The Crossroads 2018 Trans-Tasman Online Safety Conference

Post-Conference Statement

OCTOBER 2018

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The Crossroads was the second trans-Tasman online safety conference co-hosted by Netsafe (New Zealand) and the Office of the E-Safety Commissioner (Australia). The conference held in Auckland from 10-11 October 2018 captured the complexity, and the current state, of online safety. It explored the intersection of technology, education, regulation and wellbeing while recognising the opportunities and challenges of each area.

Over 200 delegates from New Zealand and around the world attended. They shared relevant experiences, spotlighted the latest online safety trends and provided insight into successful interventions. This report provides an overview of the key themes discussed and recommendations, that if implemented, will enhance online safety and digital resilience.

Key Themes

1. Online abuse and harassment have a wider impact than previously thought
2. Online challenges are always emerging
3. The online safety community is working hard to improve the online experience
4. The online safety experience is not the same for everyone

1. ONLINE ABUSE AND HARASSMENT HAS A WIDER IMPACT THAN PREVIOUSLY THOUGHT

Netsafe's 2018 research shows that one in 10 New Zealand adults report being unable to fully participate in daily activities because of harmful online content. Sadly, this figure doubles for young people.

Unfortunately, these are similar statistics to those found by researches in Australia, the United Kingdom and America.

The research shared by presenters demonstrate that online harm is a far-reaching and complex social problem. It can manifest as anything from the loss of privacy, to dangerous content, through to unsafe online interactions with other people.

The complexity was further reinforced by the release of New Zealand's first-ever report into the economic effect of online harm. It provides a new assessment of the damage caused by online bullying and harassment which was previously understood in terms of social cost and personal harm.

The report revealed that the estimated cost to individuals, communities and interventions was $444 million every year, and that 64 percent of people are worried about the impact of online bullying and its effects on society. It provides a starting point to understand the full impact of this behaviour and where to best focus responses.

2. ONLINE CHALLENGES ARE ALWAYS EMERGING

It is widely understood that digital technology has provided users with opportunities and benefits like never before, but unfortunately the experience is not exclusively positive.

Due to the evolving nature of digital technologies and how people engage with them, new online challenges and risks are constantly emerging. Some of the concepts explored at the conference included digital self-harm, sexploitation amongst youth and fake news.

The research presented offered an evidence base to inform effective interventions for the newest online challenges. By combining frontline experience with research, it provides an opportunity to define the nature and scale of each online safety challenge and guide public education responses.

As online harm evolves rapidly, the study of the nature and impact of digital communications will remain a relevant but challenging area of research, analysis and policy intervention.

3. THE ONLINE SAFETY COMMUNITY IS WORKING HARD TO IMPROVE THE ONLINE EXPERIENCE

The online safety community is comprised of many people including representatives from industry, government and non-profit organisations. Each have a slightly different approach, but all are committed to making the online experience safer and more positive, so that users can maximise the benefits and minimise their risks.

There is no single solution that will make the online environment safe, but a multi-layered approach involving people, technology and policy will help. Attendees at the conference showed a genuine commitment to working together and openly discussed the issues and areas where collaboration was possible.

4. THE ONLINE SAFETY EXPERIENCE IS NOT THE SAME FOR EVERYONE

Conferences are an opportunity for online safety practitioners to come together, speak and listen. We heard how online harm and opportunities manifests differently for individuals according to various qualities like ethnicity, culture, age, gender, sexuality and gender identity.

It is clear that there is not a standard online safety intervention. The need to create content for specific audiences is more important now than ever before.

In the words of Sticks n' Stones, when it comes to online-safety for young and the marginalised, *if it's not with them then it won't be for them.*

Future Directions

Over two days, presenters and delegates at The Crossroads conference identified several themes that can help improve online safety and digital resilience. These are:

1. Keep online safety interventions human-centred
2. Strengthen partnerships by moving beyond traditional collaboration
3. Continue to research online safety
4. Develop more participatory practices
5. Boost advocacy for legislative and policy setting for the digital age
6. Remain connected to the online ecosystem

1. KEEP ONLINE SAFETY INTERVENTIONS HUMAN-CENTRED

Online safety is about people, technology and behaviours. Social problems such as online harm demand a human response. Technology can assist but rarely solves the problem on its own.

People must remain at the heart of any response and service to online harm.

