

Safer Internet Forum 2011: Internet in my pocket (Thursday 20 October 2011)

Session moderator: Janice Richardson, Insafe Coordinator

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Who were present at the session (what kind of actors)?

This parallel session considered how young people use digital technology in their daily lives, and how 'mobile' their lives have become. It also questioned what the future might hold in terms of the development of devices, and the impact this might have on online safety. As such, the session involved a wide range of stakeholders:

- Representation from the Pan-European Youth Panel.
- Representation from the Pan-European Teacher and Parent Panel.
- Representation from Safer Internet Centres: Erroll Marshall (Denmark), Georgi Apostolov (Bulgaria), Bernhard Jungwirth (Austria).
- Representation from industry: Lars Kindervater (GSMA Europe/Deutsche Telekom), Marco Pancini (Google), Annie Mullins (Vodafone).
- Representation from NGOs: John Carr (eNACSO: The European Alliance for Child Safety Online).

The session also included a very practical demonstration of emerging mobile technology from Russell Prue (Anderton Tiger), an independent ICT evangelist and broadcaster.

As outlined by the moderator in the opening address, the aim of the session was to identify three top ideas to lay down in front of the European Commission for future action.

The issue(s): Overview of the issues that were discussed

The session started with a short presentation from members of the Pan-European Youth Panel, who described a day in the life of a 'typical digital teenager' covering a spectrum of activities including information gathering, education, entertainment, communicating and sharing experiences. The young people described the mobile internet as being '**cool**', '**simple**', and a way to make '**your whole life movable**' in your pocket.

Interestingly, however, several of the youth panellists do not own a smartphone, with some stating that they find smartphones '**a bit scary**'. Others mentioned the potential for **timewasting** on a smartphone (for example playing online games) or **spending too much money** on online content and services, while others shared concerns about the potential for **cheating** in school tests and exams. Several young people only used mobiles for phone calls and text messaging,

instead **preferring to use a desktop PC for internet-based tasks**. It would seem, therefore, that young people might be more **selective users of smartphones** than we might initially think.

Next, parents and teachers were asked to share their views on the mobile internet. Five key themes emerged:

- **Stressful:** The mobile internet can be stressful for young people, feeling compelled to keep checking their phone and never 'switching off'.
- **Status symbol:** The parents and teachers felt that the mobile device has become something of a status symbol, and young people feel pressurised to always have the latest handset. This also led to concerns over theft which, aside from the stress of losing the actual device, could also lead to a large volume of personal data being lost or compromised.
- **Too private:** Parents and teachers felt that the mobile device is too private. It is impossible to supervise internet use via a mobile device in the same way as you might a desktop PC in a family room in the home, and this could potentially make young people more vulnerable.
- **Immediate:** The immediacy of being able to upload content to the internet via a mobile device gives young people no time to reflect before posting, leading to actions they may later regret.
- **Making private things public:** One teacher spoke about how mobile devices can cause issues in the school environment, such as pupils taking pictures in the gym class and uploading them to social networking sites (SNS), so compromising the privacy of others.

However, as one parent participant observed, it was interesting to note that, generally, **young people mainly talked about opportunities**, whereas **adults tended to focus on the risks and dangers** of the mobile internet.

Next came various perspectives from Safer Internet Centres, looking specifically at **online relationships** conducted via mobile devices, and the potential for **mobile apps to provide support for young people** via the very devices they are using.

