

**Before The Commission On Child Online Protection (COPA) Hearing III
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Panel Five: New Technology and the Future
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Topic: The Wireless Internet and Its Impact

Today the Internet and wired Web are available to anyone with a computer and a modem or high-speed connection to the Internet.

But the Internet is also gearing up to provide content over the wireless networks as well. In Japan, for example, NTTDoCoMo offers a service called iMODE, which provides Internet content to users of wireless phones. This service was first launched in March of 1999 and by the end of June of this year has signed up over 8 million users.

Of the installed base roughly 45% of these users are teenagers who use the system to communicate with each other using short messages, play interactive games, and access the Internet to seek out information.

Many wireless networks in the United States have also started offering wireless Internet access. AT&T, Verizon, SprintPCS, and others now offer wireless phones equipped with a web browser. The Internet on these phones, today, is converted to a menu driven access system.

Web sites must be reprogrammed to provide wireless access, or must contract with companies who provide this service. Today the majority of wireless web users are interested in obtaining information on travel arrangements, their calendar, phone book and other related information. However the wireless carriers are targeting the consumer and youth populations because of the explosive growth that is seen in these sectors.

There is nothing in place today to preclude sites, which provide objectionable materials to add wireless capabilities to these sites. They would not be able to send graphical images today, but they could certainly repurpose their sites to provide text-based content to wireless phones.

The result of wireless access to the web today, and more importantly in the future would permit anyone equipped with a wireless phone or handheld device to access content from anywhere within a networks coverage. This will make adult supervision almost impossible. At the present time most wireless carriers are limiting the types of sites that can be accessed from wireless phones—this is

NOT being done to preclude objectionable sites but rather to insure that the wireless carriers receive a revenue stream from the sites that they enable.

In the near future (next year) this type of access limitations will disappear and users will be able to access virtually any web site from a wireless device.

As can be seen from the attachment—a listing of wireless enabled sites from Cellmania.com—so far the wireless community is being driven by business and other applications—however, as the number of wireless Internet users grow—and that number starts to include the youth population—it is my belief that those who provide sexually explicit materials will find wireless a new channel of distribution for its products.

The Future

It is not going to be possible to appeal to the wireless carriers to limit the web sites that can be visited from wireless devices. Just as today a person can enter in any site by name or number, the wireless community will provide the same ubiquitous access to the Internet.

One of the big drivers for wireless technology will be the use of these devices for instant messaging. This means that, just as AOL, Yahoo and others provide the capability to communicate instantly with anyone signed onto the site, so too will

wireless users be able to communicate with their friends or answer email from anyone no matter where they are. This, again, will make it more difficult for adults to supervise Internet activities by youth and predators will be able to send and receive email and instant messages to a wirelessly equipped child at will.

Good News

There is, however, some good news that comes along with wireless technology deployment and the Internet. The Federal Government has mandated that wireless carriers provide a way to determine the location of a wireless phone—this mandate—called E911 was designed so that public safety emergency centers would know exactly where a phone is when a call for assistance is made.

Both the Internet and the Wireless community are planning to take advantage of this technology to provide location based services—that is, services that would permit you to query an Internet site and receive responses back to your wireless device that provided restaurant, theatre, and store information based on their proximity to your location.

An added advantage of this technology will be the ability to be able to determine where a person is located. If a child were carrying a location device a parent could see their location with access to the Internet on a map. Further, these

devices will include the ability to sound an alarm should the child be in any danger. There are a number of issues yet to be addressed regarding the technological aspects and the privacy rights of location based wireless services, but within the next two years we will start to see devices that offer these capabilities.

In addition, as wireless technology becomes cheaper and more of the youth market adopts the use of wireless devices, they will be able to call for assistance if they feel that they are in a situation they find to be of concern to them.

Ultimately we will live in a world where voice and data access to the Internet will be available to anyone with a wireless phone, PDA, or other mobile device. We will, within a year or so, be able to take a digital photograph and transmit it instantly to the Internet and to others equipped with a wireless device. And we will be able to track the location of a person who has granted us permission to do so.

When the third generation of wireless networks is in place in three or four years, the wireless Internet will not seem much different than the wire Internet of today, and it will be fraught with exactly the same problems. Therefore, any safe guards that can be put into place for the wired Internet will also work for the wireless Internet, and the wireless Internet will also be able to provide us with the ability to locate our children and make sure that they are where they are supposed to be.

Submitted by:

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Attachment: Mobile Internet Listing