

Dr Terry Cutler, of Cutler and Company, has been appointed chair of the Information Policy Advisory Council. Dr Cutler talks to ABA Update about the role of the Council.

On-line advice

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You have been appointed chair of the Information Policy Advisory Council, have there been any other appointments to date?

The Minister [Senator Alston, Minister for Communications and the Arts] has put the membership of the Council together with considerable care, because he was very concerned to get the best people across the broad spectrum of the industry who have a direct interest in these emerging issues.

Now he has announced the composition of the council, I expect he will be indicating some of the initial challenges that he sees for the Council, very soon.

Will the Council's focus be on business, on generating the Australian commercial aspect of on-line services?

It is broader than just business. Firstly, I can say the composition of the Council includes members with a range of consumer and user experience—or people with a special interest in a broad range of application areas and user areas. I would expect the Council to look at issues like broad access as much as at the participation of business in electronic

commerce. The charter, as I see it, will be concerned with the deployment, development and exploitation of the emerging opportunities, within each and every area of the community.

When established, the Information Policy Advisory Council will operate on an on-going basis. What outcomes are you looking for?

The Council has two tasks at its core. Firstly, it is to consider, from the perspective of the industry and the user, what it thinks are the emerging issues of importance. As such, it will provide a channel of advice to the government on issues that merit government consideration. Secondly, the Council will be taking on board questions that the minister refers and responding with advice.

So it is a two way flow of advice. One is in response mode, the other is generating issues where we say these things are coming on stream, or these will be problem areas, or these are emerging opportunities, so that we see the government has a role in doing something about them.

Do you think any one area, content, technology or regulation, will have the greatest emphasis?

The focus at any point in time will vary. I would hope that we would have a balanced agenda. My personal concern would be to identify and, through the Council, have agreement on priority issues that will have an impact on what are the bottlenecks that need to be addressed before we can move forward. There is always a danger in sectors like this: you can draw up pages of checklists of issues and you can be paralysed by the magnitude of the task. I think it is important to have a process which homes in on those pivotal issues that fundamentally progress the industry and opportunities in service delivery, rather than trying to do everything.





Will one of the Councils' duties be to promote the use of on-line services?

I see one aspect of our role as being a group of zealous missionaries promoting the opportunities for Australia in this area.

Do you mean promoting opportunities for the consumer or the provider?

For everyone—for service opportunities, for strategic industry development opportunities and for global market participation opportunities.

Is it possible to accomplish that without a conflict of interest—to remain impartial?

I don't see that as a problem. Each member of the Council will be conscious of the importance of the sector and of the incredibly exciting potential opportunities. These range from community applications to business opportunities through to opportunities for transforming the way communications networks work in country areas and non-metropolitan Australia.

We wouldn't be on the Council if we weren't committed to capitalising on the opportunities.

One real role the Council has is to promote a greater awareness of the opportunities and facilitate much better public understanding of those opportunities.

What plans do you have for looking at international opportunities?

The fundamental message we need to get across is that the world of on-line services and telecommunications services is, by definition, a global market without border restrictions.

We won't be saying we will look at opportunities here and there. We will be saying everything we do is part of this wider market—both in terms of being competitive, and in terms of developing offshore services as an integral part of the game. That means changes to some of our notions about export as well.

We need to think global from day one. You can't think about developing a local business which you then take offshore at some later date. From day one you are competing in a global market. You have an on-line service which you are trying to make attractive to customers and users. This means you are competing directly with someone else, for example, those providing competing services in the US or the UK.

You need that mind set. Either we attract those users here or they will go to those offshore services.

How well has Australia responded to on-line opportunities?

It varies from sector to sector.

As a very general comment, small and medium sized business have been more energetic in the first instance than the larger corporations. The government has played a leading role, particularly the state governments in Victoria and South Australia who have been using multimedia and on-line services for their own government service delivery. That's a crucial part of service development.

One of the challenges for the Council is to encourage more businesses to start paying attention to the opportunities here as the infrastructure develops.

There have been some reports recently that commercial on-line developments in the US have not been as lucrative as originally hoped. Has that happened here as well?

There is a lot of noise from some areas, but you would expect that in these sorts of games.

A lot of people have gone in with the wrong expectations. If you treat this industry like a lottery there will be a lot of disappointed people.

Part of this game is mindset. It is very hard to know how aspects of this game will develop. You can't adopt a wait and see attitude and do nothing. You need to get in there in a small way and start experimenting, learning and developing your models: your business, and your community networking models.

