



New research shows that Australians see industry, government and Internet users themselves as all having a part to play in the appropriate supervision and selection of Internet content.

International research on attitudes to the Internet

Top line findings from a three country international survey on attitudes to the Internet make clear that there is a high level of public perception that the Internet entails some risks for users. It shows that Australians see industry, government and Internet users themselves as all having a part to play in the appropriate supervision and selection of Internet content.

The survey was undertaken in Australia, Germany and the USA by the Bertelsmann Foundation in cooperation with the ABA, during June 1999. It seeks peoples' views on perceived risks associated with the Internet and practical ways of managing these risks.

The majority of those surveyed in each country are concerned about the presence of racist messages and pornographic material on the Internet. Seventy per cent of Australians and 68 per cent of Internet users consider that a hotline for reportage of dangerous material is a good idea.

The full report of this research will be released in Australia in conjunction with the Internet Content Summit in Munich, Germany in September. The Summit is one of the most significant events in the development of a broad set of

strategies for self-regulation of Internet content by industry, academia and government policy makers. The ABA will be an active participant in this international forum and has participated in the research project as part of its commitment to its new area of responsibility for Internet content.

International Network of Experts on Content Self-Regulation

In February 1999, Mr Gareth Grainger, ABA Deputy Chairman, was invited to join the International Network of Experts on Content Self-Regulation. The network is an initiative of the German-based Bertelsmann Foundation. Through the network, the Foundation aims to facilitate the development of a coordinated international system to ensure responsibility and security on the Internet, particularly for minors. The network comprises key players and decision-makers in the area of Internet content and responsibility.

The network's mission is to facilitate the development of an integrated system of approaches to dealing with harmful and illegal content on the Internet through self-regulation. Its work in devel-

oping this self-regulatory system is focused on four key areas of responsibility: industry codes of conduct, self-rating and filtering mechanisms, hotlines and law enforcement.

The network's first meeting was held in New York on 27 February 1999, and the second in Gutersloh, Germany, on 3 July (see report, p.16).

An overview of the results of the three-country study into Internet regulatory issues was presented at the Gutersloh meeting.

Research methodology

The research was conducted with representative samples of the adult population in each country: Australia, Germany and the USA. In Australia, 1200 telephone interviews were conducted with people aged 18 and older, of which 718 were with Internet users.

For further information about the Internet Content Summit in Munich, visit www.stiftung.bertelsmann.de/english/

ABA commences role as Internet content regulator

The ABA's role as Internet content regulator officially commenced on 16 July 1999 when the *Broadcasting Services Amendment (Online Services) Act 1999* received royal assent. The Bill had previously passed through the Senate on 26 May 1999 and the House of Representatives on 30 June 1999.

The ABA will implement the co-regulatory scheme established by the Act in partnership with industry and the community. In performing its role, the ABA will be guided by the principles laid down in the legislation of minimising the financial and administrative burdens on industry and encouraging the supply of Internet carriage services at performance standards that meet community needs.

The regulatory scheme is complaints-based. It establishes a framework in which people who are concerned about particular Internet content can make a complaint and have that complaint investigated. The ABA will commence investigating complaints from 1 January 2000. Leading up to 1 January 2000, industry will be developing codes of practice and the ABA will be working with industry to ensure they contain appropriate community safeguards. The ABA will also pursue initiatives in relation to community education, research and international liaison as required by the Act.