

COPA Commission Hearing

June 8, 2000

Introduction

It is a pleasure for us to be here before the COPA Commission and to discuss GetNetWise a comprehensive toolbox of resources for parents that is widely distributed online. GetNetWise is a direct response to the serious need to protect children online from unwanted and inappropriate content or contacts. On the Internet, GetNetWise is designed to be easy to use and easily accessible “one click away.” That powerful click is the response to a challenge to the Internet industry to help families keep their children safe online while affording them the opportunity to take full advantage of the learning and recreational potential of this global medium.

GetNetWise is a direct response to the Internet medium – a world wide network, without borders or centralized points of control. The Internet is not physically contained within the jurisdiction of a locality, state, or nation, nor subject to the laws of any one nation. It is an open medium, in which people all over the world determine the course of their own online activities, viewing and creating content. A click on a link can send content racing from a computer half way around the world, jumping oceans as easily as city lines.

Who exercises control of this content? No one, and everyone. No one has the means to control, or limit, or legislate what the world will put on the World Wide Web. But everyone has the means to limit what comes in to his or her own computer. The power to control content lies with the end users. And when the end users are children, control should lie with parents or caregivers.

Parents are finding that with one click of a mouse, they can gain access to information needed to help ensure that the Internet is an educational and entertaining world for their children to explore, safe from unwanted and inappropriate content or contacts. That

powerful click is the response to a challenge to the Internet industry, to help families keep their children safe online.

The challenge embraced by GetNetWise is two-fold: first, to assemble information about the use and deployment of online empowerment tools into a common, easy-to-use resource for parents, and second, to ensure that the resource has the widest distribution possible, so that it is essentially one click away.

Both Congress and the Administration worked with Internet industry leaders and well-known family groups in the 1997 Internet Online Summit and the 1998 America Links Up campaign to address children's safety online. Since then, the Internet industry has focused on creating a collection of resources that would be accessible from the major entry points to the Internet and that would provide families with information on how to guide their children online. The Child Online Protection Act (COPA) asked whether providing one click access to such a common resource for parents was feasible. Before the COPA Commission even convened to examine this question, a partnership of Internet companies and public interest groups came together with the goal to create just such a resource.

The partnership, which includes AOL, AT&T, Alta Vista, Bell Atlantic, Bell South, Cyber Patrol, Dell, Disney Online, EarthLink, Excite@Home, IBM, Lycos, WorldCom, Microsoft, Net Nanny, Network Solutions, Prodigy, Road Runner, Surf Watch Software, Yahoo!, Zeeks, the American Library Association, Association of American Publishers, Center for Democracy and Technology, Center for Media Education, The Children's Partnership, Commercial Internet eXchange, Cyberangels, Enough is Enough, Internet Alliance, Internet Content Rating Association, National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, NetFamilyNews, People for the American Way, and the US Chamber of Commerce, believes that this goal was reached when GetNetWise was launched in July, 1999, demonstrating that one-click away access was not just feasible, but operational. For the past ten months, it has been helping parents keep children safe by giving them the means to guide their children's online activities. Parents need only to access the child

safety page on their Internet Service Provider (ISP), Online Service Provider (OSP), or portal site, and they will be but one click away from the resources that the partnership has made available on GetNetWise.

Why GetNetWise?

GetNetWise offers parents and caregivers the most effective technological and legal means by which they can protect their children from unwanted and age-inappropriate content on the Internet.

Through GetNetWise, a public service sponsored by Internet companies and public interest organizations, families can find the means to exercise that power in their own homes, making the Internet a safe and valuable resource for their kids. GetNetWise is more than a Web site. It represents a commitment to child safety from ISPs, OSPs, and portals. These companies, which serve as gateways to the Internet for over 90% of Internet users in the country, have given parents one-click access from their sites to family-friendly information and tools for online safety.

As the Internet grows, it is augmenting or supplanting other media such as newspapers, television and radio. Parents and educators realize that denying children access to the Web, and all the benefits that access confers, is a great risk—though certainly not the only one. As children plunge into an array of educational, entertaining, and wholesomely engaging resources, they may come upon other, objectionable material. At GetNetWise, we know that the best way to have kids be safe users is to empower their parents to guide their Internet explorations and help them make good choices, based on their family's values and the child's ages and maturity.

