

# **Internet Safety and Maori**

**Sally Pewhairangi**  
**Ngati Porou, Te Aitanga a Mahaki**  
**Electronic Resources Librarian, Manukau Libraries**

## **Abstract**

*Maori have been quick to utilise the internet for their own purposes. There are a number of websites pertaining to a wide variety of Maori subjects for example te reo Maori, whakapapa, Maori arts and crafts, Maori health, Treaty of Waitangi, and Maori education. Notwithstanding, there are concerns regarding the use of the internet for the dissemination of Maori information, particularly in relation to ownership, control of access and cultural values. This paper explores the Maori cultural issues relating to internet safety and discusses the role of libraries in addressing these issues.*

## **1. Introduction**

The internet is rapidly affecting every aspect of our lives – the way we teach children in schools, store and transmit personal and commercially sensitive information, and communicate with each other. It has re-shaped our view of the world, and those in it by providing access to an insurmountable amount of information from an extensive range of sources. Individuals, organisations and communities have the potential to benefit enormously from the knowledge that can be found through the internet. Yet, there are also risks such as security of personal details, unacceptable content and inaccurate information. Internet safety is about minimising the risks of the internet whilst promoting its benefits.

Maori have been quick to utilise the internet for their own purposes. Ross Himona and Kamera Raharaha were pioneers in establishing an authentic Maori presence on the Internet,<sup>1</sup> and they have continued to lead the way with the formation of the New Zealand Maori Internet Society in 1997. “Many iwi groups, Maaori non-government organisations and businesses have websites and well-established e-mail communication networks...Despite this, however, problems of access and affordability mean that many Maaori are still on the marginalised side of the digital gap.”<sup>2</sup> There are also concerns regarding the use of the internet for the dissemination of Maori information, particularly in relation to ownership, control of access, and cultural values. For Maori, the cultural safety issues surrounding Maori information in an electronic form are of greater importance than the safety issues relating to individual Maori internet users.

New Zealand public libraries provide internet access to all users, regardless of their age, education, wealth, or ethnic origins. New Zealand public libraries have historically also been repositories for a large amount of Maori information including whakapapa, waiata and other taonga. Librarians are information experts. They are skilled at finding and organising information. They are also experienced at teaching users how to learn these skills themselves. New Zealand public libraries and librarians are well placed to provide a safe internet environment for all users, including culturally safe Maori electronic resources.

This paper explores the Maori cultural issues relating to internet safety and discusses the role of libraries in addressing these issues.

## **2. The value of the internet**

The value of the internet to Maori cannot be underestimated. There are two main reasons why making Maori information available on the internet is beneficial – ease of access, and the potential to create a strong Maori internet presence.

### **2.1 Ease of access**

The internet is a medium that enables information to be distributed widely at very little cost. No longer is Maori information uneconomical to produce and distribute, as it often is in printed form. For example, many government departments are using the internet to enable policy documents to be more accessible. In some cases electronic documents are the only copies available.

Internet users search for information using keywords that can be found anywhere on a page. This is a significant advantage over print resources that generally rely on an American classification system that assigns subject headings, and as such, the majority of Maori information is described under “Maori (New Zealand people) -- social life and customs”<sup>3</sup>, or not described at all, especially if it is in te reo Maori. Content on the internet is not systematically organised or described, instead it searches for instances of keywords that occur anywhere within the electronic text. Therefore searching for Maori information, that you know exists on the web, is often much more rewarding than the same exercise undertaken with print resources.

### **2.2 Maori internet presence**

The lack of published or readily accessible information about Maori culture has also prompted its appearance on the internet and has gone some way towards an increased understanding of Maori culture and values. Maori arts and crafts sites such as waiata, ta moko, weaving and bone carving are prominent on the internet, and this exposure has encouraged further employment initiatives for Maori.<sup>4</sup> Maori organisations of New Zealand,<sup>5</sup> set up by Kamera Raharaha is one site that provides extensive Maori cultural information.

Maori are also making increasing use of the internet because it has enabled them to “provide information from a viewpoint that may not have found a voice in the mainstream media”.<sup>6</sup> Maori news does not feature prominently in mainstream news, and when it does it is often negative. Using the internet to address this imbalance has been an objective of several Maori news sites such as Nga korero o te wa,<sup>7</sup> Te putatara<sup>8</sup> and Te karere ipurangi.<sup>9</sup> Maori are also utilising the internet as an international platform to discuss and participate in global indigenous issues. For example Sovereignspeakout<sup>10</sup> is a forum for the discussion and news about sovereignty related issues and indigenous rights.

