

“The Norwegian Model” – a description of the process to reach telecom providers in Norway 2006 - 2007

Several new measures to protect children and young people

Last autumn the office of the Norwegian Consumer Ombudsman (Bjørn Erik Thon) took the initiative in commencing a dialogue between various parties in the industry, the authorities and industry bodies about making children’s use of mobile phones safer. This initiative has resulted in a very constructive dialogue and in many implemented and planned measures.



The Consumer Ombudsman Bjørn Erik Thon

The Consumer Ombudsman and the Minister of Children and Equality (Karita Bekkemellem) have organised two round table meetings on the subject, one in December 2006, and the other June 12th. Since the first meeting in December 2006, the telecom industry and a number of other interested parties have done a great deal towards making children’s and young people’s daily encounter with the media safer. Among the things presented at last week’s meeting were:

- The introduction of age controls by the telecom providers *)
- ICT Norway’s launch of a commonsense mobile phone guide for adults and children and SAFT’s launch of tips for safe internet usage
- Norwegian Media Authority/SAFT and ICT Norway’s introduction of a planned label for those website providers who excellence themselves in good moderators, availability to privacy terms and guidelines, and accessible possibilities to report content to the editor. This work is not yet finished, but the goal is to reward those who succeed in excellence, and forward them as good examples, as supposed to trying to tear down who does not.



The Minister of Children and Equality Karita Bekkemellem

There was general agreement at the meetings that this collaboration for safer media usage for children and young people should be continued and expanded and it was agreed to hold another round table meeting before Christmas 2007.

“The measures launched at the meeting are a real step in the right direction,” says consumer ombudsman Bjørn Erik Thon - “now I’m looking forward to continuing.”

One of the measures planned for the future is creating a programme on safe use of media for *Grunnskolen Uke* (a week dedicated to the collaboration between homes and school – concentrating on different subjects each year), which is arranged every autumn in Norwegian primary and secondary schools. At the round table meeting it was also suggested that a closer look should be taken at children’s use of mobile phones.

"This kind of collaboration between business, the authorities and industry bodies is almost unique, nationally and internationally. It has been noticed internationally and I have already been talking to many other people about how the various forces can achieve results through collaboration and dialogue," says Thon.

*) To further explain what this entailed:

All the biggest telecom providers in Norway to make changes that are as follows:

- When one is to make a subscription one has to be 18 years or older. The change lies in that when you make a subscription for your child, you will now have the possibility to enter the child's age, and make different reservations accordingly. For instance; if the user of a subscription is listed as under the age of 18, they will not be able to receive content that is violent or pornographic from any service providers.

These changes are not all set in action as of yet. Of course all of this means a great deal of work on the telecommunication providers' part, and the changes will be done in time, but within six months to a year.

One of the biggest accomplishments of this work however, is that we had a good dialogue, where the goal always were the protection of children; as well as the responsibility of both parents and telecom companies. For it is a fact that parents themselves when making a subscription to a telecom company, must ensure that they do fill out the details of the users age, and what limitation they wish to make. If not, the parents themselves must take responsibility if the bill is excessively high, and/ or the services provided are not such as a child should receive.

There were numerous partners involved, and the working group, which is still active – consisted of amongst others:

- The Ministry of Children and Equality
- Office of the Consumer Ombudsman
- Norwegian Media Authority/SAFT Nono Plus
- ICT Norway
- ChildMinder
- The biggest Norwegian telecom and service providers, including:
 - Telenor
 - Netcom
 - Chess
 - Aspiro
 - Tele2