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Protecting consumers online

ANEC is announcing the results of a study on consumer demands for Internet filtering tools. The purpose of this ANEC study was to investigate to what extent unsolicited commercial communication (Spam) and Internet content filters should be testable and comparable in order to help consumers with their choice. The report, carried out by Intertek Research and Performance Testing, UK, identified performance standards as being the most helpful way of ensuring product transparency and to help with consumers' choice.

Seven countries (Austria; Belgium; Czech Republic; Italy; Poland; Sweden and UK) were investigated by interviewing consumer associations and concerned stakeholders:

The following issues were identified:

- Tests carried out by consumer associations show that consumers' requirements (ease of use, clear labelling, reliability, security).are not met.
- Internet filters product choice is limited in Europe;
- Filters should be Internet Service Providers (ISP) based rather than installed on the consumer's computer;
- Balance between privacy rights of children and parental control should be taken into account;
- Cultural bias should be taken into account (language, different laws and habits);

The ANEC study notes that protection of children is of prime concern but consideration for the special requirements of all users should be taken into account (eg: ease of use, clarity of instructions, presentation of scope, ability to report filtering failures, etc). "These parameters would need to be quantified in some way to allow repeatable measurement of assessment to be made" said Gottlobe Fabisch, ANEC Secretary General, "Another issue that needs to be addressed is the inclusion of different technologies such as SPAM filtering and mobile Internet access as they pose quite different problems compared to basic web filtering".

With the study, ANEC aims to call for relevant standardisation work on setting minimum performance criteria and measuring methods of Internet filtering tools to help consumers choose the best for their needs.

ANEC in brief

ANEC is the European consumer voice in standardisation, representing and defending consumer interests in the process of standardisation and certification. ANEC was set up in 1995 as an international non-profit association and represents consumer organisations from the EU Member States and EFTA countries. ANEC is funded by the European Commission and EFTA, while national consumer organisations contribute in kind. Its Secretariat is based in Brussels.

More information on the study: www.anec.org

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