We cannot accept liability for loss occasioned to any person or organisation, including any third party, acting or refraining from acting as a result of any information contained in this report.

This report is solely for the use of Voodoo SAS. The scope areas and controls covered have been tailored to this engagement and, as a result, the report is not intended to be used in comparison with other ICO reports.