

Objectionable Material on the Internet and the Department of Internal Affairs Response

Jon PEACOCK
Inspector of Publications
Department of Internal Affairs

Abstract

A presentation on the background, role and powers of the Censorship Compliance Unit with a particular focus on the proactive approach taken to the investigation of child pornography disseminated using the Internet.

In 1996, the Gaming and Censorship Compliance Unit became aware of the existence of locally operated Bulletin Boards offering objectionable material. Investigation into a number of these Bulletin Boards resulted in prosecutions against a number of individuals under the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993.

After an internal reorganization, the Censorship Compliance Unit was established, and came into effect in July 1996.

The unit was mandated to enforce the Films, Videos, and Publications Classification Act 1993 and comprised 6 Inspectors of Publications, spread around New Zealand. Due to increased workload the unit has recently increased in size to 7 Inspectors.

On its inception, the unit undertook research into those areas where objectionable material was the most accessible. From this, a strategic decision was taken to approach these areas in a proactive manner. All staff have been trained in undertaking proactive Internet investigations.

The area that indicated the highest level of use was the Internet Relay Chat (IRC).

IRC enables people to connect anywhere on the Internet to join in live discussions, or communicate one-on-one.

A network is comprised of a number of individual servers. Within a network, since all the servers are connected to each other, all users are connected even though they may not be connected to the same server.

There can be many discussions going on at once; each one is assigned a unique channel name. Channels are generally named after the topic under discussion. Within IRC, the channels show the name of the channel, the nickname of the people in the channel and the entries made by each individual.

IRC channels are named explicitly to allow people to identify the channel in which they are most interested. Some of the channel names, we have identified, carry names such as:

#100%littleboysexpics
#100%%preteengirlsexpics
#Snuffsex

Given the focus on electronic media, training became a very important element to staff capability. Each unit member (with the exception of the newest appointee) has received training on handling electronic evidence, and the use of computer forensic analysis applications.

The proactive approach the Unit has employed, has been highly successful. Since it's creation, the Unit has identified in excess of 420 New Zealander's who have been involved with objectionable material in this manner. Of those, where the cases have proceeded to court action, (approximately 90) all have been convicted. Currently there are approximately 30 additional court cases pending.

Information on offenders based outside on New Zealand, is also regularly passed on to overseas enforcement agencies. This information sharing has resulted in a number of highly successful operations, where further offenders have been identified.

Given the attention generated from these successes, the unit began to receive requests from individuals and organizations seeking information on the safety of the Internet.

In response to this interest the Unit created the 'Online Safety Guide', incorporating material originally published by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children.

This guide, along with mouse pads carrying the Internet safety message, has been distributed to schools around the country. A second publication called 'Censorship and the Internet', aimed more at an adult audience, was produced to explain the legislation and how it relates to Internet use.