accan

The Secretary
House of Representatives Standing Committee on Communications

Via email: coms.reps@aph.gov.au

August 2009

Re: Inquiry into Cybercrime

Thank you for the opportunity to input into the inquiry into cyber crime and its impact on Australian consumers. This submission partially addresses items C) and D) in the Terms of Reference.

About ACCAN

The Australian Communications Consumer Action Network (ACCAN) is Australia's new communications consumer watchdog. The purpose of ACCAN is to improve consumer advocacy, undertake research and analysis from a consumer perspective and to make the market work for communications consumers. The operations of ACCAN are made possible by funding provided by the Australian government.

ACCAN commenced operations on July 1 2009. Prior to that, the Consumers Telecommunications Network (CTN) represented the interests of residential Australian consumers on telecommunications issues.

Recommendations

- *That the committee refer to the full list of recommendations in the Surfing on Thin Ice report*

- *That the Committee seek specific details from all agencies involved in consumer education as to the successes of existing campaigns*

- *That a comprehensive approach to e-security skills development for consumers be developed with clear and measurable objectives*

- *That ACCAN be a partner in future settings in future consumer education programs and skills training campaigns*

Consumer research on e-security

In 2006, ACCAN's predecessor CTN published a research report *Surfing on Thin Ice: Consumers and Malware, Adware, Spam and & Phishing*, which investigated Australian residential consumers' experiences with e-security and identifies areas of concern and their implications on telecommunications policy and regulation. Findings and recommendations were formed through a literature review and an online survey of 254 consumers.

While more than 1 in every 10 consumers surveyed had experienced unexpectedly high bills or financial loss as a result of e-security problems, more than 1 in every 3 consumers surveyed had stopped or changed the way they made online purchases, paid bills online, or used online banking because of e- security concerns.

The research also revealed that though awareness of e-security threats may be reasonably high, consumer understanding of threats and how to protect themselves against them may be lacking. More than 1 in every 2 consumers surveyed were less than confident they could successfully identify malware, adware, Spam or phishing. More than 4 out of every 5 consumers surveyed thought Internet Service Providers should take more responsibility to provide better security online for consumers, while 2 out of every 3 thought Government or consumers should take more responsibility.

The full report is attached for reference (Attachment A).

Recommendation: that the committee refer to the full list of recommendations in the Surfing on Thin Ice report

Also attached is CTN's 2008 submission to the 2008 E-Security Review, undertaken by the Attorney General's department (Attachment B).

Other research

Other specific research we wish to draw the Committee's attention to is the Australian Communications and Media Authority's report *Australia in the Digital Economy Report 1: Trust and Confidence.* It is online here: http://acma.gov.au/webwr/aba/about/recruitment/trust_and_confidence_aust_in_digital_economy.pdf

As far as we are aware, there is very little independent and reliable information available about consumer experiences with e-security other than the above. In addition, research is also undertaken by companies that provide security products and services. Whilst valuable, they are not the same as research that aims to examine consumer skills and awareness of e-security threats, or their actual success

in protecting themselves. Specific data on this should be sought from law enforcement and regulatory agencies.

Consumer education

We anticipate that the Committee is aware of the Stay Smart online, E-security Awareness Week and ScamWatch initiatives. There are many different agencies involved in promoting e-security and cyber-crime awareness – the ACCC, DBCDE, the Australian High Tech Crime Centre and so on – we expect these agencies will have undertaken assessments of the effectiveness of their campaigns and messages.

Recommendation: That the Committee seek specific details from all agencies involved in consumer education as to the successes of existing campaigns

A co-ordinated approach with clear and measurable objectives would be a central component of this. We have no oversight of whether this presently exists, nor input into what these deliverables are appropriate. There would also seem to be a role for internet service providers to provide consumer education resources, seeing as they interact directly with end users to whom they supply a service. Again, we don't have oversight of existing arrangements, but co-ordinated efforts will have a much greater likelihood of improving consumer skills and awareness.

Recommendation: That a comprehensive approach to e-security skills development for consumers be developed with clear and measurable objectives

ACCAN's predecessor CTN was a partner in the promotion of ScamWatch and E-security Awareness week. As a membership-based peak body, ACCAN is able to distribute material and conduct education campaigns with member organisations. We would be pleased to participate in joint discussions and benchmark settings in future consumer education and skills training campaigns.

Recommendation: That ACCAN be a partner in future settings in future consumer education programs and skills training campaigns

Should you wish to discuss this submission in more detail, please contact myself or Sarah Wilson on 02 9288 4000 or via info@accan.org.au

Yours sincerely,

Allan Asher

Chief Executive Officer