

# ICRA - Delivering a Safer Internet

The Internet Content Rating Association has designed a content labelling system that will allow Internet users to choose which content they wish to see. The use of such systems is becoming increasingly critical as the Internet becomes a mass medium and children make more and more use of this global network for information and entertainment. As parents and governments become more concerned, ICRA is moving into a new expansion phase to encourage the widespread adoption of content labelling. ICRA invites online publishers, service providers and other organisations to work with ICRA to support the creation of a better Internet for the future.

## The Internet is now a fundamental communications medium

The Internet has become a mainstream facility; the majority of households is now connected in leading nations and rapid adoption continues globally.

As the Internet develops, users want the means to exercise more choice over what content can be accessed. In particular, parents want to ensure their children enjoy the positive elements of the Internet whilst avoiding unwanted content and activities.



Although content labelling and filtering is starting to take root, adoption levels are still relatively low. Our challenge now is to promote site labelling and the means of empowering users to manage their Internet experience.

**ICRA's core purpose is to empower users to make their own decisions about the type of content they want to access, while respecting the free speech rights of content providers**

To achieve this, ICRA encourages labelling and filtering of content.

**ICRA members:**



ICRA has designed and now manages a content labelling system that enables objective labelling of all types of Internet content.

**ICRA has already achieved a high degree of awareness and support around the world**

"Microsoft shares the goal of creating an online environment in which children can learn, explore, and have fun without exposure to the many things that can harm them. We first integrated the ICRA system into Internet Explorer in 1996 and took a further step last October [2001] of requiring all of our MSN sites to rate themselves based on ICRA standards"

*Senior Vice President, Microsoft, July 2002*

ICRA now aims to move on to the next phase in its development; to achieve widespread adoption of the ICRA system.

**With the right backing ICRA can make a real difference**

Given increased funding, ICRA will be able to address the regulatory challenges of the converging media and technology worlds.

**This document answers the following key questions about ICRA:**

- Why are Internet content standards vital?
- How does ICRA help?
- How does the ICRA system work?
- Where is ICRA going now?
- How does ICRA benefit users and stakeholders?
- How can you benefit and support?

### Improving users' control over access to content on the Internet and other digital media is a pressing issue

Concerns are growing over children's access to adult sites and some services on the Internet – for example, chat. But this is a challenge to regulators who must strike a balance between protecting vulnerable users and respecting freedom of speech.

Similar issues are also emerging on mobile and digital TV platforms as digital convergence becomes a reality.

### ICRA's approach empowers users yet protects the freedoms of content providers

ICRA was formed in 1999 as an independent, international, non-profit organisation.

#### The ICRA approach has five key elements:

1. **The ICRA Vocabulary** that describes content as objectively as possible (using a questionnaire to identify content types, e.g. sexual materials, violence, chat)
2. **Labelling** of Internet content and services by content providers, at source, using the ICRA vocabulary
3. **Filters** for use on PCs or servers that are able to read the content labels and block or allow websites according to users' wishes
4. **Templates**, or 'pre-sets', that users can adopt (and customise) to define more easily the filter settings they want
5. **User awareness** and education so that users can understand the ICRA system and enjoy the benefits.

With the ICRA system, users can make their own decisions about the type of content they wish to see whilst content providers remain free from the burden of censorship.

ICRA addresses the regulatory challenges faced by governments around the world, and provides a more flexible and international solution than one imposed by national regulation.

### ICRA's overall aim is to achieve a critical mass of labelled sites accompanied by widespread integration into filters.

### The ICRA solution has benefits for all stakeholders:

Figure 1: Benefits of ICRA

Users	Content providers	Service providers	Gov't / regulators
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Empowerment</li> <li>• Impartiality</li> <li>• Granularity</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• Free to use</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Freedom of speech</li> <li>• Social responsibility</li> <li>• Objectivity</li> <li>• Independence</li> <li>• International acceptability</li> <li>• Cross-platform compatibility</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Self-regulation</li> <li>• Free labelling</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Meeting users' needs</li> <li>• Social responsibility</li> <li>• Promotion of self-regulation</li> <li>• International acceptability</li> <li>• Transparency</li> <li>• Giving users confidence</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Promotion of trust and confidence</li> <li>• Competitive neutrality</li> <li>• Cultural neutrality</li> <li>• Addressing citizens' issues</li> <li>• Maximisation of Internet use</li> <li>• Self-regulation</li> </ul>

In summary, widespread adoption would bring:

- Faster and higher take up of Internet services and usage
- Accelerated economic growth of the sector
- More rapid development of e-learning and democratic engagement
- Reliance on self-regulation rather than government intervention.

