

IAAC People-Centric Information Assurance research

Paper 8 – Communicating digital safety and security ideas to people

Results from IAAC's PCIA workshop of 7 April 2011

The aim of the current PCIA research is to understand how to help people fend for themselves online. By “fend for themselves online” we mean people doing whatever it is they need to do so that they feel safe doing the things they want to do online. It includes behaving sensibly and taking appropriate precautions.

The objective of this workshop was to understand how to communicate basic digital safety and security information and ideas to people. Given the enormous diversity of the people who need to be reached, how should they be approached, who should the messengers be and how should the messages be crafted?

For a discussion of the content of the information and ideas to be communicated, refer to the report from the preceding workshop¹.

Disclaimer: This report is not a record of the workshop discussion. It is, as with previous workshop reports, a digest of the many insightful points made in, and arising from, the discussion. The ideas expressed in this report should not be taken to represent the views of any individual IAAC member or sponsor.

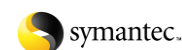
Key messages

1. Getting digital safety and security messages across to the UK public is a mammoth task. The population of the UK is hugely diverse. Different people have different interests, concerns and needs. They have different ways of going online and different purposes for being online. They are receptive to different ways of being reached.
2. There are also lots of messages to be communicated. Each message has to be presented in a bite-sized form so it has a chance of being taken on. As some of the information will be forgotten the first time it is received, people will need reminding continually of the key safety and security messages they need to know.
3. As this is a social challenge that affects the whole of the UK population, it is for the Government to provide the vision, national strategies and overall leadership required and to be the enabler of any concerted activities that need to take place. However, there is no expectation that the Government should do everything. The Government will be one of many bodies involved in communicating ideas to people, all working together through cooperation and collaboration, sharing expertise and knowledge.
4. The bodies best placed to provide good content are not usually those best placed to get that content across to people. Content providers and communicators each need to work to their strengths. The aim is to have authoritative and consistent information be provided by those who can articulate the ideas best, and then to have those messages be conveyed by those each target group is most open to being influenced by.
5. People need to relate to the messages being conveyed if they are to pay them any attention. The messages need to be contextualised to people's interests or passions. They need to relate to dangers people recognise, and they need to provide advice people will appreciate being given.

¹ PCIA workshop 7, 12 October 2010

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6. Messages need to be designed so the information is easy to understand and the target audience retains the ideas. They need to adopt a tone and style appropriate to the particular audience, carry information of interest to that audience, and point out the benefits from taking on the message not just focus on the problem being addressed.
7. Communications campaigns should be bold and imaginative and their backers should understand that often the success of a campaign cannot be known in advance. Not every campaign will be as successful as the “Clunk-Click” seat belt campaign of the early 1970’s. Where possible, communications should be professionally designed, put the focus on people’s behaviours rather than on technological solutions, and be action-oriented.

Discussion

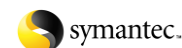
The breadth and depth of the challenge

1. The population of the UK is a hugely diverse audience for digital safety and security messages. Different people will face different issues and have different needs.
 - People connect online in different ways. Today most people go online using consumer digital devices (PCs, smart phones, etc.). These people need to take an active role in keeping themselves safe and secure online. Those who don’t go online in this way will likely get connected later as digital devices enter the fabric of their lives (e.g. smart meters in their homes). For these people, their need is primarily to be given confidence that any safety and security issues that might affect them have been properly addressed by the organisations that ask them to use those devices.
 - Different people venture online to different extents. Approximately 1 in 5 of the UK population today have yet to use the Internet. If or when they do go online, it is likely they will do so in only a limited way. For example, they will probably use the Internet to communicate with family and access information and possibly entertainment, but stop short of conducting more significant activities such as making purchases.
 - Different people face different problems. For example, the recent explosion of mobile apps means there are many people who now find their major daily exposure comes through the apps they have downloaded. These apps create new challenges and expose people to new threats. As different people have different knowledge, beliefs, capabilities and digital common sense, they have different levels of susceptibility to these threats.
2. Each group within this population has to be targeted separately. There is no single communications campaign that can reach everyone effectively. Different people have different interests and are receptive to being reached in different ways.
3. Each person within each target group will need to be reached. There are very few people, if any, who can have active online lives whilst relying on others to protect them. This is true even for children. Parents cannot oversee or intervene in all the channels their children use to go online. Children need to learn to look after themselves online and not to leave matters of protection to others.
4. There is an enormous range of information and ideas to be conveyed to people and a variety of aims to be achieved. As discussed in the preceding report², these aims include enabling people to build realistic perceptions, develop conducive attitudes, gain familiarity with dangerous situations and build up a basic understanding of how to stay safe. The range of information covers their responsibilities, essential safety rules, common sense behaviours, and what to do when there is a problem.
5. The normal way to communicate such a large body of knowledge would be within a formal setting such as a classroom. However, there is no realistic prospect of getting vast numbers of people to attend classes

² See the report from PCIA workshop 7 (12 October 2010)

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on digital safety and security. Therefore, people need to be reached as they go about their normal lives. The information and ideas to be conveyed need to be presented in bite-sized chunks. As there is no guarantee that people will be receptive to each message each time it is broadcast, and as some of the information will be forgotten the first time it is received anyway, the communication process needs to be continual.