Will the Information Policy Advisory Council have any relation to Australian Multimedia Enterprise?

No. The [Australian Multimedia Enterprise] AME has a very specific stand alone charter, which is administering a certain amount of money to provide funding for multimedia content producers. Certainly the Council would look at the availability of capital and financing for the industry and at whether specific initiatives like the AME are sufficient, or whether we need larger funds or additional ways of responding to bottlenecks that might be identified.

I see us complementing and working with organisations like AME.

The Council will look at regulation of on-line services. Will that be complementary to the ABA's role?

Certainly. Already I have had many useful discussions with the ABA's chairman, Mr Peter Webb about the ABA's report on content



regulation.¹ We have also discussed how we can work together on the issues arising from the implementation of the recommendations in the ABA's report. I see that as a complementary role rather than competing in any way.

Is it necessary to have two bodies looking at regulation?

We can provide a useful and complementary input to the government and to the ABA in our ability to provide the ABA, in its work and responsibilities, with an industry perspective.

We can provide advice from that perspective, in the same way we would to the government.

Back to Cutler & Company. What does it do?

We specialise in the communications sector's field of convergence, working in telecommunications, multimedia and on-line services both in Australia and overseas. We work for both companies, from the commercial business development perspective and with governments on policy and regulatory issues.

What do you bring to the Council?

I bring a lifetime career of working in this sector and an intense interest, in the past few years, in working on both industry and public policy issues.

My experience is very broad and I have had recent high level participation in the discussion in Australia about the opportunities and public policy issues associated with new media.

How does the status of discussion in Australia relate to international discussion?

All Australia's activities in the on-line area must be geared towards trying to improve Australia's participation in global forums and developing what are truly global on-line and new communications systems. It is an international game.

Where does Australia fit in?

At the moment we in the forefront of industry developments.

I don't think we have been as much at the forefront of international discussions about those developments as befits the industry activity, so I would like to see our level of participation and involvement in international discussions, whether the discussion is about content regulation, copyright, electronic commerce or whatever, significantly increased.

Will that be your role as chair of the Council?

It will certainly be something I will be promoting as part of my role.

Will it be part of your role also to encourage domestic benefits of locally developed technology rather than allowing the benefits to escape overseas?

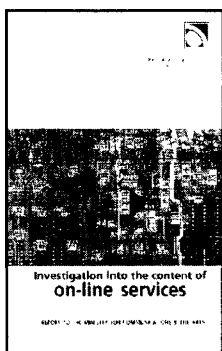
That's precisely why I think the focus on these new emerging opportunities is so timely and important. There really is an opportunity for Australia to participate in these new markets and carve out a position which is crucial to the knowledge based on-line economy of the next century which isn't far away.

So it's up to you to make sure this doesn't slip away?

I think we won't be alone in that. This and every other part of industry has a responsibility to promote these opportunities.

Information Policy Advisory Council members:

- Dr Terry Cutler, Managing Director, Cutler & Co.
- Ms Jennifer Hooks, Executive Director, Film Victoria.
- Mr Geoff Cousins, Chief Executive Officer, Optus Vision.
- Ms Amanda Harkness, Director, Strategy, Telstra multimedia.
- Dr Greg Clark, President, Technology Group, News Corp.
- Mr Michael Begun, Managing Director, Michael Begun & Co.
- Mr Daniel Petrie, Director, Advance Technology, Microsoft.
- Mr Mike Grant, Chief Executive Officer, Imago Ltd.
- Dr Denise Wood, Executive Director, OptCom South Australia Inc.
- Ms Mara Bun, Manager, Policy and Public Affairs, Australian Consumers Association.
- Mr Bob Savage, Managing Director, IBM Australia Ltd.
- Mr John Thame, Managing Director, Advanced Bank.
- Mr Mark Needham, Manager Information Technology & Telecommunications, Cane Grower's Council.
- Mr Gary Sturgess, Sturgess Australia.
- Commonwealth Officials:**
- Mr Neville Stevens, Secretary, Department of Communications & the Arts.
- Mr Andy Macdonald, Chief Government Information Officer.
- Mr Eric Wainwright, Deputy Director, National Library.



¹ *Investigation into the Content of On-line Services*, ABA, June 1996. Available from the ABA, price \$20. Phone (02) 9334 7700.

The report is also available on-line at the ABA's Web site: <http://www.dca.gov.au/aba/hpcov.html>