### ICRA has achieved a great deal and is uniquely placed to help deliver a safer Internet

ICRA's key accomplishments include:

- Development of the ICRA Vocabulary which provides the central, objectively-based, foundation for the content labelling system
- Support from major Internet players including telcos, ISPs and content providers
- Recognition by leading governments, e.g. Australia, Canada, EU, US and UK
- Charitable status in the UK and the US
- On-going labelling of content by major communications players including Yahoo!, AOL, MSN and BT Openworld
- Promotion of labelling from industry bodies, such as the US adult entertainment and the UK interactive gambling associations, which both now require members to label their websites with ICRA
- Development and release of ICRAfilter as open source software to demonstrate the concept and stimulate further development.

### ICRA's new business plan aims to propel ICRA to the forefront of content standards

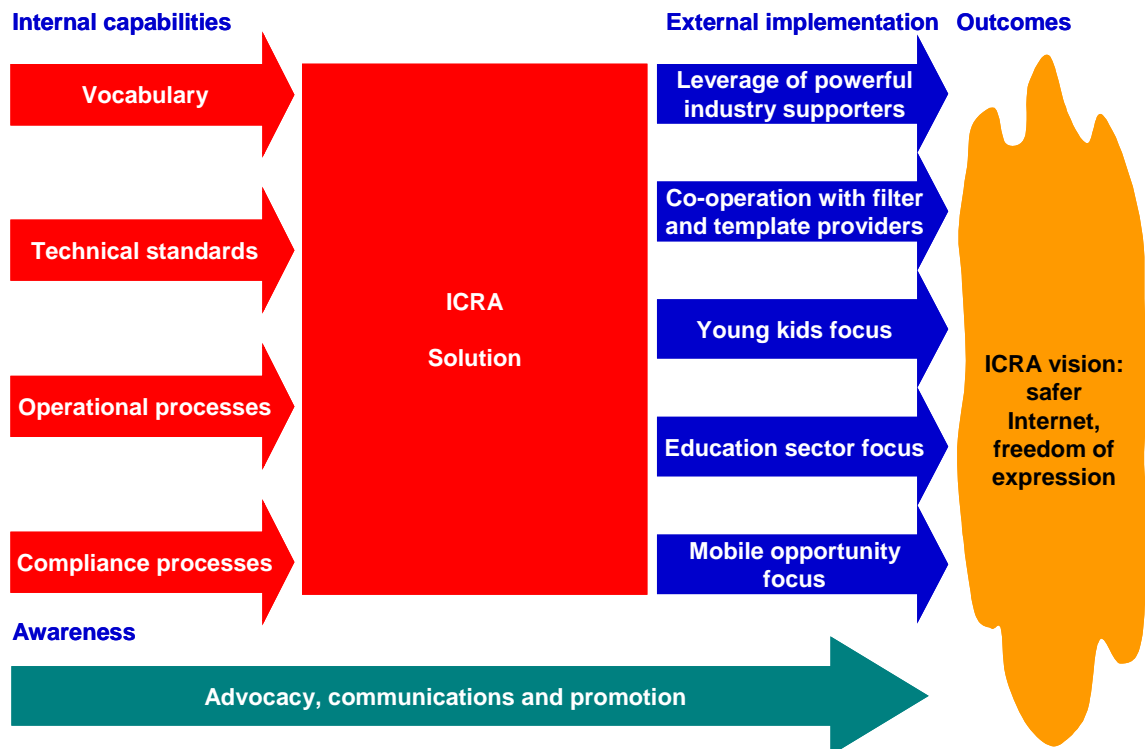
In February 2003, ICRA launched a five year business plan designed to deliver full-scale implementation of the ICRA system and to attract the necessary funding.

The key next steps for ICRA are to:

- Pave the way for easy technical implementation of the ICRA system on a much greater scale
- Demonstrate effectiveness of the solution amongst selected user-bases as a spring-board to wider adoption, focusing initially on:
  - labelling content for younger children
  - working with the education sector in several countries on pilot projects
  - responding to demand from new sectors, such as mobile
- Focus on content labelling, but encourage the adaptation of filtering tools to read ICRA labels and the development of templates
- Leverage maximum support from influential supporters, such as Microsoft.

