

Cooperative
Arrangement for
Complaints Handling on
Social Networking Sites

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Background

Australia has a healthy and promising digital economy which is set to provide further growth and opportunity. In taking advantage of this opportunity, it is important that all Australians are equipped and empowered to be capable digital citizens.

Being a capable digital citizen is about having the necessary skills to be smart, safe and responsible online. Capable digital citizens have the skills and knowledge to take advantage of the opportunities of the online world while minimising the risks that can arise. Digital citizenship is also about being a positive contributor to online communities. For example, constructively sharing views, creating and rating content, commenting on articles and reporting content that may be inappropriate. These active modes of participation are to be preserved and encouraged.

Promoting digital citizenship requires a collaborative effort - it is a shared responsibility and we all have a role to play. There are a wide range of stakeholders including young people, parents, teachers, online service providers, the private sector, governments and non-governmental organisations. The most effective approach is for stakeholders to consult and collaborate.

The providers of Social Networking Sites (SNS) or services with SNS-like functionality, listed at the end of this document share a common goal to support and empower all Australians to be good digital citizens. In pursuit of this goal, they are recording here a cooperative arrangement for complaints handling on SNS that builds on existing cooperative processes. This arrangement is voluntary and non-binding. SNS recognise that a complaints handling system which is tangible, helps to build the confidence of users and promote good digital citizenship.

Implementation of this cooperative arrangement is to reflect the nature of each particular SNS and is to be assessed by each provider independently. This cooperative arrangement is intended to support the SNS' existing policies and processes, reflect understanding of how each SNS operates and provide for flexibility, noting the need to avoid a prescriptive approach.

This cooperative arrangement is not to impact on any law enforcement or Attorney-General's Department arrangements with the providers.

Principles

Policies for acceptable use

1. These providers will have in place policies for acceptable use, which may be referred to by terms such as community guidelines, terms of use, codes of conduct or similar. They will provide clear information about what constitutes inappropriate behaviour on the site. This information should be easily accessible and include information about the consequences of breaching the acceptable use policy.

Complaints mechanisms

2. These providers will have mechanisms for reporting inappropriate content, contact or behaviour as outlined in their policies for acceptable use. Providers will enable users to have access to information they need to make an effective report and, where appropriate, an indication of how reports are typically handled.

Review processes

3. These providers will have a process for reviewing and acting on complaints promptly, as appropriate in the circumstances. This process should be adapted to the scale at which the SNS operates. The providers will build systems and provide trained staff to assess issues on a case by case basis in accordance with the providers' policies. A user's non-compliance with policies for acceptable use may have consequences including removal of content, suspension or closure of their account. Sanctions for a breach of a provider's policies will in all cases be determined by the provider.

Child abuse material

4. These providers will remove child abuse material in accordance with the providers' child abuse policies as soon as they are made aware of it. Upon receipt of notification of alleged child abuse material, they will implement effective processes to expeditiously review that material and take such other actions as appropriate. They will continue to make referrals of this material to the appropriate authorities, including to law enforcement.

Identified contact person

5. These providers will have a contact person(s) with whom the Australian Government can discuss issues and any appropriate messaging to the community and media in response to issues as they arise. This is particularly important where an issue is of public interest and as such, requires prompt attention.

Education and awareness raising

6. These providers will encourage their users to understand the functionality on the site, including reporting tools. They will provide clear guidance designed to give people the tools, knowledge and skills to navigate their services safely.
7. These providers will take steps to help users be aware of the importance of being smart, safe and responsible online.

Collaboration with Government on education and awareness raising initiatives

8. These providers will contribute to, support and collaborate with the Australian Government, as appropriate, on relevant cybersafety initiatives.

Continued innovation

9. These providers will innovate to provide useful services that promote user safety.

Transparency

10. These providers will each provide information on how they give effect to this cooperative arrangement (see appendix).

11. These providers will meet with government officials on a bilateral basis every six months to discuss trends and emerging issues.

12. These providers will provide the Consultative Working Group on Cybersafety with information on trends and emerging issues every twelve months.

Participating SNS (as at 16 January 2013)

- Facebook
- Google (YouTube)
- Microsoft
- Yahoo!

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Appendix [SNS name]

In the interests of transparency, providers supporting the Cooperative Arrangement for Complaints Handling on Social Networking Sites agree to provide information on how they give effect to the Principles in relation to the social networking services they offer, using this form.

1. About the Social Networking Service(s)

[Brief outline of the social networking services offered]

2. How will the provider give effect to the complaints handling aspect of the Cooperative Arrangement?

3. Other actions taken on implementation of these arrangements?