

The PointSmart Prescription: Putting Best Practices to Work in Online Safety

Moderator: Alan Simpson, Vice President of Policy, Common Sense Media

Panelists:

Torie Clarke, Senior Advisor for Comcast Corporation

Lee Rainie, Director, Pew Internet & American Life Project

Joan Dzenowagis, Scientist, eHealth, World Health Organization

Pablo Chavez, Managing Public Policy Counsel, Google

The panelists agreed that digital citizenship is a combination of respecting others online while also ensuring that users are getting accurate information from the Internet. The panelists discussed that although tools to keep people safe online are improving, families are not using them because they are either hard to find or difficult to understand. The panel emphasized that digital literacy is the key to making sure that consumers can protect themselves and that best practice seals on websites may also play a helpful role in some instances.

Rainie shared that 93 percent of teenagers are online, 71 percent have their own cell phones, and 61 percent are on social networks. There has also been a consistent rise in texting as well as blogging and instant messaging in the context of social networks. Also, Rainie stated that families are having a lot of conversations about the Internet and that two thirds of youth are taking steps to manage their Internet profiles. He said that it appears risky kids are the ones doing risky things online and that most kids are being smart online. Rainie claimed that there is not yet a set of tools for measuring digital literacy and that researchers are not doing a good enough job thinking about bullying and cyber harassment because a statistics vary based on how one defines these acts.

Clarke explained that Point Smart Click Safe is one of the most comprehensive and succinct studies out there and that it found that a diversity of players is needed to protect children online. Clarke stated that although larger players have played a big role in online safety, many of the small and medium players needed to be brought in. Clarke said that a hard focus on digital literacy is the key to ensuring that America has smart, aware, and informed consumers.

Dzenowagis commented that we are going online more and more for things we do not want to talk about with other people. She suggested that there should be a focus on consumer safety because if we do not take care of consumers there will be a lack of trust with regard to the Internet. Chavez stated that Internet could be used as a tool to teach offline citizenship. He shared a YouTube video that explains how teens can use the Internet as a useful resource.

Simpson asked the panelists what they are doing that really works to promote online safety. Clarke stated that Comcast has done a good job of improving tools for parents, but improvements could be made in making the tools more user-friendly. Chaves agreed and said that such tools should be easily discoverable and understandable. Simpson then asked what to do about families that are not actively looking for ways to protect children online. Rainie said that families have internalized what is the worst of the Internet, and that an effort must be made to make families aware of the benefits of the Internet.

Simpson also asked how the panelists defined digital citizenship. Clarke suggested that people need to know the basic rules and regulations of the Internet in order to fully realize the opportunities online. Rainie defined digital citizenship by including navigational skills or how people search for information and find their way to the best information, but also how they treat others online.

Simpson asked if there were any best practices for educating people on online safety. Clarke said that a focus on helping parents find the basics would be helpful. She also suggested a best practices seal so that consumers can be confident in what they find online. Dzenowagis stated that in the public health arena consumers largely do not understand seals and that seals can be ineffective because they are unenforceable. Chavez suggested that such seals could be helpful in several spaces including behavioral advertising that chooses to opt out of data collection. He cautioned however that it is difficult to decide what is a good site and what is a bad site and that it is important to maintain a diversity of opinions and content.

Simpson closed the session by asking each panelist what is coming next. Rainie and Chavez said that mobile applications would pose new challenges. Clarke expressed concern about a possible online Janet Jackson incident. Dzenowagis stated that as technology continues to evolve, there would need to be a fundamental understanding of Internet rules, responsibilities, and values.