

## **IAB Chairwoman's Preface**

The proliferation of images of child sex abuse on the Internet is a global problem and a major challenge for all of us involved in the fight to protect our children in the rapidly changing world of on-line technologies. As paedophiles develop ever more complex and sophisticated methods of disseminating their illegal material, we must be ever more resourceful and determined.



While there is some way to go before use of the Internet is fully embedded in Irish society, there is little doubt that already it has been a major contributor to the development of our economy. It is also a certainty that our children are growing up in a world where they will be at a disadvantage if they do not acquire the skills to use all the new technologies as they come on stream. There is ample evidence to suggest that even very young students are using the Internet as a learning tool and it is not fanciful to suggest that a laptop will soon replace some of those heavy books in their school bags.

Thanks to the many research initiatives and awareness programmes the “downside” issues of Internet use have been highlighted and publicised. Governments, industry and users have all come together in an attempt to combat the problem with some success, but the fight must go on. In particular the illegal use of the Internet by paedophiles continues to challenge the best efforts of all concerned to eradicate this heinous crime. The exchange of images of children being sexually abused continues to proliferate and in some instances have become even more extreme.

This is a global problem that does not respect national boundaries and requires a global response. The Hotline in Ireland, together with its international counterparts coordinated through the INHOPE network, acts as the early warning system for the public to draw attention to illegal content on the Internet. The Hotline fulfils this essential role by rapidly

delivering qualified detail of illegal content to police authorities in the source country so that action may be taken against the perpetrators.

As Chairwoman of the Government appointed Internet Advisory Board, I am consistently impressed with the professionalism and dedication of the ISPAI www.hotline.ie staff in dealing with this unsavoury content and I commend those members of the industry who continue to support the work of the Hotline. I appeal to the public to use the Hotline and to become more aware of the damage being done to our society by paedophiles.

On behalf of the members of the Internet Advisory Board, I would like to take this opportunity to thank Paul Durrant, General Manager of the www.hotline and his staff for their professionalism and dedication. Their work continues to make the Internet a safer place for all our citizens, particularly our children.

**AUDREY CONLON**

Chairwoman  
Internet Advisory Board  
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform  
Dublin  
February 2008

## **ISPAAI Introduction to 5<sup>th</sup> Report**

I am pleased to introduce the 5<sup>th</sup> report of the www.hotline.ie service, as it presents the work which has been quietly but persistently carried out over the last year to fight illegal content on the Internet with the intention of making it a safer environment for all. This is paid for by contributions from the responsible members of the ISP industry that make up the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland (ISPAAI).



As discussed in the report, Internet usage in Ireland has grown phenomenally over the last couple of years. It is now a public space that is used by people from all walks of life for all manner of purposes, from buying the groceries to keeping in touch with friends whether they live around the corner or on the far side of the Earth. It has especially become a favourite of children who learn to use it proficiently through fun and entertainment yet benefit from it as a rich source of information for schoolwork. It is vital that parents and teachers can feel comfortable about encouraging children to use the Internet as its use has become a life skill they will need for their future.

Unfortunately, criminals follow the trends of society and have moved online too. Of late the news media have increasingly reported the "new phenomena" of financial scams, online paedophile approaches to children and court cases where people were found to have downloaded child pornography from the Internet. It therefore surprises many people to discover that this was foreseen by Government and Industry and in fact the Hotline, set up to tackle these issues, has been in operation since November 1999.

It is very important that the industry that supplies the Internet service, while promoting all its positive uses and benefits, continues to contribute to deterring its unlawful use. I look forward to celebrating the Hotline's 10<sup>th</sup> anniversary next year with many more of the new Internet Service Providers that have sprung up around the country joining the 22 who were members in 2007.

I would like to express my sincere appreciation of the Hotline Analysts, both in www.hotline.ie and in other INHOPE member Hotlines around the world, who are exposed every day to the most harrowing material which they trace and notify to law enforcement in the appropriate jurisdiction. Without their resilience and dedication the Internet would contain considerably more illegal content than the miniscule proportion currently estimated to exist.

