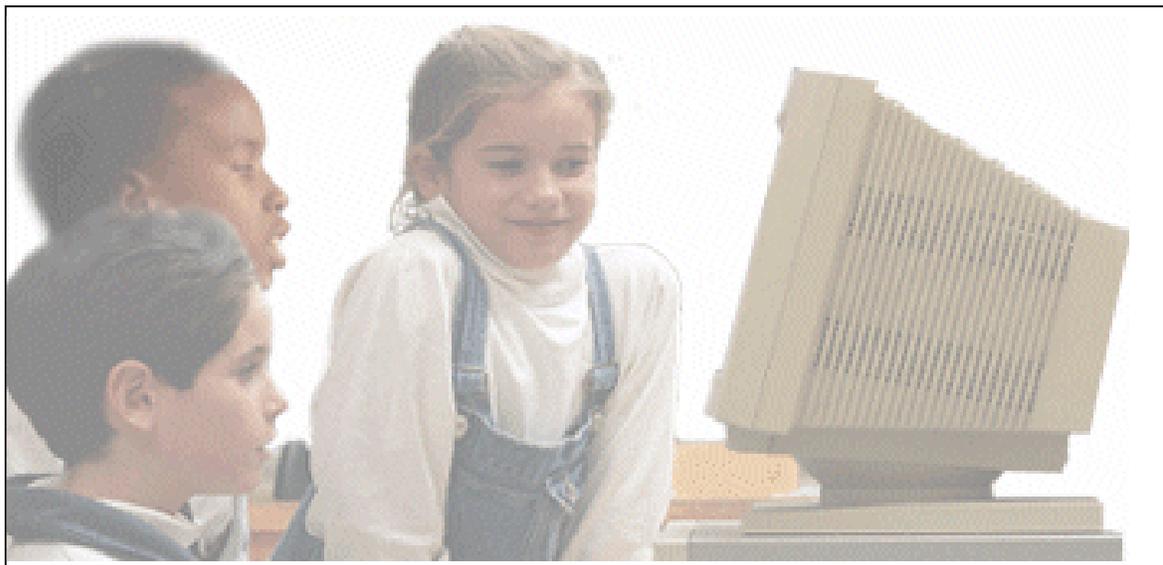


PROMOTING SAFE USE OF THE INTERNET



How to communicate messages about safe use of the Internet to parents, teachers and children across Europe.

SAFE USE OF THE INTERNET ACTION PLAN

Preparatory Actions (Lot 4 Awareness)

**FINAL REPORT
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**



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SECTION 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report outlines the findings of a year long research study commissioned by the European Commission (DGXIII), in preparation for the ***Safe Use of the Internet Action Plan*** (See <http://www.echo.lu/iap> for full details). The work was carried out by the non-profit organisation Childnet International (see www.childnet-int.org) and Public Relations company Fleishman Hillard (See www.fleishman.com), henceforth called the programme team.
- 1.2 The objective of the work was to assess the key messages which would help children stay safe online, and how best to then communicate these safety messages effectively to parents, teachers and children across Europe.
- 1.3 The research involved: assessing existing Internet safety awareness programmes across Europe (and elsewhere), identifying the key messages and styles of communication, developing pilot deliverables and testing these in six European countries through focus groups and an online website questionnaire, and then producing recommendations (this report) which will support wider awareness actions in the full ***Safe Use of the Internet Action Plan*** for 2000 onwards.
- 1.4 Due to the limited scope of the project, it must be stressed that this was not a pilot programme for a full scale Internet safety awareness campaign, but rather a preparatory test of particular styles of messages, images and deliverables to see which approaches work best. Furthermore, the programme team was concerned to assess whether a full European-wide awareness campaign would work, and whether there were specific issues/concerns in individual countries and national variances to take into consideration.
- 1.5 The testing of the messages and deliverables had two key components: asking experts, teachers and children through the www.netaware.org website (self-selecting); and getting impressionistic feedback from 12 focus groups in the six European countries. In addition the programme team were in constant touch with other organisations and initiatives concerned about safety and self-regulation of the Internet. These included: The Bertelsmann Experts Group, the Association of Hotlines in Europe (INHOPE), the European Schoolnet, Disney's European Safe Surfing Week, Getnetwise in the USA, the Vienna Conference on Combating Child Pornography on the Internet, European Research into Consumer Affairs (ERICA) as well as individual government's involved in designing awareness initiatives. Consultation with these bodies has been crucial and many of the findings have been endorsed by these other organisations.
- 1.6 The programme team believe that the 12 key findings from this report and the main recommendations (see below), will help shape the future ***Safe Use of the Internet Action Plan*** as well as other emerging Internet safety awareness campaigns. Because of the expanding use of the Internet and the demand for good advice from parents and schools in keeping children safe, it is crucial that a wider pan-European Internet safety awareness programme is established quickly. Key to ensuring the success of this wider campaign is securing cross sector support from partners in different countries and ensuring that a high profile branded campaign has real investment, and "ownership" from industry. With the promise of 50% match funding from the European Commission, there is a unique opportunity to deliver a fuller awareness programme which will have a real impact on ensuring that children are kept safe using the Internet.

