Sort your settings website - promoting online safety to children, young persons and their families

In response to the rise in online crime during the COVID-19 pandemic, the force launched a website aimed at promoting online safety for children and their families and worked with retail stores to distribute the website QR codes.

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Key details

Stage of practice	Untested
Purpose	Prevention
Topic	Cybercrime Digital, data and analytics
Organisation	Essex Police
Contact	Daemon Haywood
Email address	daemon.haywood@essex.police.uk
Region	Eastern
Partners	Police Business and commerce Voluntary/not for profit organisation
Stage of implementation	The practice is implemented.

Key details

Start date	November 2022
Scale of initiative	Local
Target group	Adults Children and young people Families General public

Aim

The aims were to:

- promote understanding of online safety measures among children, young people, and their families to help protect against cybercrime
- increase police interaction with the public

Intended outcome

A reduction in the number of children, young persons and parents becoming victims of internet-based crime including fraud, child abuse, and blackmail.

Description

The COVID-19 pandemic led to an increase in online crime, which prompted the force to create an initiative aimed at helping children and families protect themselves. The initial idea took inspiration from retailers who placed flyers or advertising leaflets in shopping bags.

To help inform individuals around how to protect themselves against online crime, especially children, the force created a card the size of a debit card which had the name 'Sort your settings - and stay safe online', with a QR code. When scanned, the QR code on the card took the user to a bespoke Essex Police web page. The card was designed to be simple to read and easy for a retailer to put into a customer's bag. It is another tool to help keep children and their families safer

in the online world.

The web page was created with support from the media, graphics and business crime departments. It is hosted on the force's Single Online Home public-facing web page.

The page provides advice on how to protect yourself from the main types of online harm. This includes explaining how to update security and privacy settings and how parents can 'sort your settings' to keep their children safer.

The team tried to cover the most popular devices such as online gaming devices, smart phones, and social media. The information is predominantly aimed at helping children stay safe but can also benefit adults. To create this web page, the team researched content related to online harms that was available nationally.

About 1,000 cards were printed at a cost of £0.10 per card. The project acquired funding through the force media department.

The force launched the 'sort your settings' cards during the Black Friday and Christmas period because of the increase in sales of internet-enabled devices, such as smart phones and games consoles. They approached a local branch of a national gaming store that sold internet-enabled devices and the manager agreed to promote and distribute the cards.

'Sort your settings' cards were given to customers who purchased internet-enabled devices, along with their receipt, at a promotional event in December 2022, supported by police and the Children's Society.

Over the first five-week period, it was estimated that approximately a third of the cards that were printed were handed out. The initial trial saw over 1,700 individuals visit the web page in the first few weeks, approximately 17% of people who had received a QR code card. Further stores were approached across the county to see if they would be willing to distribute the cards.

Since 2022, the process has been repeated every Black Friday and Christmas period. Approximately 31 stores are involved, including the local:

- Curry's
- Argos

- O2
- Three Mobile
- EE/BT
- Vodafone
- Smyths
- CEX

The bespoke web page is reviewed every year to include additional types of online threat, such as information about artificial intelligence.

Overall impact

As the website received 1,700 visits in the first few weeks, the force decided to expand the operation beyond the trial.

The force has received positive feedback from the stores distributing the 'sort your settings' cards. Parents and children have reported to stores that the page was very informative and helpful, as they did not know previously how to set privacy settings.

Example of positive feedback from a store:

'Our customers see the information as really useful, often taking additional cards to share with their family. The sort your settings cards have prompted conversations between us and customers on safety settings they had no idea were in existence. Then there are the age-restricted games, we can point out the guidance so that the parents purchasing for their children can make informed decisions.'

Learning

Some of the stores used were part of a national chain (CEX, Game Digital, Smyths). Despite this, stores must be approached individually to support the initiative, as it is often the responsibility of local store managers to provide approval.

Officers had to approach stores directly in person to explain the aims of the initiative and what would be required by staff, which can be time consuming. Distribution of printed cards was also done personally by officers.

Research was required around consoles, smart phones and social media to ensure what was being added to the webpages was accurate. This information must be reviewed periodically to maintain accuracy, which the force does annually.

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