## **3. The risk to Maori culture**

Maori information on the internet is also more vulnerable than it has been in any other format. It’s integrity is being threatened by the dilemmas of intellectual and cultural property rights, control, language, accuracy and authority, and access.

### **3.1 Intellectual and cultural property rights**

In the Western industrialised world knowledge is a commodity. It can be readily bought, sold and traded with little concern or acknowledgment for the societal or cultural context in which it was created, or in which it will be used. The use of the internet perpetuates this Western view.

In Maori society knowledge is a taonga. It is shared with those who have a right to it. Ownership is not by the individual but the society, iwi or hapu, in which it was created. Intellectual property laws do not acknowledge group ownership and as such Maori intellectual and cultural property (taonga) is not adequately protected. A claim is currently before the Waitangi Tribunal (The Indigenous Flora and Fauna and Maori Intellectual and Cultural Property Claim (WAI 262)) that relates to the ownership and use of Maori cultural and intellectual property – including native plants and animals, Maori symbols and designs, and the knowledge contained in Maori songs, traditions, and writings. A report on the findings is expected later this year.

### **3.2 Loss of control**

Maori knowledge is traditionally passed from one generation to the next. The circumstances in which it is shared, and by whom, are strictly controlled.<sup>11</sup> Not all information is freely available. Providing traditional Maori knowledge over the internet makes it readily available to all. There is also no control over the manner in which it is viewed, altered or re-used.<sup>12</sup> The lack of control is also exacerbated by information that is held offshore and not subject to New Zealand jurisdiction.<sup>13</sup> Alistair Smith<sup>14</sup> provides two examples where Maori cultural values have been affronted – preserved tattooed Maori heads being hung on meat hooks, and Lindauer postcards being digitised without consultation with descendants.

### **3.3 Language**

The inability of the internet, until recently, to accurately portray macrons to indicate long vowels has proved problematic and “many Maori feel that the web does not represent their culture because the language is not represented correctly”.<sup>15</sup> The small number of websites written in te reo Maori also makes it difficult to search the internet using the Maori language. This is of particular concern to students in Maori medium education learning vital information literacy skills. Te Kete Ipurangi is an example where this has been overcome. Te Kete Ipurangi is a bilingual portal and web community which provides quality assured educational material for teachers, school managers, and the wider education community. It is an initiative of the Ministry of Education.<sup>16</sup>

### **3.4 Accuracy and authority**

Ascertaining the accuracy and authority of information on the internet are criteria that all internet users should apply when assessing the validity or worth of that information. Inaccuracy of Maori information may change the meaning of it, or cause confusion, and as a result affect its mana. For example, spelling mistakes have been found in online copies of the Treaty of Waitangi.<sup>17</sup> In this instance the ability to portray a strong Maori presence and greater bicultural understanding is diminished.

### **3.5 Access**

Maori do not have easy access to the internet. Generally, they do not own computers, have high computer or information literacy skills or are heavy users of the internet.<sup>18</sup> The internet is primarily used by white middle aged academics. Why should Maori information be made electronically available if it is likely to benefit them, rather than Maori?

## **4. Minimising the risks**

Policies and strategies are being developed and implemented by Maori and government to help ensure that the risks of the internet to Maori culture are minimised.

The New Zealand Maori Internet Society has made a submission to the Internet Society of New Zealand, now called Internet NZ, asking for a <.maori.nz> domain name.<sup>19</sup> This will provide an avenue for authentic Maori information to be easily recognised.

The Draft Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples 1993<sup>20</sup> and the Mataatua Declaration on Cultural and Intellectual Property Rights of Indigenous Peoples June 1993<sup>21</sup> address the issues around indigenous peoples and intellectual and cultural property right mechanisms; and also the control of access to this information.

Te Puni Kokiri has produced a report to the government outlining Maori and information technology, especially internet access.<sup>22</sup> This report and other e-government strategies make suggestions about how the digital divide can be closed.

The recognition and implementation of these initiatives will aid in improving the cultural safety of Maori information on the internet.

## **5. Libraries play a role**

In 1987 Sharon Dell, the Maori Materials Subject Specialist at Alexander Turnbull Library, wrote an article in *New Zealand Libraries* titled “The Maori book or the book in Maori”.<sup>23</sup> The article outlined the history of printed Maori resources and how work being done to record them in a bibliography had highlighted an awareness of cultural sensitivity by the National Library towards Maori information.

Since this article much has been written in library literature about the need to cater for Maori library users and to respect the cultural value of Maori information.<sup>24</sup> Biculturalism has been a conspicuous element in New Zealand libraries since the early 1990’s.