Summary of Findings and Recommendations

1.7 The following is a summary of the findings and main recommendations of this report on promoting safe use of the Internet. ***This summary and a pdf version of the full report is available at www.netaware.org***

<p>1 There are very real dangers for children using the Internet</p>	<p>The research highlighted that parents have real concerns about the dangers to children using the Internet. These can broadly be grouped under 3 headings:</p> <p>CONTENT - accessing inappropriate content including pornography, child pornography, racist/hate and violent sites.</p> <p>CONTACT - being contacted through chat rooms and e-mail by those who would seek to harm or lure them.</p> <p>COMMERCIAL - the blur between much content and advertising, direct marketing to children, collection of information violating privacy.</p>
<p>Recommendation ⇒</p>	<p><i>Any Internet awareness initiative needs to address these dangers and, as well as explaining the nature of the Internet, provide clear advice and safety tips which will ensure that children remember how to keep safe online. Initiatives need also to respond to emerging dangers that arise as the Internet develops.</i></p>
<p>2 There is enormous demand for advice</p>	<p>The research confirmed that Internet users (and parents in particular) are looking for authoritative, reliable and credible advice that will help them ensure that children's/pupil's experience on the Internet is positive and safe. Many of those interviewed asked "When is this awareness programme going to start?"</p>
<p>Recommendation ⇒</p>	<p><i>There is a real urgency to develop safety awareness initiatives whilst the use of the Internet is growing so rapidly. Such a campaign could prevent possible tragedies and there is a clear "window of opportunity" to develop appropriate responses and for Industry to show responsibility and leadership in this area.</i></p>
<p>3 Clear advice about blocking software is needed</p>	<p>The feedback from parents confirmed that whilst filtering software has its place, it is no fail safe guarantee that children are not accessing inappropriate material and no substitute for direct parental involvement. Furthermore parents were confused as to the effectiveness of filtering software. Parents need to recognise their part in keeping children safe online. Other strategies such as always keeping the computer in a family room, or "taking the trip together" need to be implemented in conjunction with software usage.</p>
<p>Recommendation ⇒</p>	<p><i>Any Internet Awareness initiative needs to include advice as to filtering software and the merits and drawbacks of particular sorts (see for an example www.getnetwise.org). Advice as to how best to use software as part of protecting children online is key.</i></p>
<p>4 Parents feel less net literate than their children</p>	<p>The research identified the anxiety of many parents that their children knew more about the Internet (and the dangers) than they did. Many stressed that they needed an "idiot-proof" guide to the dangers and steps to help their children avoid them. Parents are a diverse group and any advice needs to be suitable for beginners as well as those with more experience of the Net.</p>
<p>Recommendation ⇒</p>	<p><i>Awareness Initiatives aimed at parents must not assume a certain level of knowledge. Resources (such as websites) should give options for parents to pick up the basics. An "advanced" and "beginners" distinction may be helpful.</i></p>

5 There are few statutory-funded initiatives	<p>The research identified that whilst there are some excellent general Internet awareness programmes and some small scale Internet safety initiatives for pupils in schools, there appear to be few government-funded programmes in member states which specifically make the general public aware of the dangers to children in using the Internet. This contrasts with the involvement that the Federal Government has taken in the USA to kick-start safety awareness programmes.</p>
Recommendation 	<p><i>Governments must recognise that they share a responsibility to communicate Internet safety to citizens. While the focus of their activity may be on awareness in schools, they need to examine other ways of communicating with parents e.g. websites, libraries, health centres, crime awareness campaigns etc.</i></p>

6 Industry has a leading role to play in safety awareness	<p>The research confirmed the fact that Industry involvement in safety awareness is crucial as Internet companies have good communication channels to their customers and can profile the issue. Those companies which the programme team consulted with were supportive of the concept of wider Internet safety initiatives. There are already some excellent examples of how individual companies have supported safe surfing. In joint industry-wide campaigns, companies must be careful not to let their own self interest (e.g. their brand positioning) override the aims of a campaign as a whole.</p>
Recommendation 	<p><i>We urge Industry to contribute, and in some cases lead Internet awareness initiatives. Individual companies should consider how they might join together with competitors to support wider Industry awareness campaigns.(eg links to central site, funding, mirror advice on their sites, etc.). Furthermore all individual companies providing Internet services should include a safety component in all that they do. The results of this research can help individual companies promote safe surfing - see recommendations on positive tips, deliverables etc.</i></p>

