



content of on-line services was options for protecting minors from Internet content that may be inappropriate for them.

The ABA found that the Internet and other on-line services offer an unprecedented level of variety, as well as quantity, of information and entertainment from around the world. However, many parents and supervisors consider some of this material to be inappropriate for minors and wish to exercise some control over the material which their children access.

Platform for Internet Content Selection (PICS)

The ABA is pleased to see developments such as the Platform for Internet Content Selection (PICS) emerge in the on-line environment. PICS itself is a set of technical standards. These standards enable Internet content, such as Web sites, to exhibit any label or symbol which is compatible with the PICS standard.

PICS labels can provide useful tools for parents and supervisors to exercise some control over the content accessed by children in their care. Parents using PICS com-

patible software can choose whether to block their children's access to material that has been labelled in a way to indicate that it is unsuitable for them. For example, a label may indicate that a site contains sexual material. Some parents may decide that this material is unsuitable for their children and elect to block that material. Parents also have the choice of blocking material which has not been labelled, or to override the block after viewing the material.

Importantly, those who are not concerned about blocking their own access to Internet content need not activate these tools.

The PICS standards allow any organisation or individual to develop a labelling system which reflects their tastes and standards, and make these labels available to other Internet users.

Recreational Software Advisory (RSACi)

A number of organisations have already begun to establish labelling schemes which can interact with the PICS standards. One such scheme is that developed by the Rec-

reational Software Advisory Council for Internet Content, known as 'RSACi'.

The RSACi model gives Internet content a rating of between 0 and 4 on the topics of sex, violence, nudity and language, including hate language. To some degree these are matters which form a core of community concerns that cut across cultural and geographic frontiers.

The RSACi ratings model seeks to describe rather than evaluate Internet content. By doing this the RSACi system seeks to minimise value judgements about the appropriateness of content and enables users to make their own decisions about its suitability, applying their own tastes and standards.

A descriptive labelling scheme may provide opportunities for application in the international environment. It allows users in different countries, cultures and even different households to use the labels to make their own decisions about the suitability of content for themselves or their children.

Labelling schemes

To date many of these labelling schemes have emerged

from North America. However, some of these schemes may easily be redefined to address the concerns of the wider Internet community.

Labelling schemes which seek input from Internet users in a wide range of countries may have a greater chance of acceptance on a regional or international basis.

This acceptance may then encourage content providers to label their material. Providers would be aware that these labels can be used by parents and supervisors, wherever they may be located around the globe, using the PICS compatible software.

It would seem that this is an area which international bodies such as the European Commission, UNESCO, the OECD and ASEAN, to name a few, might play a leading role in promoting discussion about the opportunities presented by labelling schemes. Such bodies could help to bring together relevant industry and community groups to discuss the matters which labelling schemes might address if they are to be effective tools for parents and supervisors throughout the international Internet community.

ABA presents Internet finds at London conference

The ABA presented its views and findings on regulation of the Internet and on-line services at the European Commission-sponsored 'Policing the Internet' conference.

'All countries are struggling with these issues and the conference discussed options for international cooperation,' said Mr Peter Webb, ABA Chair-

man. 'The ABA is keen to establish a dialogue with countries concerned with the issues regarding Internet content. The ABA is particularly interested in the international application of labelling schemes which may be used by parents and supervisors to protect minors in the on-line environment.'

As part of the conference, Ms Kaaren Koomen, ABA Man-

ager On-line Services, participated in a seminar with representatives from Childnet International, Internet Watch and the Internet Service Providers Association in the UK. The seminar topic was 'International responses: the way forward.' Material presented at the conference will feed back into European Commission regulatory proposals.

Other issues discussed at the conference included the protection of women from sexual exploitation on the Internet; violence in information technology; censoring or freedom of expression; is controlling the Internet feasibly possible?; cooperation from the police and the legal system; and the role of industry and Internet users.