### **5.1 A National Information Strategy**

LIANZA, the Library and Information Association of New Zealand Aotearoa, in partnership with Te Ropu Whakahau, the Maori Library Information Workers’ Association, have recently written a proposal on a National Information Strategy.<sup>25</sup> This has been in response to the government’s efforts to create a knowledge society and the contribution libraries can make towards this. The National Information Strategy is based on a three pronged approach to knowledge.

1. Knowledge Access – the infrastructure to access knowledge.
2. Knowledge Content – the actual content made available and accessible through an information infrastructure.
3. Knowledge Equity – the skills to turn information into knowledge.

Strategic issues are addressed to “ensure that all citizens have the opportunity to access and utilise a nation’s knowledge wealth in a way that will enhance the social, political and economic well being of that country.”<sup>26</sup> Consideration has also been given for the need to develop separate, more appropriate, initiatives for Maori.<sup>27</sup>

### **5.2 Manukau Libraries**

Manukau Libraries provides internet access in two forms. Firstly, free internet access is available to the majority of websites which contain information that is either New Zealand, education or government focussed. For all other websites internet access is charged to the library user. Both

forms of access are filtered. Free internet sites are filtered by domain name (<.nz>,<.govt> or equivalent, and <.ac> or equivalent). Pay internet access is filtered for adult content. Public libraries are places for all people in the community to use and as such Manukau Libraries believes internet access to informational sites should be free, and access to adult content should not be available in a public place where it can be easily viewed by children. Acceptable use policies are also visible besides computers which are in clear view of library staff.

Manukau Libraries has also recognised the importance of the internet as a source of information with my recent appointment as Electronic Resources Librarian. My role is to ensure that Manukau Libraries provide, through its website and its branches, access to internet sites which have been selected using a range of evaluative criteria, including cultural appropriateness. My role is also to strengthen the information and literacy skills of our library staff in relation to electronic resources so that they are able to share this expertise with our customers as facilitators to knowledge.

## 6. Summary

The internet has a lot to offer Maori, but there are concerns of intellectual and cultural property rights, control, language, accuracy and authority, and access. Some initiatives are being developed at a national level in an attempt to address these apprehensions. When they are recognised and implemented the cultural safety of Maori information on the internet will be improved.

New Zealand libraries have been aware of the need to respect the cultural value of Maori information for some time and are lobbying for the government to implement a National Information Strategy that reflects this awareness. New Zealand public libraries, in particular Manukau Libraries, have undertaken steps to reduce the risks of cultural safety whilst providing expertise to all users in safe and effective internet use.

## Endnotes

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<sup>1</sup> New Zealand Maori Internet Society/ Te Whanau Ipurangi (a), p.1.

<sup>2</sup> Peters, pp.211-212.

<sup>3</sup> Library of Congress Subject Headings are used to describe print resources held in the majority of New Zealand libraries.

<sup>4</sup> An example is <http://www.taitokerau.com>. The Tai Tokerau Maori Tourism Association brings several tribes under a single heading to strengthen and develop cultural tourism in the area.

<sup>5</sup> <http://www.maori.org.nz>

<sup>6</sup> Peters, p.215.

<sup>7</sup> <http://webnz.co.nz/tekorerokorero-p1.html>

<sup>8</sup> <http://maorinews.com/putatara/>

<sup>9</sup> <http://maorinews.com/karere/>

<sup>10</sup> <http://groups.yahoo.com/group/sovernspeakout/>

<sup>11</sup> Dell, p.100.

<sup>12</sup> Smith (a), p.111-112.

<sup>13</sup> Smith (b), p.4.

<sup>14</sup> Smith (b).

<sup>15</sup> Smith (b), p.6.

<sup>16</sup> <http://www.tki.org.nz>

<sup>17</sup> Smith (b), p.5.

<sup>18</sup> *Maori Access to Information Technology*.

<sup>19</sup> New Zealand Maori Internet Society/ Te Whanau Ipurangi (c)

<sup>20</sup> *Mana Tangata*, pp.19-26.

<sup>21</sup> *Mana Tangata*, p.51-52.

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<sup>22</sup> Bright, Tipene, "Cybermarae : Maori World Views, the Internet and Initiatives n ICT," *Computers in New Zealand Schools*, 11, no. 3 (Nov 1999): 38-39.

<sup>23</sup> Dell.

<sup>24</sup> MacDonald, p17-22.

<sup>25</sup> <http://www.lianza.org.nz/nis.htm>

<sup>26</sup> <http://www.lianza.org.nz/nis.htm> introduction.

<sup>27</sup> <http://www.lianza.org.nz/nis.htm> section 5.

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