



Media Release

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ACCAN asks Google to follow its own mission statement

ACCAN, Australia's peak body for communications consumers, has written an open letter to Google Australia & New Zealand managing director, Ms Maile Carnegie, calling on Google to follow its own mission statement and make online information 'universally accessible' by making its reCAPTCHA service fully accessible.

reCAPTCHA, which Google acquired in 2009, is an online test made up of fuzzy numbers and letters which is designed to verify that you are a human rather than a computer-controlled bot. reCAPTCHA is currently used by over 200,000 websites but is blocking millions of blind or vision impaired users from accessing these sites because their screen reading software can't read CAPTCHA tests and the audio alternatives can rarely be deciphered.

"Google is one of the world's biggest online innovators, so we are calling on them to be industry leaders by making reCAPTCHA accessible for everyone," said ACCAN CEO Teresa Corbin. "It is Google's mission to be 'universally accessible' and this is an ideal way for Google to achieve this laudable goal," said Ms Corbin.

CAPTCHA (Completely Automated Public Turing test to tell Computers and Humans Apart) tests are often used when signing up for a new online account, commenting on blogs or even accessing some government services. Google provides an accessible mobile phone verification when signing up for a new Google account, but this option or any other accessible options, are not mandated with their reCAPTCHA service.

The World Wide Web Consortium, an international community which develops web protocols and guidelines, has declared CAPTCHA inaccessible. Additionally, the reliability of CAPTCHA tests as a security tool has been put into question by software company Vicarious, who claim to be able to solve CAPTCHA with greater than 90% accuracy.

ACCAN says accessible alternatives to CAPTCHA and reCAPTCHA include an email verification or software such as HoneyPot.

The Google-owned reCAPTCHA differs slightly from normal CAPTCHAs, as every completed reCAPTCHA helps Google digitise the world's collection of printed books.

"While we acknowledge the many benefits reCAPTCHA brings in digitising print books, it effectively considers people like me who are blind non-human, excluding us from many online activities. This is simply unacceptable," said ACCAN disability policy advisor Wayne Hawkins.

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The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's peak communications consumer organisation. The operation of ACCAN is made possible by funding provided by the Commonwealth of Australia under section 593 of the Telecommunications Act 1997. This funding is recovered from charges on telecommunications carriers.

ACCAN and other Australian disability organisations launched a “kill CAPTCHA” petition in August which has received over 3500 signatures from around Australia and other countries including the US, UK, Canada, Germany, Cambodia, South Africa, Ireland and Slovakia, to name a few. The petition asked the CEOs of Google, Microsoft, Yahoo, eBay, Twitter, Yelp, and Facebook to make CAPTCHAs accessible, or provide an accessible alternative.

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Interviews: Wayne Hawkins, ACCAN disability policy advisor. Contact Mark Callender 0409 966 931 or mark.callender@accan.org.au

Additional information:

- Wayne Hawkins, ACCAN disability policy advisor, has been blind for about seven years and CAPTCHA tests have fast become one of his most hated aspects of the web because it blocks him from using many online activities. Wayne began the "kill CAPTCHA" petition on change.org in August 2013.
- ACCAN’s open letter to Google can be accessed through the online media release: <http://accan.org.au/news-items/media-releases/729-accan-asks-google-to-follow-its-own-mission-statement>
- ACCAN’s community position statement on CAPTCHA: <http://accan.org.au/our-work/policy/728-community-position-statement-on-captcha>
- Kill CAPTCHA petition: <http://www.change.org/en-AU/petitions/it-s-time-to-finally-kill-captcha-2>