



Children's Charities' Coalition on Internet Safety

Gordon Frazer,
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Dear Gordon Frazer,

You may know that Microsoft arranged for me to visit Seattle last year to obtain a full briefing on the new child protection components of Vista. This was followed up with additional discussions with a range of key players within the company, both in the UK and at Redmond. I was, and I remain, hugely impressed by the tools which Microsoft has integrated into Vista. I am aware also that a comparable module is being created that would retro fit with Windows XP and be integrated into the Windows Live platform. All in all this therefore presents the possibility of first class child protection technology being made available on a very large scale. This fits completely with policy positions which CHIS has advocated for several years.

Imagine, therefore, our huge sense of perplexed disappointment when, at the launch of Vista and since, we have been completely unable to detect any serious, large scale or sustained attempt by Microsoft to promote the child safety components of its new operating system.

Arising from correspondence with people in Seattle I saw clips of Bill Gates on two talk shows he did in the USA around the time of the US launch of Vista. Child safety was mentioned, but essentially it was in passing. It was certainly very brief.

After the launch, both here and in the USA, the fact of the existence of the child protection elements has received some further, but still very limited editorial coverage by experts and others who write on these subjects, including myself. Generally such comment has been confined to the geeky pages. What there has not been is any sort of marketing or advertising initiative by Microsoft to push or promote awareness of the safety components, using the same creative techniques that you routinely use to drive other parts of your product range, including other parts of Vista.

I know you did something with Dell in the USA, but it sounded quite limited and I have not seen any metrics on its success, or lack of it. I believe that initiative was, in any event, funded entirely by Dell.

Against that, both here and in the USA, I have seen several, substantial double page advertising spreads in a number of national newspapers telling me, for example, how Vista makes it much easier for me to manipulate or edit my holiday photographs and then distribute them over the internet. Even in Vista's set up the procedures the family safety component are, in my opinion, hugely underplayed. When I installed my version on my own machine at home, the programme listed several of the hot new features that Vista contained, but the child safety elements were not among them.

Having gone to all the trouble and expense of creating these wonderful tools, why are you not promoting awareness of them and promoting their use in the same way you promote awareness and use of so many other things that you do? There is no doubt that parents are very interested in using parental controls, and there is equally no doubt that some parents are holding back from allowing their children to buy or use computers with internet access because of their anxieties about safety. You and I are both members of the DfES Home Access initiative where this dimension has been alluded to. Thus whether you look at it from the perspective of the potential to increase sales or from the public policy perspective, Microsoft's stance is baffling.

I would be grateful for your comments.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'John NCH', written in a cursive style.

Secretary

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