7 Partnerships are crucial to success	<p>From researching existing safety awareness programmes it was clear that the most successful were ones which involved partners from all sectors, e.g. government, education, industry, child welfare, parents groups etc. Child-welfare groups, whilst they may not be able to bring funding to a partnership, have valuable advice and experience to offer in communicating to children and parents. Where child welfare groups work together with government and industry, it is crucial that all participants are seen as equal partners.</p>
Recommendation 	<p><i>Whilst forming effective partnerships is difficult, we urge the development of cross-sectoral campaigns as they potentially have the greatest impact and reinforce messages communicated by individual campaigns/groups.</i></p>

8 Awareness campaigns need quality, complementary media	<p>The research showed that for an Internet safety awareness campaign to be effective, online and off-line elements need to be integrated and complementary. Furthermore, awareness campaigns need to be imaginative and capture the user's attention and differentiate themselves from the saturation of media messages. Although a website is crucial, its production must not be seen as the sole solution. In addition there has to be significant promotion, linking and updating of the site, and other deliverables such as public service announcements, posters, leaflets, mousemats, adverts etc. must be included and targeted at different audiences.</p>
Recommendation 	<p><i>We urge those undertaking awareness campaigns to use different deliverables to reach different audiences. These must also be of the same high quality as general marketing messages. Initiatives need to be planned to be sustained in the medium term to ensure maximum impact.</i></p>

9 Awareness campaigns need to address different audiences and need to be timely	<p>Safety messages have to be communicated clearly and targeted at different audiences at the right time. There are different 'labels' which can be used to attract different age groups and it is vital that there is not simply a distinction between adult and child. Where does the novice teenager go? Timeliness (i.e. the right time to promote safe use of the Internet is key) e.g. at the time of first hardware purchase, signing up to go online, induction into the Internet at school, start of school term, public announcements, etc.</p>
Recommendation 	<p><i>We would urge those undertaking awareness initiatives to think carefully about their audience and the timeliness of their campaign. ISPs should also provide more safety information at the point of customers signing up. Ensuring that there are effective distribution channels and partners willing to promote the campaign to audiences at key openings is crucial.</i></p>

10 There are few national variances	<p>Surprisingly the research showed that across Europe most adults have similar concerns about safety and the Internet. Although the team were looking for local manifestations of "danger" and were sensitive to the country-specific cultural, linguistic and socio/economic factors which impact on the Internet, attitudes did not seem to vary greatly. There appears to be a surprising level of commonality with regards to the appropriate messages and style for communicating safety on the Internet.</p>
Recommendation 	<p><i>Because of this finding there is real value in sharing experience across Europe in awareness and there is scope for developing a wider pan-European awareness campaign with a multi-lingual website and deliverables etc. However, there is a need for local delivery and a wider campaign needs to complement smaller national initiatives.</i></p>

11 Messages need to be positive and need to empower	<p>The overall response from the focus groups and website research (which involved a small sample of children), showed a preference for images and styles of safety tips that emphasised the positive and helped empower children to take responsibility themselves. This reflects widespread change across Europe in cultural norms and values, with an increasing emphasis on the rights of the child and equality. There needs to be a balanced approach of not only protecting children from harmful use of the Internet, but also fostering positive use. Part of an awareness strategy needs to include directing children towards interesting and exciting sites (that are also safe) rather than simply away from harmful ones.</p>
Recommendation 	<p><i>Awareness campaigns need to examine carefully the style of their messages and focus on building responsibility in children so that they can take care of themselves. Parents need to be helped to understand how they can be involved appropriately with their children's use of the Internet and how this involvement will vary with the age of the child. Further research on children's views on the messages would be beneficial in determining children's desires and expectations of parental involvement.</i></p>

12 Awareness about Safety complements wider Net literacy	<p>The ability for children to use the Internet will be an increasingly essential skill. It is crucial therefore that Internet safety is integrated with the fuller net literacy training of young people so that as well as learning how to use the Internet, evaluate the reliability of information, knowing how to publish and exploit the medium, children also know how to keep safe. The corollary of this is safety campaigns will be more effective as children learn these broader skills. A long term effect of good net literacy is likely to include children passing on their knowledge to their peers, including safety tips.</p>
Recommendation 	<p><i>More research needs to be done to connect Internet safety with Internet literacy programmes. Furthermore Internet awareness campaigns should include children in their design and delivery - eg. competitions to design logos, posters, tips etc. and campaigns that mix safety with what kids want. This will aid net literacy.</i></p>