I would like to thank Brian Lenihan T.D., Minister of Justice, Equality and Law Reform who has been unfaltering in his support of the Hotline over the reporting period. Also my thanks go to An Garda Síochána who back the Hotline concept and who relay the reports regarding illegal content to countries where no INHOPE Hotline exists. I must also mention the Members of the Internet Advisory Board, the European Commission's Safer Internet Programme and particularly the member companies of the ISPAl whose continued support has enabled www.hotline.ie to work successfully throughout 2007.

**PAUL DURRANT**  
General Manager  
ISPAl www.hotline.ie Service  
February 2008

## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

### **Background**

This is the fifth major report of the www.hotline.ie service (The Hotline) since its establishment in November 1999. The report examines activities of the Hotline during 2007, provides analysis of the statistics collected, compares trends with previous reporting periods and offers some observations.

The Hotline is a service run by the Internet Service Providers Association of Ireland (ISPAI) to combat illegal content, particularly child pornography, on the Internet. Its operation relies on the public to submit reports about content they have encountered on the Internet which they suspect may be illegal.

The objective is to have a rapid response system to remove from public access illegal content found to be hosted on, or being distributed from, ISPAI members' Internet facilities. It also serves to notify An Garda Síochána in such an eventuality, so they may initiate investigations. The Hotline's existence is also intended as a deterrent to illegal use and to provide a safer Internet environment for all who use it, particularly children.

### **International dimension**

Due to the global nature of the Internet, national action alone would be largely ineffective. The Hotline cooperates through an international network of partner Hotlines (INHOPE) which are recognised by their governments and operate to best practices developed and appraised collectively by the INHOPE. Members act against the hosting and distribution of child pornography on the Internet irrespective of the originating jurisdiction. Through the INHOPE network, details of illegal content discovered by a Hotline in one member country can be swiftly

forwarded for action to the Hotline in another INHOPE member jurisdiction. In 2007, the INHOPE network grew to 30 member Hotlines.

### **Reporting levels**

In the 12 month period from 1<sup>st</sup> January 2007 to 31<sup>st</sup> December 2007 the Hotline processed 2,590 reports. This is a decrease of 3.25% on the 2,677 processed in 2006.

The average number of reports processed per month during 2007 was 216 per month compared to 223 per month in 2006.

A comparison of ComReg's "Quarterly Key Data Report, March 2008 (08/22)" with that of the previous year (07/17R) shows that total Internet access subscriptions rose from 1,035,800 at the end of 2006 to 1,213,100 in December 2007. At the end of 2007, approximately 73% of subscriptions were broadband.

Given the increase in numbers using the Internet the fall in public reporting, although slight, is of concern. The Hotline has responded by increasing visibility, through events and media opportunities, being referenced in the "Get With IT" Internet safety publications of the Internet Advisory Board and by changing the online reporting component of the website to simplify the reporting task for the public.

### **Suspicious reported**

Details of all reports received by the Hotline are transferred to a database and the complaint is categorised. Suspected child pornography remains the top reason for report submissions. It was cited or implied in 2,044 reports, which represents 79% of all reports. This is the same percentage as last year.

The Hotline accepts reports of other types of illegal content, the other 21% of reports comprised: 3% queries, 4% computer related (complaints of

financial scams, viruses or trojan attacks, denial of service, hacking and similar), 2% racist material or incitement to violence, and 12% other (where insufficient information was given to allow the Hotline to categorise the suspicion).

### **Assessment process**

When processing a report, every activity carried out by the Hotline Analyst, along with their findings and resulting actions, is recorded in the database. Initially the Analyst tries to access the reported content. In 157 cases the reports were either queries or matters outside the Hotline remit where no content access attempt was undertaken. In a further 202 cases (mainly spam advertising of potentially illegal content, or photo sharing sites) insufficient detail was provided by the reporter to allow the Analyst find the content. 44 sites had already been removed by the ISP by the time the Analysts tried to access them.

In 2007, 395 cases were recorded where the content was either not found or not accessible compared to 397 cases 2006.

