



UK MOBILE OPERATORS ANNOUNCE JOINT CODE OF PRACTICE FOR NEW FORMS OF CONTENT

Monday 19TH January. London. The UK mobile phone operators announced a joint code of practice for the self-regulation of new forms of content on mobile phones. Orange, O2, T-Mobile, Virgin Mobile, Vodafone and 3, have all signed up to the code designed to facilitate the responsible use of new mobile phone services whilst safeguarding children from unsuitable content on their mobile phones.

As mobile technology advances, phones are being developed with enhanced features, such as colour screens, video and picture messaging and Internet browsers, allowing access to an increasing variety of services. The vast majority of commercial content is suitable for customers of all ages. However, some of the new services may contain content of an adult nature, which is only suitable for customers who are over 18 years of age.

Mobile operators recognise that this may cause some concern to parents whose children have mobile phones. The UK mobile operators have therefore worked together over several months to develop the Code of Practice which is intended to protect children and give parents and carers:

- confidence to understand new mobile devices
- the power to influence the type of content that their children can access
- the knowledge to show their children how to use new services responsibly

It also gives assurances to all customers that the mobile operators will combat illegal, bulk and nuisance communications.

The main points of the Code are:

- All commercial content unsuitable for customers under 18 will be classified “18”. Such content will not be made available to customers until the networks, through a process of age verification, are satisfied that he or she is at least 18.
- The classification framework will be in line with comparable standards in other media and will be created by a body that is independent of the mobile operators
- Chat rooms made available to customers under 18 will be moderated (ie monitored to guard against inappropriate use)
- Parents and carers will be able to apply filters to the mobile operator’s Internet access service so that the Internet content thus accessible is restricted
- Mobile operators will work with law enforcement agencies to deal with the reporting of content that may break the criminal law
- Mobile operators will also combat bulk and nuisance communications
- Mobile operators will provide advice to customers on the nature and use of new mobile devices and services and support other relevant media literacy activities designed to improve the knowledge of consumers.

Hamish MacLeod, who co-ordinated the process on behalf of the operators, said: "Over the past 12 months, the mobile phone industry has been working together to agree on a framework that will govern how content is distributed, developed and accessed by the industry and customers alike.

The industry is aware of parental concerns and, through this code, addresses those concerns in a responsible and timely manner."

MP Stephen Timms, Communications Minister, said: "This Code of Practice is an excellent example of the responsible self regulation we are keen to encourage among the mobile operators to address issues relating to new types of content now available on mobile handsets. We believe this approach best meets the needs and expectations of consumers.

"New technology introduces significant benefits and opportunities, but it can also bring new concerns and we must ensure that safeguards are in place to protect those vulnerable, such as children."

The Code covers content such as visual, online gambling, mobile gaming, chat rooms and Internet access. It does not cover traditional premium rate voice and SMS (texting) services, which will continue to be regulated under the ICSTIS Code of Practice and nor does it cover peer to peer communications.