

Anti-porn activist calls for legislation on cell-phones

Telus customer loses suit, continues battle

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SURREY, BC—Five months ago, Christian businessman Gordon Keast would never have predicted that his outrage over Telus offering online “adult content” to cellphone subscribers like himself would turn him into an anti-pornography activist.

“It was all about me: ‘How could they do that to my phone?’” he says. “To be honest, I had absolutely no idea that there was this side to their business—or Bell’s business, or any of them. I didn’t know...But now that I know, it’s hard to just ignore it.”

Keast was especially disturbed that children with a web-enhanced cellphone could be viewing and sharing porn.

He responded by suing Telus, Canada’s second-largest telecommunications company, for \$300 in damages in small claims court—a suit he refused to drop even after a national public outcry forced Telus to hastily abandon its new service.

But by mid-May, after a judge had told him he had no hope of winning his case, Keast decided it was time to move on.

“I accomplished what I set out to do in February,” he says. “Telus stopped what they were doing, and I was a little part of that...Now is there anything else we can do?”



With cellphones regulated in Europe and not in Canada, Gord Keast is asking why.

“There are laws about the distribution of pornography to children and underage minors,” he adds. “So I may be naïve, but why is it being allowed on cell-phones?”

Keast began partnering with Beyond Borders, a Winnipeg-based children’s rights group. “We’re delighted to have somebody really inform us [on this issue],” says president Roz Prober. “We would be negligent if we allowed it to continue.”

According to Keast, there are upwards of 250 million pages of pornography on the internet as well as possibly millions of mostly unblocked child porn sites—all accessible by the estimated 45 per cent of North American teens who now have cell-phones.

But what is not yet clear to either Keast or Prober is how to correct the problem in a way that would not run afoul of charter rights on freedom of expression, for example.

For its part, Canada’s internet industry believes it is addressing the issue. About 10 months ago, a committee representing more than two dozen wireless service providers began work on guidelines for rating all internet content.

“It’s a complicated effort,” says Marc Choma, spokesman for the Canadian Wireless Telecommunications Association, who also points out parents are not powerless to control their children’s cell-phone usage.

“If you did not want to have your mobile browser activated on your cell phone, you don’t have

to,” he says. “The carriers have a system as well where you can...choose what services and even when someone is allowed to make calls or access particular services.”

Prober counters that placing such a heavy onus on parents is “unfortunately irresponsible.”

“We have to acknowledge,” she says, “that there’s all sorts of parents—parents who are absolutely wonderful but who on the technological side just aren’t up to speed on child protection, to parents who are just negligent.”

Prober believes the only solution is federal legislation in which “the bar [protecting children from pornography] is set very high.”

A lawyer with Beyond Borders is currently reviewing a bill now before the United States

Senate—*Cyber Safety For Kids Act*—to see if it could be adapted to Canada.

It would require website operators to flag pages containing material that could harm children, and empower authorities to ensure adult sites have secure log-ins, age-identification requirements and “clean” home pages. Violators would be subject to fines.

Several previous attempts by U.S. lawmakers to control online pornography have all been struck down in court. This latest attempt as well, Keast admits, “may be doomed to failure, but at least these politicians are looking for solutions.”

“If we just stand and do nothing, nothing gets better.”

Letters

Re: Salvation Army celebrates 125 years

I was pleased to see the article on the front page of the June edition of the Ontario Christian Week about the 125 year celebrations. I was, however, a little surprised at the emphasis of the Army’s Social Services with no recognition of the 340 corps (churches) and outposts throughout Canada with nearly 15,000 similar churches and churchplants throughout the world. We are an evangelical church first preaching the Word of God like other churches and the social work is only a result of the love that God has put in our hearts to meet a need of the less fortunate.

I am very thankful for the social services done by the Army but without the ministry of the corps there would be no social services since the every officer becomes a soldier in a corps before training as officers. I am sure you are aware of this but many who read your paper only think of us as feeding the poor or caring for the addicts. The

secular publications overlook the spiritual work of the Army but I thought that a Christian publication such as yours would place some emphasis this before the social services.

May God continue to bless your work.

A. Gerald McInnes
Major

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Web tool helps churches work together

RICHMOND HILL, ON—Martin Francis is bringing skills honed in the corporate world to fulfill his desire to see churches cooperate more effectively.

The result is Ecclesiact, a website management system two years in development full of features to assist churches and ministry organizations. “My passion is to get Christians working together,” he says. “This is designed to help them collaborate on mission and outreach.” The name is taken from “ecclesia,” meaning “church” in Greek.

The system makes it easy for churches to revise their own content without professional help, he explains. It comes with an event registration system, protected member directories and a daily Bible verse. It accepts online donations. And it has several options that enable participating churches to share information about their activities.

“This is perfect for helping people coordinate local events,” he says. And the possibilities are even larger. “I envision a half-dozen churches in a locality not having to staff their offices every day, but to share things like phone answering and event updates. Not every congregation has to have the whole range of gifts.”

Churches (e.g. www.westmountparkchurch.org) are starting to use the “tool” Francis describes as “a full-featured commercial quality system being offered to churches for a fraction of its development

costs.”

And the bonus is that “it demonstrates to the wider community that Christians are working together.” Multi-church activities such as Billy Graham campaigns and the Alpha program are very important aspects of building Christian community, says Francis.

“Nothing succeeds without others. I want to bring the ability to work together into churches. This is just one tool.”

“Christians need to wake up to their responsibility to spread the gospel. And we need to do that together,” he says. “We need to make the gospel relevant. We need to be where people are. We need to show them that we’re working together.”

“Collaborative systems like Facebook are leading the way. But Christians should be at the forefront of such things,” he insists. “The declining influence of churches in Canada is a result of our apparent inability to work together.”

Francis highlights a favorite Bible verse to describe how his faith matters to the work he does. “Whatever your task, put yourselves into it, as done for the Lord” (Colossians 3:23). “That’s how I do my programming. I try to go the extra mile. And because it’s for ministry, there’s double merit.”

“If I do a good job, then churches will be able to do their job better.”