Establishing guidelines and standards can be a challenge for parents. Often parents are less familiar with Internet technology than their children. While parents may make little or no use of the Internet, many children are using it in school or in the library, and are even becoming Web authors as their own class projects are posted to school Web pages.

Often they use the Internet at home without adult supervision. Parents who want to understand the alternatives available to them to help their children stay safe online find GetNetWise to be a valuable resource.

What makes GetNetWise so useful? First, accessibility: Over 90% of online users have one-click access through their ISP, OSP, or popular portal sites, via a button or link which connects them directly to GetNetWise resources. Second, we help parents understand the nature of the risks that their children face online, and suggest actions they can take in response. Third, we offer a list of recommended sites appropriate for children, and finally, we give parents access to tools which will help them make their children's online experience safe and enriching. GetNetWise is regularly updated so parents can be assured that the information they are getting is current.

What kind of helpful information will parents find through GetNetWise?

GetNetWise provides four types of information:

Online Safety Guide

The Safety Guide provides information about the potential safety and privacy risks to children online. In a frank but friendly tone, the guide helps parents learn about the kind of material available on the Internet, and what issues merit their concern. It explains that the primary appeal of the Internet, interactivity, is also the attribute which creates the greatest risk. But what's new to parents may already be second nature to children; parents may find they're learning things their children already know.

Because one solution doesn't fit all children or all families, the safety guide addresses the needs of children by age/maturity level, and offers general tips for children, teens, and families. It also covers specific risks, and offers strategies to deal with each. In some situations, technology may offer parents a way to solve a particular problem;

when that is the case, a link can take parents directly to Tools for Families, where they can learn about the tool and what it can do for them.

Tools for Families

The tools section provides a comprehensive directory of over 110 technology tools that families can use to filter, block or monitor access to inappropriate content, such as violent or sexually explicit materials. The directory also includes tools which filter, block, or monitor outgoing materials, such as e-mails or chat rooms where children might post information. Parents can learn about the different ways that these tools work, and the standards that they apply, to determine what tools will work best for their family. These tools can be changed or altered as kids grow up and can be personalized to each computer and each user in the house. A searchable database allows parents to identify their needs and see a list of appropriate tools. Links to the tool providers allow parents to download the latest versions.

Because we want parents to have as much information as possible about available technology, we add new tools to the GetNetWise database when they are made available. We keep the database current by actively looking for new tools, and we provide an online request that developers can use to tell us about their new family empowerment software. The criteria for inclusion on the tools directory are posted, and of course, there is no charge to the software companies for the listings. Currently, there are more than 110 tools listed in the directory.

Interestingly, one of the frequently viewed tools is not a technological solution at all, but a sample contract or agreement, which sets out in simple language the rules that a child agrees to follow when going online. The child pledges to follow the rules that minimize his or her risk, and to keep parents or caregivers informed if anything untoward happens. Links to other such contracts are also provided.

Reporting Trouble Online

For many parents, the first indication that they need to be involved in their child's online activities comes when they see that a child has accessed inappropriate or objectionable materials. In a panic because their child has been exposed to pornography or other pernicious content, they may assume that a law has been broken. This section of GetNetWise helps parents understand the difference between material that is illegal and material that is inappropriate for their child, and between what is dangerous and what is merely annoying.

More important, it provides information on what steps to take in response to various situations, from calling law enforcement if a child's safety is immediately threatened to reporting sites which include illegal material. Should the situation warrant a call to law enforcement, links are provided to state police and to federal law enforcement agencies. These agencies can provide comprehensive advice about dealing with online problems. Additionally, there are links and/or phone numbers for child advocacy organizations involved with various threats to children, in both the online and physical worlds.

Web Sites for Kids

Parents often look to "Kid-Safe" Web sites to provide a safe and enjoyable online haven for their children. Our list includes current sites that have been developed or recommended by our partners or by other family-oriented non-profit groups and child development experts.

