

## HALF OF KIWI TEENS POST SENSITIVE INFO IN PUBLIC PLACES ONLINE

**Auckland, 4 May 2009** – New NetSafe research indicates that half of NZ teenagers post sensitive information about themselves on publically available webpages and mobile phone chat rooms.

Coinciding with the Privacy Awareness Week, these preliminary findings are from the NetSafe Convergence Generation research project which explores the experiences of approximately 1,700 high school students around New Zealand. The findings reveal that one out of two teenagers surveyed reported having posted sensitive information about themselves in public online spaces in the past year (including social networking profiles set to be “open” to the public).

High school students reported posting a range of sensitive information on ‘open’ sites, including their:

- Instant messenger ID or email address (30%)
- First and last name, OR their first name and a recognizable picture of themselves, and anything (like pictures, stories, or comments) that they wouldn’t want someone who didn’t like them to find. (30%)
- Mobile phone number (14%)
- Home address (3%)

Findings show that while half of the young people surveyed manage their public identities well, the half of them are posting sensitive information in public places – which has the potential to create issues for them in the future says John Fenaughty, NetSafe Research Manager.

“Once information is posted publically online you lose control of it. You can’t control who sees it, copies it, forwards it, or who, potentially uses it against you. Even if you take it down, there’s absolutely no guarantee that it hasn’t already been copied and posted elsewhere online.”

The numbers of young people posting their contact details on public pages, including their email and mobile phone numbers, raises issues for the serious topic of cyberbullying.

“The good news is that the majority of teenagers are not posting their contact details online. The bad news is that a sizable minority have posted their email and instant messenger contact details and just over one in ten have posted their mobile numbers on public webplaces. With their contact details ‘in the wild’, this can leave them vulnerable to be targeted by cyberbullying.”

Another concern is how sensitive information, once publically available, can cause problems when young people start applying for employment.

NetSafe is already aware of employers who search online to find out information about new applicants. If their public digital footprint shows applicants in a way that the organisation feels is negative, then they will be unsuccessful. Most organisations are particularly wary of digital

footprints that include alcohol and drug use, sexual images or references, or examples of abusive behaviour and fighting.

Netsafe's findings were released for Privacy Awareness Week to highlight that privacy issues also apply to young people in New Zealand. The NetSafe Convergence Generation research shows that the majority of Kiwi teenagers use the internet and mobile phones to conduct their social lives.

Fenaughty adds, "As more and more time and activity is spent online, young people necessarily face greater challenges managing their information and privacy. That isn't to say the internet and mobile phones are bad, it just means we all need to be aware about managing our personal information well."

How to manage your digital footprint:

- 1.) Use the privacy settings of your social networking pages to hide your sensitive information from public view.
- 2.) Search on your name (try putting your first and last names in quotation marks) and your phone numbers and see what comes up.
- 3.) Remove any other examples of sensitive information about you that have been posted online.

--ENDS--

**Contact Details:**

John Fenaughty, Netsafe Research Manager, P +64 21 44 28 72

Martin Cocker, Netsafe Executive Director, P +64 21 790 369

Annabel Fordham, Privacy Commission, P +64 4 474 7590 or +64 21 509 735,  
E [enquiries@privacy.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@privacy.org.nz) (To contact Marie Shroff).

**About Netsafe:**

NetSafe is a non-profit organisation that promotes confident, safe, and responsible use of Cyberspace. NetSafe's members represent New Zealand's cybersafety community, including government, law enforcement, schools, industry, and parents. NetSafe promotes cybersafety by educating and supporting individuals, organisations, and industry on the full range of cybersafety issues. Further information and resources can be found at [www.netsafe.org.nz](http://www.netsafe.org.nz)

"To contact the Privacy Commissioner, Marie Shroff, for interviews about Privacy Awareness Week, please contact: Annabel Fordham tel 04 474 7590 or 021 509 735 or email [enquiries@privacy.org.nz](mailto:enquiries@privacy.org.nz)"