A greater focus on prevention and awareness raising efforts will help eliminate some of the challenges that individuals face. It is very important that solutions are relevant, practical and valuable to the audiences that use them including parents, educators and young people.

2. STRENGTHEN PARTNERSHIPS BY MOVING BEYOND TRADITIONAL COLLABORATION

Collaboration by its very nature is hard. That said, if we deepen the ways that we collaborate with each other, we will move significantly closer towards our shared vision to create a safer and more positive online experience.

Further, where we design (or modify) a service or intervention, we should consider how that will interact with those already in the online safety community. By working together in complementary ways, we will amplify our impact and minimise the harm people can experience in an online environment.

3. CONTINUE TO RESEARCH ONLINE SAFETY

Over the last decade there has been a growing body of research which explores peoples' online safety experiences. It has tended to focus on the prevalence of online harm. Research of this nature must continue so the online safety industry can keep track of trends. However, it reveals only part of the story.

There is a need to better understand various elements of online safety including the long-term impact of online harm, user behaviours and best practice support services and awareness strategies.

We encourage researchers to make greater use of qualitative and multidisciplinary methods to help us all better understand the 'how's' and the 'whys' of online safety.

4. DEVELOP MORE PARTICIPATORY PRACTICES

Participatory practices allow audiences to be included in the planning of services designed for them. Online safety interventions that include participatory practices will more effectively meet the diverse needs of the audiences (e.g. youth and marginalised groups) that they are designed to serve and support.

The entire online safety community can make use of these practices to varying degrees, from information sharing, right through to supporting community initiatives.

5. BOOST ADVOCACY FOR LEGISLATIVE AND POLICY SETTINGS FOR THE DIGITAL AGE

The measures in the Harmful Digital Communication Act 2015 (New Zealand) and the Enhancing Online Safety Act 2015 (Australia) were designed to address concerns about digital communications which cause significant harm.

For each online safety challenge, we are presented with a range of possible interventions. It can be difficult to find the right mix and type of legislation, regulation, technology, education and enforcement. These choices made under the pressure of rapid change can have long-term implications. Therefore, it is important that the online safety community continues to share its unique perspectives and advocate for the appropriate outcomes for users all over the world.

6. REMAIN CONNECTED TO THE ONLINE ECOSYSTEM

The online ecosystem is interconnected and can be broadly categorised into three categories:

1. Online safety;
2. Online security; and
3. Cyber-crime.

As many digital challenges involve all three categories, ongoing collaboration and coordination between each sector is critical to successfully reducing the impacts these challenges have on individuals.

Way Forward

Unfortunately, there is no panacea that will remove all online risks. However, by working together the online safety community can lobby for change, support those people experiencing challenges and greatly improve the online experience by educating users to access digital opportunities and prevent online harm.

The next opportunity for the trans-Tasman online safety community to exchange information and participate in thought-provoking discussions will be at the Ideas that Illuminate conference. The event will be held in Sydney from 11-13 September 2019. You can register your interest at esafety.gov.au/esafety19.

For more information about this report or to discuss opportunities to work together with Netsafe, please email help@netsafe.org.nz

About Netsafe

Netsafe is New Zealand's independent, non-profit online safety organisation. Netsafe provides online safety education, advice and support for people in New Zealand. Taking a technology-positive approach to the opportunities and challenges that digital tech presents, Netsafe works to help people in New Zealand make the most of technology by providing practical tools, support and advice for managing online challenges.

Netsafe was appointed as the approved agency to receive, assess and investigate complaints of harm caused by digital communications under the Harmful Digital Communications Act in 2015. The free service is available to all New Zealand internet users experiencing online harassment, offering help and advice to resolve complaints. Netsafe's helpline is open 8am-8pm Monday to Friday, and 9am-5pm weekends and public holidays.

Netsafe.org.nz - 0508 NETSAFE (0508 638 723) - help@netsafe.org.nz

About the Australian Office of the eSafety Commissioner

The Office of the eSafety Commissioner is committed to helping all Australians have safer, positive experiences online — just as they would offline. The Office co-ordinates and leads the online safety efforts of government, industry and the not-for profit community. It has a broad remit which includes providing:

- a complaints service for young Australians who experience serious cyberbullying
- identifying and removing illegal online content
- tackling image-based abuse.

The Office also provides audience-specific content to help educate all Australians about online safety including young people, women, teachers, parents, seniors and community groups.

esafety.gov.au - 1800 880 176