How to respond to this mammoth challenge

6. Though in many ways the digital world has evolved enormously over the past two decades, we are still in the early days with regard to developing people's digital safety and security habits. There have been many initiatives to date aiming to teach people better habits. There has also been some confusion around which habits people should learn. For example, should people change their passwords regularly or should they choose a complex password they can remember and then stick with that? If people are to be helped, there needs to be clearer thinking and more collaboration between those providing advice.
7. This is a social challenge that affects the whole of the UK population. Therefore it is for the Government to provide the vision, national strategies and overall leadership required and to be the enabler of any concerted activities that need to take place. However, there is no expectation that the Government should do everything. There are at least four other roles that need to be involved. These are:
 - Thought leaders – those who can provide structured thinking and show the way forward;
 - Doers – those who are good at making things happen;
 - Content providers – those who can provide authoritative information and plain English explanations;
 - Communicators/messengers – those the target audiences are open to being influenced by.
8. Any national strategy the Government develops should be aligned with other relevant plans and activities. For example, the next revisions of the UK Cyber Security Strategy and National IA Strategy should include engagement and communication with the public on relevant aspects of digital safety and security.
9. The UK Government should also look at what other countries do (e.g. Sweden, the Netherlands, France, Germany, the USA) and at what other bodies (e.g. ENISA – the European Network and Information Security Agency) have to say regarding engaging with the public. Though each country might have slightly different problems or approaches, there will undoubtedly be much that can be gained from collaboration and sharing of ideas at an international level.

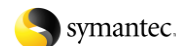
How to reach people effectively

The first step in communicating digital safety and security information and ideas to people is to build an approach that can cover such a diverse range of people.

10. Different groups of people will need to be reached through different channels and will be variously receptive to different messengers and message forms. For example, children will be receptive, each to a different degree, to the messages they receive from:
 - Schools;
 - Parents;
 - Peers;
 - The music and entertainment industry;
 - Television – TV programmes such as Blue Peter, soaps, comedies;

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- ISPs and online content providers such as CEOP (the UK's Child Exploitation and Online Protection Centre), Get Safe Online, and WARPs (community warning, advice and reporting points)³.

Therefore there is a need for a wide variety of messengers and message forms.

11. Different groups might be best approached when in a particular situation or through a particular relationship they have. For example:
 - The university enrolment process could be an effective way to get messages across to new students;
 - Bodies that focus on helping the elderly could be an effective way to reach the over-60's;
 - Local or community "digital champions" - individuals who are willing to provide some of their time to help others within their community - could be an effective way to reach those who live in smaller or more segregated communities.
12. Those who make the best communicators for a particular target group might not be the best to provide the content that is communicated. For example, when parents hold negative attitudes towards a subject, it is usually those rather than something more positive they convey to their children. Peers can mislead as often as they might forewarn. Journalists can reach a large audience but do not always provide a balanced perspective of the issues.
13. It is therefore important to separate the creation of content from the communication of that content. Content providers and messengers each need to work to their strengths and to work together in partnership. The aim is to have authoritative and consistent information be provided by those who can articulate the information and ideas best, and to have those messages then be conveyed to each target group by those that target group is most open to being influenced by.

How to get people's attention

It is not sufficient just to broadcast lots of messages. It is necessary to get target groups to pay attention to those messages.

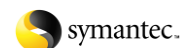
14. For this it is important to make the messages relevant to the target groups' lives. The message has to be framed in the type of language the target audience uses, and the information and ideas have to relate to issues the target group relates to. These issues might be associated with people's passions (e.g. sport) or their interests (e.g. family history). They might be issues of local relevance carried by the local papers or national issues picked up by the broadcast media.
15. Many communication opportunities will be transient, perhaps relating to a particularly significant event. For example, there is often an upsurge in scams following a natural disaster such as a major earthquake or tsunami. Major events can be used to remind audiences of relevant key messages, such as the message that other people are no more to be trusted in the digital world than in the physical world and that if people want to stay safe online they need to use the same amount of common sense.
16. Alternatively, the issues around which digital safety messages are wrapped could simply be issues inserted into the early evening TV drama serials many people watch.