Parents need options based on their values and the needs of their children. Some may choose to use tools which will limit their children's viewing to sites such as these or other kid-oriented sites. But, as they learn when they read about blocking and filtering technology, they may be restricting their children's access to valuable and appropriate information. A young girl entering puberty, for example, may seek information about the changes her body is undergoing, but find that any mention of reproductive organs has been screened from the content she is permitted to see. As children grow up, their

information needs change, and GetNetWise can give their parents the resources they need to make decisions about their child's online access.

How have parents been made aware of GetNetWise?

The July, 1999, launch of GetNetWise generated widespread coverage, reaching millions of American homes through television, radio and print media. Attendance of key policymakers, corporate executives, and other well-known supporters at the launch ensured coverage in all top ten television markets, as well as 50 smaller markets. C-Span coverage and rebroadcasts, video news releases and repackaged news releases continued to enlarge the number of viewers reached. Print coverage by the *New York Times*, *Washington Post*, *USA Today*, *Christian Science Monitor*, *Los Angeles Times*, and the wire services extended the story, as did coverage by online zines such as C/Net, Newsbytes, PCWeek Online, ZDNet, and others.

Since the launch, GetNetWise and its partners have continued to earn media coverage in connection with safety for children online. We have promoted the site in a variety of ways, including banner ads and buttons displayed on the Web, bookmarks distributed at libraries, print brochures distributed at trade shows for educators, advertisements on bags of Wise Potato Chips, and promotional video screens displayed at 7-11 Stores. Information about GetNetWise is included in briefings of policymakers and public officials at federal, state, and local levels.

Partners and supporters provide one-click linkage to the GetNetWise site (or their own functional equivalent site) from their own Web sites, and they often promote the site in other ways. For example, AT&T gives the logo a prominent position, has included the site in an online shopping guide for consumers, and listed it as a resource on their "Parents" page. Lycos distributes GetNetWise capability brochures at all events attended by Lycos Zone, including trade shows pertinent to children and educators, and information about GetNetWise is included in Lycos Zone press kits at shows and press events. Microsoft runs banner ads on MSN, and includes information about GetNetWise

in appropriate press announcements and online feature stories. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and Net Nanny introduce and promote GetNetWise at classes conducted for law enforcement, parents, and teachers.

Interest in online safety and potential solutions for parents has filtered from the technology world into the mainstream, increasing the visibility of GetNetWise. No longer just the purview of technology writers, online safety is now addressed by journalists who cover education, family issues, children, and consumer affairs. References to GetNetWise have recently appeared in articles about privacy, as well as in an article about how parents are finally taking cues from their children and using the Internet to trade parenting tips. A recent episode of CBS Television's "Touched by an Angel" dealt with online safety, and referred viewers and Web site visitors to Enough is Enough, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, and Safekids.com, all GetNetWise advisors.

How are parents responding to GetNetWise?

Traffic

During the first ten months since GetNetWise came online, it provided 1,746,538 online users access to this resource, representing more than 12 million hits. Also, these numbers do not include page views by those partners, particularly Yahoo!, that provide their own version of GetNetWise resources tailored for their audiences.

Information from our partners indicates that online child safety resources generate a great deal of traffic. But understandably, not all of our partners tally the visits to their child safety pages, and those who do may count them differently. Some have numerous features bundled into their child safety pages, which makes extraction for purposes of assessing their link to GetNetWise impossible. Net Nanny, for example, a vendor of family empowerment tools, reports almost six million visitors to their site since last July. The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, another of our partners, receives 2.3 million hits per day, but cannot distinguish between those

seeking information about child safety online and those looking at images of missing children. AOL has two pages, Neighborhood Watch and Parental Controls, that deal with child safety and include the GetNetWise link. Neighborhood Watch has averaged about 472,000 visitors per month, while Parental Controls has averaged about 2,084,000 visitors. Though not comparably measured, we feel that we have evidence of abundant interest in the problem of child safety online, and the solution of family empowerment.

User Satisfaction

We do not yet have an online satisfaction survey for users, but we do provide a link which enables users to contact either the Webmaster or the GetNetWise director with questions and concerns. To date, our correspondents have expressed little dissatisfaction with GetNetWise, but many have used the link to comment on objectionable materials that they have found online.

