

IWF hits back at censorship and secrecy claims

By Genie Ventures

Dated: Apr 22, 2009

In an extensive interview with Broadband Genie, the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) has defended itself vigorously against allegations of secrecy and censorship, as well as its remit and the general effectiveness of its work.

When www.broadbandgenie.co.uk ran a story on the IWF headlined 'Children's charities name and shame UK broadband providers' it became our most viewed, and most commented on, story of the year to date. But what surprised us more than the level of interest was the level of vitriol aimed at the organisation. To put the record straight and our site visitors' points across, we set up an interview with IWF director of communications Sarah Robertson.

So why all the bad feeling? One possibility is the Wikipedia incident of December 2008, where the blocking of an image caused a brief media stir, raising the heckles of anti-censorship campaigners. The judgement (on a Scorpions album cover image) was upheld by its police partners, but the IWF's board responded quickly in the public's interest and removed the URL from its list. The first piece of adverse publicity it had received in 12 years of existence seems to have dealt a huge blow to its reputation. Now the dust has settled, Broadband Genie wanted to let the IWF give its side of the story.

The IWF was founded in 1996 by the internet industry, which wanted to do its best to combat inadvertently hosted illegal content such as child sexual abuse. Its aim was to supply a free reporting mechanism for the public and a national 'notice and take down' service for internet service providers, freely regardless of membership. It is a self-regulatory body with charitable status, funded by the industry and led by an independent board. It also deals with other criminally obscene content and since 2004 content that incites racial hatred.

Some of the fiercest accusations centred on the IWF being secretive, it censoring content and the effectiveness of its methods.

On secrecy, Robertson said: "We have one of the most comprehensive websites imaginable, publishing everything from member lists to board minutes and funding details. The whole blocking initiative is described and there is a huge FAQ section, as we recognise the importance of explaining our role in providing this list, plus a complaints procedure and full contact details. It's arguably too comprehensive, which is why we're redesigning the site to make it more user friendly."

On censorship, she added: "The blocking initiative was industry led in 2004 when we were asked to consider providing a URL list and our remit hasn't changed since then: we still add only URLs depicting indecent images of children to the list and we still try to minimise the availability of illegal online content only. There are many debates around harmful and inappropriate internet content: but we have no role in that. Who can define what is harmful and inappropriate? For example, there are widely differing views on pornography. We try to remain neutral: we are dealing with widely diverse stakeholders with quite different views.

"Will our remit grow? I don't know - that would be a matter for our board and member companies. But I think we are successful because our role is quite specific. We certainly have no plans to increase the block list to other forms of content."

Discussing the effectiveness of the IWF, Robertson says 18 per cent of child abuse content was hosted in the UK when it was formed. That figure has been less than 1 per cent since 2003. She said: "The UK is doing a great job, and our experience, approach and data are shared around the world, helping other countries to combat the problems. The key is disruption at many levels and data sharing – at home and abroad. It is important to remember the internet didn't create paedophiles, but the fantastic freedom of information the internet allows for is no reason not to challenge the distribution of sexually abusive images of children. The IWF is more than a list: we are actually getting on with exactly what people want us to be doing – focusing on getting the content removed and informing the processes which gets those responsible investigated."

In conclusion, Robertson added: "I wouldn't want my internet content censored at all, but I would be quite happy for a trusted independent organisation to be able to work in partnership with the internet industry to make a difference in the supply and access of child sexual abuse images. It's really not about censorship."

Broadband Genie editor Chris Marling said: "It is no surprise 90 of the internet's leading companies are members of the IWF. It does valuable work in the fight against illegal internet content worldwide and should be applauded, not criticised. It is unfortunate many have the wrong idea about the organisation's role, and I hope this interview will go some way to putting the record straight."

To read the complete in-depth interview, please see the full transcription at <http://www.broadbandgenie.co.uk/articles/full-internet-watch-foundation-interview-20090408>.

###

NOTES TO EDITORS

1. Broadband Genie is the UK's leading independent broadband and mobile broadband comparison website, providing consumers with an unbiased source of information on broadband prices and contracts and allowing them to compare broadband providers in an independent environment. Broadband Genie was launched in March 2004 as the first dedicated consumer comparison site for broadband, while Mobile Broadband Genie was the first independent mobile broadband comparison site, launched in October 2007. Both sites are among the most popular sites in their respective fields, and regularly feature in the national press. <http://www.broadbandgenie.co.uk> / <http://mobile.broadbandgenie.co.uk>

2. All queries and interview requests should be directed to Chris Marling at Broadband Genie: t 0844 415 5531 / f 0871 6618553 / m 07908 327303 / chris.marling@genieventures.co.uk

Category	Internet, Consumer, Computers
Tags	broadband, broadband providers, broadband uk, broadband internet, compare broadband, broadband news
Email	Click to contact author
Phone	0844 4155531
Address	19a Belgrave Road
City/Town	Cambridge
State/Province	Cambridgeshire
Zip	CB1 3DE
Country	United Kingdom
Link	http://prlog.org/10222199



Scan this QR Code with your SmartPhone to-

- * Read this news online
- * Contact author
- * Bookmark or share online