

Safety in Business nsgirl.co.nz

By Jenene Crossan, Managing Director, nsgirl Ltd

Jenene Crossan, Founder and Managing Director of nsgirl Ltd, discusses the safety procedures that nsgirl employs on her online magazine, nsgirl.co.nz and what impact the Internet has had on the adolescent demographic.

nsgirl.co.nz (owned by nsgirl Ltd, consisting of major shareholders Jenene Crossan, Grant Nicholls & Lloyd Morrison) was launched in December 1999 and has led the way for the industry of online publishers by maintaining strong Internet safety policies as an integral strategy for the online magazine. By nsgirl.co.nz providing access to vital research information courtesy of site visitors, The Internet Safety Group and NetSafe have been able to further inform and educate the public on the necessities of protecting teenagers privacy and safety of teenagers whilst utilising the Internet. Promoting the safe use of the Internet, gaining an understanding of the technology and the associated impacts on the safety of teenagers while not undermining the many valuable benefits of the Internet, is a pivotal platform for continuing this discussion.

nsgirl employs a number of policies to ensure the safety of its visitors and preservation of privacy at all times. Firstly, all material – that is, content, images, and communication – must be sent through the nsgirl editorial team prior to being published on nsgirl. This enables the team to censor the content on the site and ensure that the audience are not revealing sensitive information about their lives. This also serves as an effective way to stop potentially harmful or destructive visitors from publishing unwanted or negative content. Secondly, readily accessible information on the site ensures that if the audience seek advice about safety, they'll be able to penetrate into it in a matter of seconds. This information consists of suggested guidelines as to what is appropriate and inappropriate content to reveal and what action to take if someone harasses you whilst online. All communication directs through to the www.netsafe.org.nz website. Thirdly, nsgirl is highly protective of the database accumulated from the site and maintains a steadfast stance on not selling individual database information. Finally, and most importantly, nsgirl facilitates an environment whereby the audience feel comfortable enough to ask for help and advice from any of our staff members or contributing team and if we cannot provide the necessary advice we would assist in channelling them to the appropriate authorities and experts.

Furthermore, although advertising is a fundamental revenue stream in our business model and without advertising we would not be able to provide a free, entertaining and informative publication, we recognise our responsibility of filtering the nature of the adverts presented on nsgirl. We maintain the right to refuse advertisers if we deem their message as unsuitable.

There are no laws or government departments in New Zealand to administer policy for online publishers and it is purely an internal nsgirl policy that has driven the stance on

Internet safety. Our audience is a subjective demographic and as part of a wider strategic plan we recognise the importance of maintaining a firm approach on safety and maintaining the highest possible level of integrity.

Due to the nature of interaction on the Internet, the implications for businesses wishing to market online to the adolescent demographic, means that businesses will need to be smarter in their approach. Partnering with sites that employ the safety policies such as nzgirl's will ensure that the trust that has been established by the publisher will allow a smoother flow of communication for the marketer.

In my experience the beauty and the beast of the Internet is that it has no 'one way' of interacting with a particular audience. The Internet's appeal lies in its ability to not segregate any demographic and to treat all people in the exact same nature. This has advantages and disadvantages and I truly believe it comes down to the knowledge instilled in the individual prior to jumping online that will be most valuable in dealing with the way that the Internet interacts with adolescents. Parents need to be made aware of their role in this process. The internet is not an 'easy' method for entertaining children for hours on end – parents should make sure they know where their kids are surfing and that the 'surfers' know what is appropriate and inappropriate content and behaviour. Remove the 'smut' level of amusement with kids by showing them these guidelines early on (note that the taboo of a subject makes it more appealing to teenagers). That said, the content available on the Internet is available in all other forms of medium and without risking the possibility of sounding like I'm teaching how to parent, I believe honesty and open mindedness will provide the essential platform for rearing a balanced and well rounded teenager who feels comfortable with going to their parents for advice.

Recent television advertising by the ECPAT (Ending Child Prostitution and Trafficking) irresponsibly took on a scare mongering tactic in order to fundraise money for their organisation. The advert focused on depicting a scene whereby two teenagers are communicating over the Internet and arranging to meet, the final scene concluding with an old man smoking a cigarette signing off with words to the effect of 'I can't wait to meet you, I bet you're cute'. This advert has purposefully neglected to provide information or assistance to parents who may be concerned about educating their teenagers and also delivers an extremely one sided view of the Internet.

Furthermore, it is imperative to recognise that no matter the potential danger to the uninformed surfer, the Internets many benefits continue to outweigh the bad. More importantly it is a medium that is continuing to grow and will inevitably play a large role in peoples lives. We cannot overlook the confidence it builds and the communication channels it provides for teenagers, especially those who do not have the social skills that are essential to popularity within our secondary schools. Our schools are founded and supported by groups or cliques and given that New Zealand has one of the highest suicide rates in the world, the Internet provides a real opportunity to the teenagers most likely to be categorised as potential victims, by allowing friends to be made easily around the

world and without prejudice. Written communication received by nzgirl is testimony to this statement.

After much time ruminating the social implications of the Internet on adolescents of New Zealand, I have deduced that, like any medium, the most likely impact will be in the form of a fundamental change in the way that adolescents receive information and conduct their communications within their peer groups. Chat, SMS messaging, ICQ messaging and most importantly email, form an integral part of conducting and conversing with others. Social engagements are planned, relationships started and terminated, overseas travel designed, gossip planted, parents informed and all other manner of general life scenarios make up an average day in the life of the email of a typical Generation Y-er. Like road safety, water safety and sex education, Internet Safety should be introduced as essential educational material.