For example, the main impact of a routine cybercrime on its victim is the time and effort it takes for the victim to get their life back to normal (to reclaim an online account after it has been hijacked, and so forth). Currently this is estimated to take someone on average 25 days. This could easily be woven in to the story line of a TV drama series so viewers could get to see how cybercrime happens and what it takes for a victim to recover from an incident. This might encourage people to be proactive in their own lives and not wait to experience the problems for themselves.

³ See www.warp.gov.uk

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Alternatively, a police drama series could devote an episode to dealing with a realistic cyber crime (for example, someone selling sensitive personal details for profit or running a botnet for hire). The police could start by making one or two common misjudgements which set them off in the wrong direction. By the end of the episode, the police and audience could have learned a number of useful points and have corrected their initial misconceptions.

17. People are usually willing to learn from the experiences of other people with whom they identify and the mistakes those other people have made. This suggests that one way to get a target audience's attention would be to get people who have had a bad digital experience to come forward and share that experience with others who are at risk of making the same mistake (e.g. through schools or clubs).
18. Even with messages being contextualised in these and other ways, people still need to relate to the threat being addressed and the advice being offered. People need to accept the problem being portrayed as realistic rather than contrived. For this, the issue being presented has to accord with the audience's beliefs. For example, if a youngster believes that the only purpose for going online is to have fun, and that parents never have fun, they are not likely to listen to any warnings about safety they might be given by their parents.

How to get people to accept the message

Having gained people's attention, the next objective is to get them to accept the message and not to dismiss it straight away.

19. For this it is important to keep the messages simple, authoritative, and independent of any product or vested interest. People are wary of advice or warnings they are given by bodies they perceive as having a vested interest such as to sell them something.
20. Communications should inform and advise but not speak down to people. Some people are deeply distrustful of anyone who presumes to have higher authority than they and will be quick to dismiss any messages from sources that appear to wag the finger, nanny them or tell them what they must do. There are few messages that can be conveyed successfully these days in the form of a traditional government communications campaign.
21. Communications should be designed to make their information and ideas easy to understand. It is often helpful to draw on parallels with the physical world as all people have some sense of physical world safety and security issues. For example, some issues could be phrased in the form "You wouldn't do this in the real world so why would you do its equivalent in the digital world?"
22. Communications should give people something they want to hear, not just convey the information or advice that the communicator thinks their audience needs to hear. When telling people about a concern they need to heed, it is important at the same time to give them help dealing with that concern. Point out the benefits of following the offered advice, do not just focus on the problems and dangers to which the advice relates. Identify the dangers in a balanced way rather than perpetuate a message of fear, uncertainty and doubt. Listen to people's concerns and questions and understand what people want to know. Provide updates on things that are new (e.g. emerging threats or trends) or things the audience might find interesting (e.g. unusual facts about the digital world) as well as providing advice on what to do.
23. Communications should be nuanced in the guidance and advice provided. The benefits of following the advice will be different for, and valued differently by, different people. For example, if the Internet can allow someone with a disadvantage or disability do something they are not able to do otherwise, there is a powerful benefit there that can be used to help communicate key messages to that particular group.
24. Above all, communications should be imaginative and use humour, graphics, video clips, comics, whatever it takes to make the messages attractive and easier for the target audience to engage with.

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How to get people to act on what they have been told

The final step is to get people to act on the information and ideas they have received.

25. Some communications campaigns are very successful at getting people to change their behaviours. The “Clunk Click Every Trip” campaign of the early 1970’s to get people to use car seat belts is often held up as the archetypal successful campaign. However, even though that campaign was a success, an earlier campaign in which the “clunk-click” slogan first appeared turned out not to be at all successful. It is often not until afterwards that the success or lack of success of a campaign becomes clear. Communications campaigns should be bold and imaginative and their backers should accept that not every campaign will be an instant or lasting success.
26. Where possible, campaigns need to be professionally designed to maximise the benefit from each opportunity. Marketing professionals can help with this as they understand how to get messages across to people who have unmet needs. Similarly occupational psychologists can help as they understand how to influence people’s attitudes and behaviours in different situations.
27. Where possible, the communication should focus on people’s behaviours and counter the common misperception that digital problems are always technological problems. If people can be helped to understand that their behaviour is part of the problem, then they are more likely to understand that the solution lies in them changing what they do. If they believe that digital problems are always technological, they will either look to others to solve the problem or, at best, see it as a problem that can be fixed with a single action such as the purchase of a product or the change of a setting.
28. Where possible, the communication process should be action-oriented. For example, if working with children, it can be helpful to get the child to do something creative with the information or idea being communicated rather than just expect them to absorb it passively. The act of creation will help the child to engage with the issue being addressed.
29. Campaigns are limited only by the imagination of the creators. With such a diverse audience to be reached, there will always be a need for new ways to reach people and new ways to explain ideas.

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