

## Stephen Balkam, CEO, FOSI – 2009 Annual Conference Speech

The online safety movement continues to grow and expand. This work began in the mid-90s and we can say that as we near the end of the decade, online safety is entering its early teen years, which is appropriate given the focus of much of our work.

While a number of us in developed countries have been involved in this issue for many years, there are considerably more people from other parts of the world where this is a recent or just emerging concern. The wide range of participants here today reflects the broad international reach of our field and it will only expand further as broadband and mobile devices become even more ubiquitous.

There has never been a time when there have been so many tools available for parents, grandparents, care-givers and others to provide some measure of protection from the worst of the web.

Family safety settings exist in all the major operating systems and search engines. They are provided by all the leading ISPs, mobile operators and social networking sites.

The tools include a dizzying array of blocking, filtering, monitoring, GPS tracking, privacy settings, and data gathering devices – many of them exhibiting here today.

However, parental uptake remains low, though the figures are growing. This may be a reflection of a generational shift and may take the next generation of parents, born in the Internet age, to fully adopt basic safety and security measures for their children.

In schools, the picture is quite different. For a number of reasons, including legislation in this and other countries, classroom computers are in a state of virtual lock-down with access to much of the web denied to students and teachers, alike. We need to rethink this over-reactive stance and liberate the computers to link our kids to a much wider world.

And, the challenge of the coming years will be to find ways to integrate the technology the kids bring to school, particularly in the guise of smart phones, netbooks and other web-enabled devices.

What is needed is a comprehensive rethink of how to infuse online safety and responsible use into all areas of the curriculum from kindergarten through to high school and not consider it as a separate add-on or something that just the technology teacher addresses.

At last year's conference we called for a shift, a new paradigm: from a fear-based to a fact-based approach to online safety education.

Our report Making Wise Choices Online, chronicled the leading educational efforts in the US from government, industry and the non-profit sector. This area continues to grow with industry alone spending millions of dollars on educating their consumers on their safety features, while also providing support to the NGO groups experimenting with ever new and innovative curricula, many of whom are with us today.

And we've seen the emergence of proposed legislation in the US through Senator Menendez' SAFE Internet Act and Rep Wasserman-Shultz' AWARE Act which would create a multi-million dollar, competitive grant program for research and online safety education and we commend them in their efforts to turn this into law.

The EU's Safer Internet Programme, now in its 10<sup>th</sup> year, continues to be an international model of how to create and administer a wide-ranging, multi-stakeholder funding project which has done much to foster innovation and new approaches to online safety awareness and education.

Adding impetus to the need to get the tools, rules and educational messages in place are various broadband stimulus programs in many parts of the developed and developing world. Here in the US, the Recovery Act provides for \$7.2B to connect unserved and underserved communities. Importantly, there is provision in the bill for broadband education and awareness training to facilitate greater use of all kinds of broadband services.

In the UK, there is the recently launched Digital Britain plan and various initiatives to connect everyone to the Internet by 2012, in time for the Olympics. We have seen various projects to wire much of Africa at a time when cell phone use on that continent is soaring.

So what we need to create is a broadband responsibility program before, during and after roll-out to ensure that local communities, states and entire countries have a safety infrastructure in place.

At FOSI, we are committed to working with industry, governments and the nonprofit sector to compile a flexible blueprint or checklist to provide assistance to localities to ensure the safe and responsible use of broadband for their communities.

And I am pleased to announce that FOSI we will be holding its first ever conference in the Middle East on the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> January 2010. It is to be held in the Kingdom of Bahrain in partnership with its Telecommunications Regulatory Authority. The event will be open to industry, regulatory bodies and nonprofit organizations in the region and from further afield. It is hoped that the Crown Prince of Bahrain will be in attendance.

We have begun planning our next European conference to be held in Madrid in May to coincide with Spain holding the EU Presidency. This will build on the success and extraordinary level of debate at our inaugural European conference in Paris earlier this year.

And in a moment, you will hear of an exciting new resource, GRID, which will become a vital information resource for anyone remotely interested in online safety anywhere in the world.

So as we connect the next billion users to the Internet, let's pool our knowledge base and best practices to develop a coherent idea of what it means to be a good digital citizen.

This includes not just the rights of free expression, of privacy and the right to remain safe online, but also the duties and responsibilities of a fully active and engaged citizen: respecting others rights and looking out for fellow cyber-citizens in a civil and respectful manner.

Our children, the digital natives, already inhabit the online world and take it for granted. We, the digital immigrants, must first wake up to this new reality and in a spirit of collaboration and mutual exploration, bring our knowledge and experience of citizenship in the offline world to bear in the social networking sites, blogs, video sharing portals and all the endlessly varied parts of cyberspace.

Rooted in a foundation of basic internet safety education, we need to employ the very best in the emerging fields of digital and media literacy and apply these understandings and experiences to build the theory and practice of digital citizenship.

It is the work of a generation.

We will need to reach deep into teacher training methods and create new types of professional development to re-orientate our trainee and existing educators to marry the new technologies with profoundly different curricula and methods of learning.

And we see this as part of what we call the Culture of Responsibility, with 6 different yet overlapping areas of responsibility and the 3 C's of online safety.

To build this Culture of Responsibility we need reasonable government oversight and support; enhanced law enforcement; robust and comprehensive industry self-regulation; tech-savvy teachers; empowered parents and resilient kids making wise choices about the content they access and post; who they contact and who they allow to contact them and how they conduct themselves online.

And it's not just the kids. We all need to act more civilly, be mindful of what we share or over share, and report abusive postings and behavior.

These are the norms we should encourage in our children and demand of each other as we transition virtually all aspects of our daily lives online. We need to use broadband stimulus programs around the world as a catalyst to create Broadband Responsibility Programs before, during and after deployment of high speed access to our homes, schools and libraries. We need to identify and promote the very best tools, rules and educational messages and methods to safely and responsibly connect the next billion users.

Will you join us in this effort? I very much hope so and I look forward to working with all of you over the coming months and years as we take on this vital and rewarding challenge.

November 5, 2009