Drawing on a presentation of findings from a 2009 survey by the Austrian Awareness Centre, and discussion from the floor, the session moderator concluded that the mobile internet poses five key challenges:

- **Costs:** issues related to costs were many, such as concern over fraudulent services and the pressures and influence of commercial advertising. There is a particular concern regarding apps, and the lack of transparency in how they operate – for example, in-app purchases and 'greedy' apps requiring access to data or a permanent internet connection.
- **Privacy:** again the issue regarding app access to data was raised, along with concerns over sexting and the rights of the individual over their own

- **Malware.**
- **Inappropriate content.**
- **Geolocation services.**

Industry representatives were asked to respond to these challenges, and several viewpoints were presented. The key themes emerging from this part of the debate can be summarised as follows:

- **Safety by default** is becoming key for industry, and the mobile operators group is working together to deliver solutions for children and young people.
- **Parental control tools** are becoming increasingly available on mobile devices, such as the ability to disable the camera or prevent in-app purchases. The desire is to move towards 'active choice' from out of the box for parental controls, but this may take some time to realise.
- **Pro-active education of consumers** is essential, and several good industry examples were mentioned such as the Teachtoday.eu website and the Vodafone Digital Parenting magazine. However, as industry panellists stressed, industry can only provide support: they can train the trainer and educate the educator BUT they can't deliver the education itself! A further challenge was put forward from the audience at this point, for industry to deliver more educational information to the consumer at the point of sale, and to leverage the power of their marketing and communication expertise to also raise the profile of online safety. There was general agreement, however, that such messages would need to be very carefully worded.
- **Effective cost control** is a complex issue due to the increasingly complex value chain. Mobile operators no longer have control over the content and services accessible via their networks.

The session concluded with an activity using the World Café methodology, where all attendees were asked to participate in debate on the key issues regarding 'the internet in my pocket' on the basis of what they had heard throughout the course of the session. The key issues remained broadly the same as those outlined above:

- **Privacy.**
- **Costs.**
- Adapted **education and awareness.**
- **Protection:** for example, the age appropriateness of content and services, and the need to allow more freedom based on the knowledge and maturity of the young person, rather than just on age.
- **Mind-set:** we need to recognise that, for young people in particular, there is **no distinction between the online and offline world.**
- They should be greater possibilities for **opting in or out** of services and

functionalities.

Some secondary themes also emerged from this debate:

- Some young people do engage in **risky behaviour**, such as bullying and sexting.
- **Lack of education and training** can lead to irresponsible use.
- Young people face **technical overload** – they are always online.
- There is now **no escape** from issues such as sexting and bullying – ‘if the internet is always in your pocket, the bully is always in your pocket too!’.

In terms of whose responsibility it is to address the issues raised by the mobile internet, there was general consensus that online safety is a shared responsibility. Additionally, education, tools, prevention, protection and enforcement are ALL essential components of protecting children and young people online.

In conclusion, a few very specific actions emerged from the debate in this session, which could potentially be the focus of future work in this area:

- **Media education** is key and needs to be embedded in the **curricula of schools**.
- Parental/technical controls are part of the solution but do have limitations, hence **digital parenting** is also important.
- **Law enforcement** is also key – the criminality exists in the real world rather than solely online, and should be addressed as such.

Additionally, any proposed solutions need to meet the needs of the users: they need to be **easy to implement**, and hence **a multi-stakeholder approach** is needed that looks at the issues and solutions from all perspectives.

Additional observations from the session reporter:

This was a very well-organised and engaging session, drawing an excellent level of discussion and debate from the participants. A good range of issues were discussed, but this was balanced with input on the positives of new and emerging mobile technologies, and the many opportunities offered. More emphasis was given to certain issues than others (i.e. privacy and cost as opposed to malware and geolocation services), but this perhaps reflects the frequency with which such issues arise at the present time.

The World Café activity worked particularly well, despite the large number of participants in each group and the limited time for rotation. Given more time, I am sure that the participants would have developed more concrete recommendations for addressing the issues raised.

Feedback at the end of the session was extremely positive. Parent participants particularly welcomed initiatives such as those presented by Vodafone (parental control tools), while the youth participants welcomed the opportunity to meet other people and present their ideas...and indeed discovered that they do in fact share the same views as adults!

Finally, the ethos of the Safer Internet Forum was perhaps best summed up by one youth panellist: "...trust, education and discussion is better than control. It's about knowledge and not about age – some 8 year olds may be more capable than 16 year olds."