

**COPA COMMISSION PRESENTATION
3 AUGUST 2000**

TALKING POINTS

Australian Context in Overview

A year ago this presentation would have been very different. It would have been a theoretical presentation based on an untested but controversial piece of legislation. A year later, we have the benefit of six months of actual operation and this is what I would like to focus on – the scheme in practice.

In Australia, there is a strong tradition of providing consumers with information about the nature of media content. Our comprehensive media classification system is based on extensive and ongoing community consultation. Australia's co-regulatory scheme for Internet content extends the classification scheme to the online world and aims to provide Internet users with the consumer information they need.

Major Lessons from the Australian Scheme

The protection of children in the online environment requires a comprehensive and coordinated package of initiatives.

Without some clarification and coordination of the roles to be played by different parties, there is the danger of unnecessary duplication of effort, as well as the possibility of important initiatives being neglected. The Australian scheme consists of three major components – the complaint hotline, industry codes of practice, and community education – and outlines the responsibilities of the different players involved.

In Australia this is achieved through a co-regulatory approach and the provision of filtering software exemplifies this approach.

The Australian scheme is based on the premise that the community, industry and government will all be active participants. Internet users have to take primary responsibility for managing their own use and that of the young people in their care. However, industry needs to play a part in providing tools and information to their subscribers and in complying with their codes of practice which document their obligations to users. Government, as represented by the ABA, can play a coordinating role and provide a central location for the lodgement of

The provision of filtering software is an example of the co-regulatory approach. The Internet Industry Association codes of practice require ISPs to offer a filtering software product to their subscribers. Internet users have a responsibility to install, activate and regularly update the products they choose to use. The ABA registers and monitors the codes of practice which specify this obligation, while the role of educating and informing Internet users as to the benefits, limitations and practicalities of filtering software falls to both the ABA and industry, as well as the community advisory body NetAlert.

Community education is an essential part of the package.

While hotlines and industry codes are important, without an informed and active user community, they will have little effect. That is why the different players in the Australian scheme – the ABA, NetAlert, the Internet Industry Association, and industry participants themselves – each has a community education role. The challenge is for these roles to be coordinated to maximum effect and this is a one of the ABA priorities.

Research has to inform any community education strategy developed.

There is a real danger in assuming that we know what information users require. It is essential that community education strategies be informed through direct consultation and research with individual users.

Child protection initiatives have to be developed in the global context but must also be sensitive to the cultural context in which they will be applied.

To borrow a well-used but apt phrase from another sphere, we need to think globally but act locally. We cannot ignore the fact that the world is made up of societies and communities with a great diversity of beliefs, values and behavioural norms. Equally, we cannot ignore the fact that the Internet is a global and borderless medium. It is the balance between these two truths that we continue to struggle with and that organisations like ICRA are actively seeking to address.

Messages from the Australian Scheme for Internet Users

- 1. The Internet has tremendous benefits and great potential to improve all our lives.**

- 2. However, there are also some risks and just as in the real world, children tend to be more vulnerable to these risks.**
- 3. A lot of the same risks that exist in the real world also exist online, e.g. stranger danger, credit card fraud and exposure to upsetting material.**
- 4. A lot of the same mechanisms available in the real world for managing children's access to media content, also apply online, e.g. setting rules around the amount of use or time of use, identification of boundaries as to acceptable and unacceptable content or services, active involvement in children's use of the Internet, etc.**
- 5. In addition, there are tools including filtering software, that are designed to help manage access, either by limiting access to certain types of content or by tracking the content that is being accessed.**
- 6. These tools are not foolproof and are not a substitute for parental supervision, however, they can play a part in helping to make the Internet a safer place for children to be.**
- 7. The industry also has a part to play and under registered industry codes of practice, ISPs are required to offer a filtering software product to their subscribers.**
- 8. These codes of practice detail a range of obligations that ISPs have in relation to their subscribers, including obligations that relate to unsolicited email otherwise known as SPAM.**
- 9. Despite the best efforts of users to protect children, there may be times when they come across illegal or highly offensive content and in these circumstances, there is a central location where complaints can be lodged and investigated.**
- 10. In the end, it is up to individual users to actively manage their own use and that of the young people in their care, in order to make their online experience as rewarding and productive as possible.**