Hot issues

In the field – ACCAN Grants Scheme 2012-17

In the past five years, a total of $1,256,055.86 has been awarded to universities, research organisations, community groups and not for profit organisations to help consumers navigate the telecommunications and technology landscape.

The ACCAN Grants Scheme has funded 31 different projects since 2012, examining emerging technologies like 3D printing, through to more serious consumer issues, such as technology facilitated stalking and abuse.

With a huge number of resources produced in this time – reports, tip sheets, apps and more – this article looks at the Grants Scheme projects that have achieved significant and ongoing impacts.

Know Your Gizmo

Since the initial project in 2012, Know Your Gizmo has expanded exponentially across New South Wales and Victoria thanks to collaboration with state government and its original leaders – the Albury Wodonga Volunteer Resource Bureau.

From its humble beginnings with ACCAN funding, the project has grown from just 14 high school students assisting older community members to improve their skills with a "gizmo" (such as a mobile phone or laptop). It has now seen more than 600 students volunteer their time with nearly 500 seniors, helping them to understand and use their gadgets more easily.

The Know Your Gizmo training pack is available for free online. It is a six-week program inviting older people in the community to bring along a gizmo, and spend time with young volunteers who help them learn to use the device.

Death and the Internet

Death and the Internet looked at what happens to your online materials, profiles and digital assets after you die. The project identified a range of ownership and access issues, and found that many online 'assets' are left exposed or stranded after someone dies. The project produced a brochure with tips and advice for consumers.

Following the ACCAN Grant, the researchers secured a grant from the Australian Research Council worth $256,000 to continue researching this issue. The research has informed over 20 publications since. ACCAN's Deputy CEO has presented on this research at several events and conferences around the world, including in Brazil and New Zealand. ACCAN recently proposed a new global standards based approach to this issue.

Homeless and Connected

Research on mobile phone and mobile internet access, ownership and use amongst 95 families and young people experiencing homelessness was conducted to gather evidence on the specific needs and circumstances of this group. The study found that 95 per cent of participants had a mobile phone, with higher smartphone use than that recorded at the time for the general population, and that mobile phones are essential for survival and safety, for gaining new skills and for moving out of homelessness.

The work in this project formed the basis of evidence for Infoxchange's Ask Izzy app, which assists in the delivery of services to homeless people. Telstra customers can get unmetered access to the Ask Izzy app. The research also resulted in the development of a 'Hardship Portal', a central web-based resource hosted by ACCAN which has information on what consumers can do if they are facing hardship.

What Standards?

What Standards? produced the first set of guidelines for Auslan (Australian Sign Language) video production to ensure that translations are clear, accessible and readily understood by those consumers who communicate in Auslan. This project examined the current standards of online Auslan translations by undertaking an audit of available material and focus groups with Auslan speakers and interpreters. They have formed the basis of interpreter training and been used in Victorian emergency services video production for the web.

Technology-facilitated stalking and abuse

Digital abuse is a worrying and pervasive new aspect of domestic violence, with 98 per cent of domestic violence workers reporting their clients were affected. An Australia-wide online educational resource for women and their support workers was developed, assisting them to identify and address technology-facilitated harassment and to seek protection.

The project produced online fact sheets and training programs. The results of the academic research resulted in law reform of the Criminal Code Amendment (Private Sexual Material) Bill 2015, NSW Legislative Council Inquiry into Remedies for the Serious Invasion of Privacy and a Senate Inquiry into the phenomenon known as 'revenge porn.'

Document Accessibility Toolbar

Whilst there are global standards for accessibility of online content in HTML and PDF, no such framework exists for documents produced in Microsoft Word. The Digital Access team at Vision Australia developed the world-first Document Accessibility Toolbar (DAT) as a standard add-in for Word. This means every person who creates a Word document can access a range of automated tools to ensure their documents can be used by people who are blind or vision impaired.

Following the launch, the DAT has been downloaded more than 1600 times by users in Australia. Approximately 169 multi-user licenses for the Toolbar have also been downloaded by organisations including the Australian Taxation Office, Australian Electoral Commission and the National Disability Insurance Agency.

2017-18 Round

ACCAN's Grants Scheme began in 2010 and was reviewed in 2012 and again this year. The 2017 Consumer Representation Review has resulted in a renewed commitment from the Government to fund and support research, education and representation for consumers. With new funding earmarked for another five years, the 2017-18 Grants round opened on 14 June and will accept applications until 25 July, 2017. For up to date information on the 2017 Round, see the Grants page or contact us on grants@accan.org.au