

approach to reducing illegal content online, encourages positive use of this new medium and avoids the need for legislation such as that proposed in the U.S.

IWF has resulted in several benefits for the wider industry. These include:

- the industry has provided a practical approach to reducing illegal content online;
- the police have been given a practical means of responding to complaints of illegal content online and an additional source of information;
- helping the industry to promote a safer online environment for their customers and enhancing those in it as responsible businesses;
- reduced risk of police action against ISPs and without the nigh impossible task of monitoring the contents of their servers.

IWF has also led the industry's efforts to participate in international developments in regulation and content rating.

Recreational Software Advisory Council

The RSAC (<http://www.rsac.org>) is an independent non-profit organisation based in Washington D.C. It empowers the public, especially parents, to make informed decisions about electronic media by means of an open, objective, content advisory system.

RSACi (RSAC for the Internet) was launched in early 1996. It operates on two principles:

- self rating by content providers; and
- individual selection of acceptable content levels by supervisors.

Content providers rate their sites with RSAC using four categories: sex, nudity, violence and offensive language on a scale of nought to five. To enable RSACi, a parent or care giver switches on the system at their browser then sets the desired filter levels which can only be altered via the use of a password.

RSACi has been integrated into Microsoft's browser Internet Explorer and will soon be integrated into Netscape Navigator. To date, more than 75, 000 sites have rated with RSACi, and some 1,500 of these are Australian. Roughly 4,000 new sites per month are rating with RSACi.

To become a successful rating scheme, a critical mass of content must be rated. To reach this, RSAC has planned:

- a public education campaign to raise awareness;
- to incorporate RSACi into all browsers;
- to integrate RSACi into search engines to give users the option of searching for rated sites;
 - to incorporate RSACi into major web authoring tools to encourage rating of a site as part of its creation;
 - to include RSACi into popular software blocking tools and license RSACi database to enhance third-party filtering systems; and
 - to collaborate with the International Working Group on Content Rating.

David Goldstein

communications update

The new Age responds

Dear Sir,

My attention has been drawn to the article by Richard Evans in Communications Update on page 16 of issue 142, April 1998 entitled "Church and state together in the new Age".

I found the article of some interest although for what it is worth, I thought two aspects were disappointing.

Firstly, that while you say "the jury is still out" you seem to have reached your own conclusions and are happy to side with a few staff who have also come to a view without waiting for all the evidence to come in.

Secondly, that instead of talking about some of the issues confronting papers like *The Age*, and whether our changes are beginning to address weaknesses in coverage, you have succumbed to the Media Watch standby of overly concentrating on "bloopers" and the superficial (eg. the pictures in the wraparound) rather than seriously looking at broader issues, strategy and execution.

The only other issue I would raise is where you have found me saying my critics are "arrogant and sanctimonious", as that is not something I believe I have ever said.

These issues aside, it is always instructive to see how others see it, and we welcome the conversation.

Yours sincerely

Steve Harris

Editor

The Age, Melbourne