One of our partners, Net Nanny, has noted that GetNetWise has been extremely well received by attendees of “Internet and Your Child.” IYC is a training program on Internet safety for parents, teachers, and law enforcement officers. Net Nanny, a founding member, core curriculum developer, and master trainer for the IYC program, passed on this comment:

We have heard tons of great feedback from Leanne Shirey, a vice detective with the Seattle Police Department and the founder of the “Internet and Your Child” program. IYC students have been very impressed with GetNetWise and consider it to be one of the more useful resources for additional information offered during the training and afterward when they are home searching for ways to control their kids’ online activities. They found the resource informative (especially the tools section), easy to use and potentially very helpful in the event that their children run into trouble online.

What are the next steps for GetNetWise?

Content enhancement

Because interactivity is considered the most dangerous aspect of the online world, we will soon be adding new privacy tools to help prevent children from inadvertently providing personal and potentially dangerous information to strangers. We will also be adding new tools that will allow parents to intervene if their children are subjected to threatening or hateful materials or language, on a Web site, or in a chat room or instant message.

We plan to collect and tabulate user satisfaction data by introducing a “Talk Back” feature. We will be soliciting the opinions of users about the effectiveness of the tools they’ve selected for use, and the response they get when they report hate speech to authorities via our links. We’ll also ask if they’ve identified any new tools which we’ve not included in our directory. Our Web master will regularly read the comments to assess needs for changes to the site.

Other surveys will focus on parents, caregivers, and children and youth who use the Internet, including those currently using GetNetWise. Our goal is to learn how best to protect children and youth within the framework of rapid technological change. The surveys and focus groups will help us refine our understanding of what’s working, and determine what we can improve.

Increased reach and awareness

GetNetWise will undertake several initiatives to broaden our reach and make our site available to more families as they go online. The development and launch of a Spanish-language version of GetNetWise will make our resources and tools accessible to more than 33 million Spanish-speaking Americans. And our focus on creating partnerships with the smaller ISPs will bring us closer to our goal of being one click away from 95% of the Internet users. Our penetration of the 6000 small to

medium size ISPs remains low, and we will need to recruit a significant number of new partners among them.

As we work to make the tools and resources of GetNetWise more readily accessible, we are also cognizant of the need to raise public awareness of the issue of child online safety and family empowerment.

This summer, at its first year anniversary, GetNetWise plans to re-launch at an event on Capitol Hill. The event will present us with a stage from which to celebrate accomplishments and to preview the exciting developments planned for year two. It will also give us an opportunity to rekindle the interest of the media and key public officials as we begin our second year. As before, we expect that an aggressive media campaign will bring our message to policy makers and millions of American homes, via broadcast, print, and online media. After the re-launch, we want to continue earning media attention as credible spokespersons for family empowerment and online safety.

We will also be paying more attention to non-Internet-using parents. With the help of our partners, we will be employing the familiar and comfortable medium of print to reach those parents who lack the knowledge or means to get our materials online. Parents' guides, teachers' guides, and public officials' guides can all be part of the mix which lets "non-online" parents know that they, too, have both the responsibility and the wherewithal to help their children safely explore the online world. Articles placed in local or community newspapers will continue the outreach to these families.

One medium which we will not be using to reach parents is unsolicited e-mail. Those who use the Internet would not be receptive to this form of message delivery, and those who are not yet online would be overlooked.

Other elements in our national communications plan include a Public Service Announcement (PSA) campaign possibly in conjunction with the Advertising

Council, and a strategic earned media campaign addressed to publications, reporters, and editors covering technology, education, consumer affairs, and women's, children's, and family issues. We will develop reporting mechanisms that will allow us to monitor and assess the results of awareness programs.

Summary

In the past ten months, the Internet community and its public interest partners have made a promising start towards providing parents with the resources they need to guide their children through the sometimes risky world of the Internet. Over 90% of Internet users have one-click access to GetNetWise, a Web site that links parents with sound advice, information, references, and access to over 110 tools. Parents can select the appropriate means to help their children safely enjoy the educational and entertaining bounty of the World Wide Web, consistent with their own values and the age and needs of their children. Web site development proceeds, with new tools and links planned for upcoming release. As public education remains a key challenge the partnership will continue to raise public awareness that engaged and empowered parents are a child's best defense against unwanted and unwelcome online content and encounters.

