Children, Mobile Phones and the Internet

Experts’ Meeting
Mitsubishi Research Institute
Tokyo, March, 2003
Children, Mobile Phones and the Internet

- Founded in 1869
- The largest independent provider of services to families and children in the UK
- 5000 full-time employees, in 500 projects across the UK
- Spotted that the Internet was going to be important for children back in 1995
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The Digital Stream

- Computers
- The Internet

Handheld Devices
- Telephones, Pagers, Cameras, PDAs

Games Consoles

TV & Radio

Storage Devices
- DVDs, CDs, Floppies, ZIPs, Detachables

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Associate Director
Children & Technology Unit
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- With arrival of 2.5 and 3G devices we are going to see the telephone move to the top of the pyramid

- Potentially we are looking at the possibility of all of the problems we currently have with the fixed Internet, moving out on to the mobile Internet and therefore becoming a lot harder to supervise or resolve

- And doubtless there will also be new problems and issues e.g. linked to the possible misuse of GPS

- The UK based 3G companies are still not very clear about the development path of the mobile Internet, so there is a little anxiety in certain quarters

- However, unlike the early days of the fixed Internet, the 3G network providers seem to be very open to co-operating with Government, police and other agencies in admitting problems and seeking solutions
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- Usage of mobile phones in the UK is very high
- 68% of all adults
- Among some age groups e.g. 15-24 year olds, this rises to over 90%
- 52% among 7-16 year olds
- The use of SMS messaging is also very high: in February, 2003, 1.65 billion chargeable person-to-person messages were sent over the UK’s four GSM networks. And the numbers are still rising.
- The urge or the need to communicate is truly a fundamental human characteristic
- But sadly some people also seem to want to use the new technologies for criminal or anti-social purposes, and we have not yet found ways of eliminating that possibility
- This is very clear when you look at how SMS and other forms of electronic messaging have been used

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- 1 in 4 11-19 year old mobile phone users in the UK said they had been threatened or bullied via their mobile phone or their PC
- 1 in 6 had been bullied or threatened via SMS over their mobile phone
- 7% had been bullied or threatened in a chat room and 4% via email
- Of those bullied or threatened by SMS 29% told nobody, 42% told a friend, and only 32% told a parent
- The range of threats used on SMS varied hugely
- But a threat, like beauty, is in the eye of the beholder or the victim
- Bullying via mobile phones is particularly pernicious – you can’t lock it out or easily ignore it

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We were very pleased with the response of the UK Government.

Not so pleased with the response of the mobile phone companies.

They penalise the victim and his or her family because someone else has broken the law:

- Anti-stalking legislation
- Malicious Communications Act
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- No one wishes to block or delay the advent of any essentially beneficial technology
- We know it is very unlikely that everything will work according to plan from Day 1
- And we also know that things will happen that no one can now foresee
- What counts is a willingness to be open about this and for the industry to be seen to be working with others, energetically pursuing solutions
- This conference in Tokyo is therefore an excellent sign of exactly the right approach
- It is also one which we have every reason to believe the UK industry will emulate
- And we count ourselves lucky that we have had this opportunity to be here to learn from you
- Children in the UK will certainly benefit from your generosity

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