



The ABA is developing a game, Net Detectives, to help schools teach young people the skills they need to be safe online

Online game promotes internet safety

The Internet is an exciting resource for children, and has tremendous value within the school environment as a tool for education and communication, according to ABA Chairman Professor David Flint. "Schools have a key role in teaching young people how to enjoy the many benefits of the Internet, while also equipping them with skills to stay safe online," he said.

Professor Flint was speaking at the National Conference of Christian Schools Executives in Canberra where he announced that the ABA is soon to pilot a new online activity to promote Internet safety for young people.

"Net Detectives uses the medium to educate young people about the medium and the need to be understand the Internet, to be 'savvy'. It is designed specifically for use within the school environment," Professor Flint said.

The activity is pitched at young people in the upper primary school to lower secondary school age range, who are an at-risk group, particularly in chat rooms. Participants work on computers in small teams to solve a 'who done it' scenario. Clues are given from an online control room, and participants can ask questions about the scenario and receive responses in real time from teachers and other experts.

In officially launching this online activity in Australia, the ABA will partner with Childnet Interna-

tional, the UK organisation that has taken up the game and operates it throughout the UK.

The ABA is seeking expressions of interest from schools throughout Australia that may wish to participate in the official Australian launch of Net Detectives, scheduled for 26 September 2003. Other events will follow later in 2003 and throughout 2004. Schools interested in participating in the launch or subsequent events should contact Sharon Trotter on (02) 9334 7865.

The Government's co-regulatory scheme for Internet content is administered by the ABA. The scheme combines a number of measures aimed at minimising the public's, and particularly children's, exposure to harmful or offensive content. It provides for a complaints hotline for members of the public to report offensive Internet material, industry codes of practice, and community awareness programs.

Net Detectives

Net Detectives is a new community education initiative being launched by the ABA. It is an online role-play activity which engages young people working in teams in real life scenarios with experts from the wider community.

A web site links participating teams as they work through the unfolding plot. Students receive clues and information about a fic-

tional, but realistic story. Stories are set in a mythical town for which there is a very authentic map. As the event proceeds, participants have to interrogate data, communicate with each other and the experts as they find the answers. The activities are pre-planned and last up to two hours.

Teachers have to register teams to take part in an activity. Once signed up, on the day of the event, teams can enter the 'action centre' – an interactive area of the web site that looks and feels like an internet chat room or bulletin board – for the start of the exercise. There is no facility for student teams to communicate directly with each other and all messages posted have to be moderated and approved by the Control Room before being passed on to other participants.

Other community awareness initiatives

The ABA developed a website, www.cybersmartkids.com.au, that provides information for families to help ensure their children's Internet use is safe and enjoyable. A complementary range of brochures, available online and in hard copy, includes general Internet safety tips; advice on choosing a filter; tips for dealing with spam; and tips for safe use of chat.

Key advice to parents concerned that their children have safe and productive Internet experiences includes:

- Parents spending time on-line with children and knowing what material their children are accessing.
- The computer being placed in a public area of the house, rather than a child's bedroom.
- Family rules about information children can safely give out online, and where they can go online.

Complaints hotline

Since the hotline became operative on 1 January 2000, approximately one thousand nine hundred items of Internet content have been referred to the ABA for investigation. The ABA works through INHOPE, an international network of hotlines that deals primarily with reports about child pornography available on the Internet. In a recent six-month period, INHOPE investigated approximately thirty five thousand reports of child pornography online.

Industry codes

Industry codes of practice are registered by the ABA and are available at the Internet Industry Association's website at www.iiia.net.au. The codes deal with a range of customer advice and content management issues, including the requirement that Internet service providers offer subscribers one of the filter products listed in an approved schedule at cost price.

