

Children's Charities' Coalition for Internet Safety



Steve Ballmer
CEO
Microsoft Corporation
Building 34
3720 159th Avenue NE
Redmond, WA 98052
United States

24th April, 2003

Dear Mr Ballmer,

Re: Internet Content Rating Association

We are writing to express our concerns about the lack of progress in relation to establishing the ICRA system as a viable, usable child safety product.

As the leading child advocacy groups in the United Kingdom we have long supported the notion that there ought to be an effective system for labelling Internet content and that this, in turn, ought to be linked to an effective public domain solution that would allow parents to determine in advance the sorts of materials, sites and places their children could access.

We strongly supported the establishment of ICRA in 1999, yet here we are, four years later, still with no sign of a working system which we can all get behind.

Perhaps there are technical or other reasons why key industry leaders no longer see ICRA playing the role they originally did. Maybe the complexities of modern web sites, or the now better-understood implications of convergence, mean people think we need a different and broader approach. Alternatively, Microsoft possibly no longer accepts that ICRAfilter can be integrated into Internet Explorer, replacing the antiquated RSACi system, but if ICRAfilter does not work properly and easily with Explorer then it is not a usable solution. There are several explanations flying around the rumour mill. Meanwhile nothing moves and, in the end, that's all that concerns us.

We are aware that ICRA recently adopted a new business plan that focuses on achieving a large increase in labelling by publishers and in usage by parents. However, if there remains any substantial doubt about the model's viability, whether on technical or other grounds, or if it is, effectively, to remain outside Internet Explorer for a further protracted period while RSACi remains in there, then the business plan will serve no real purpose. ICRAfilter without Internet Explorer is like a cart without a horse. It's going nowhere.

Either ICRA is going to work, and within a reasonable timeframe, or it is not. ICRA's business plan, which speaks of a 5 year programme with annual reviews, does not sit comfortably with our perception of the needs of the moment. I think we may have months, not years, to decide whether ICRA can be the solution we all want or whether we simply need to learn from the experience but nonetheless decide that we should move on to find alternatives.

Microsoft UK has made a substantial contribution to advancing the child safety agenda in this country, both through its own direct actions as a company and through its much appreciated participation in many Government and industry based working parties and committees. In that light I know you will share many of the concerns which lie behind this expression of our anxieties. As we see it, given Internet Explorer's pivotal position, Microsoft is uniquely placed to help resolve and expedite this matter. We hope you agree.

Thank you for your attention. I have copied this letter to the CEO of ICRA and to the CEO of Microsoft UK.

Yours sincerely,



John Carr
Internet Adviser

Please reply to:

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