ICRA's overall strategy is illustrated in figure 2 below:

Figure 2: ICRA's strategic plan



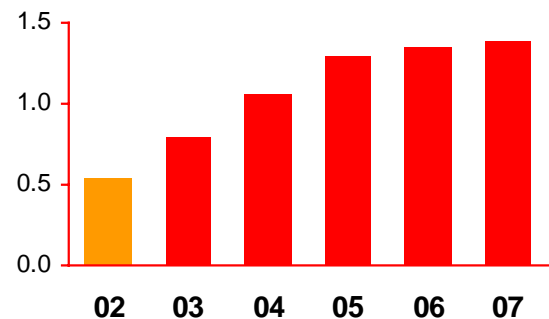
### Funding

Implementation of the ICRA business plan requires further funding from organisations which share ICRA's commitment to inspiring confidence in the Internet.

In order to deliver the business plan objectives, ICRA will need to expand to reach a headcount of 12 staff by 2007.

The business plan projects that ICRA will require funding of £0.8m (US\$1.3m) in 2003, rising to £1.4m (US\$2.3m) by 2007.

Figure 3: ICRA's funding requirements (£m)



Source: Spectrum analysis, ICRA accounts for 2002

## You can support ICRA in the following ways:

- Donations to ICRA – provide grants on a one-off basis or over a 3-5 year period (ICRA currently receives such support from businesses, governments, trusts and foundations)
- Become a member of ICRA – join the list of major players by taking up ICRA membership
- Contribute 'value-in-kind' – donate human or physical resources on a short-term or seconded basis (e.g. technical expertise, associate staff, office space etc.)
- Become a partner – make your filtering or search products ICRA-compatible or release an own-branded filter template
- Help promote ICRA – encourage content labelling or support awareness campaigns

To discuss how you might support ICRA please use the contact points at the foot of this page.

### ICRA FAQs

#### *Q: What is ICRA's mission?*

ICRA's mission is to be: "An independent, international, non-profit organisation whose aim is to empower parents to protect children from potentially harmful material while respecting the free speech rights of content providers on the Internet."

#### *Q: What kind of organisation is ICRA?*

ICRA is an independent, international, non-profit organization established in 1999 by a group of leading international Internet companies and associations. It is independent of government. ICRA has a small staff based at offices in both the U.S. and Europe.

#### *Q: How is ICRA funded?*

ICRA is funded primarily by a mix of membership contributions and special grants from organisations.

#### *Q: What services does ICRA provide?*

ICRA maintains a questionnaire for use by content providers to indicate the nature of the content they provide. It also provides guidelines as to how the labelling system can be best used with filters and templates to achieve a safer and more defined Internet for users.

#### *Q: How does a site become 'labelled'?*

The ICRA questionnaire allows content providers to describe the type of content on their sites. Based on this information ICRA generates a Content Label (a piece of computer code) which is added to the site in question.

#### *Q: How does filtering work?*

The ICRA labelling approach enables appropriately designed filters to be set to block or allow access to content based on the objective information declared in the label and the subjective preferences of the user. The filtering software can be embedded in operating systems or browsers and can be made available on a bundled or standalone basis. ICRA released a demonstration version of a filter – the *ICRAfilter* – in 2002 as a proof of concept. However, ICRA does not intend to develop filters itself, rather it will encourage filter development by as many other parties as possible. Templates can also be used to allow users to adopt pre-defined filter settings based on brands or providers they trust.

#### *Q: Isn't the ICRA solution equivalent to censorship?*

No. The ICRA solution provides a way for content providers to remain uncensored whilst providing end-users with the ability to choose which types of content they want to access. ICRA makes no value judgements on content: the content publishers describe their content objectively using a questionnaire and users define their own subjective preferences.

#### *Q: Are all websites with ICRA labels 'safe'?*

An ICRA label on a website means that a site is labelled and that compatible filters can read the label for that particular site based on user preferences. It is these user preferences which define the judgement about whether the content is appropriate for the user.

#### *Q: How can I find out more about ICRA?*

Please visit our website at [www.icra.org](http://www.icra.org) or use any of the contact points below.



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