In 1,792 cases content was accessible and entered the assessment process. In these cases the Analyst tries to determine whether or not the content presented breaks relevant Irish law. In cases of suspected child pornography, this is decided using the criteria given in the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act (1998). Where the content is assessed as probably illegal, a reference to the material and a concise description of the material are noted in the database.

### **Determinations**

In 2007, 828 reports were determined as referring to illegal content. 718 of these referred to content determined by the Hotline to be probably illegal child pornography under the 1998 Act. In 2006, that number was 423 from a total of 429 reports assessed as referring to illegal content.

This shows that despite a 3.25% decrease in overall reporting, the number of child pornography determinations rose by 301 reports between 2006 and 2007. When viewed in percentage terms this represents an increase from 15.8% of all reports in 2006 to 28% of all reports made in 2007.

It is extremely important to note that in 2007, not a single report that was confirmed as being illegal child pornography was found to be either hosted in, or distributed from, Ireland. This has been the case since the establishment of the Hotline and is a record of which this country should be very proud.

There were 5 confirmed reports of activities where a person was attempting to lure a child into meeting for sexual purposes and these reports were forwarded to the appropriate channel for action. There was 1 case regarding tourism to engage in sex with children. All of these reports referred to content that originated outside Ireland.

In the remaining 104 cases of illegal content, 10 referred to incitement to racial hatred or violence directed at an individual, 7 were computer related hacking or spreading viruses and 87 were financial scams.

The remaining 964 cases were found to be not illegal. In 35 cases images of children were reported but determined to be outside the definition of child pornography given in the 1998 Act.

Just under 16% of all reports (407) proved to be adult pornography which is not specifically illegal and no further action was taken by the Hotline. A further 522 reports (just over 20%) were assessed as "Other/Not Illegal".

The Hotline does not retain any illegal content that may be cached or downloaded in the assessment process. Any such material is securely deleted after the report is closed.

### **Resulting action**

Having determined reported content to be illegal, the Hotline Analyst then attempts to trace the source country and network so the report can be forwarded to the appropriate authorities. After elimination of duplicate reports, there were 684 unique illegal reports in 2007 compared to 421 in 2006, representing an increase of 62% on 2006.

In 21 cases, despite best efforts, the origin of the content was determined to be outside Ireland but the exact origin could not be located with any confidence. In all remaining cases the apparent source was traced.

Where the source country has an INHOPE member Hotline, details of the reported content are forwarded to that Hotline for action in that jurisdiction. In the period 393 reports were forwarded to other INHOPE hotlines.

If the origin is traced to a country where an INHOPE member Hotline does not exist, details of the reported content are forwarded to a designated contact in An Garda Síochána headquarters. In the period 250 reports were forwarded to An Garda Síochána. The reports are then forwarded to Interpol where they can be transmitted to law enforcement in the country where the content appears to be located.

There was one case of a financial scam attempt that was distributed from Ireland. The details were provided to An Garda Síochána.

It should be noted that details of the person/s who first reported the material to Hotline.ie are never revealed in any reports forwarded to other Hotlines or to the Gardaí.

### **Relationship with Law Enforcement**

It must be emphasised that only An Garda Síochána fulfil the role of law enforcement in the State. The Hotline has support from Government and the Gardaí only to accept reports of content that is hosted or distributed on

Internet services. It acts as a filter to ensure that law enforcement receives qualified reports that actually pertain to their jurisdiction. It is the Gardaí who conduct any criminal investigations of the perpetrators behind this illegal content. Once the Hotline has passed its content assessment and the technical information it has gathered on the Internet to law enforcement, the Hotline's role is completed. The Hotline very much appreciates the support it has received from An Garda Síochána in the period who have promoted the Hotline on their website and in the Garda pages of the national telephone directories.

### **Support from Industry**

The ISPAI is supported by self-regulating members of the Internet industry. It is important that new entrants to the Irish Internet hosting and access market play their part to support the Hotline and thereby contribute to the international efforts to combat the proliferation of illegal Internet content.

In 2007 the ISPAI had 22 members who support the Hotline. These were: Eircom, BT Ireland, O2, Vodafone, Meteor, HEAnet, Irish Broadband, UPC (Chorus/NTL), UTV-internet, Irish Domains, Verizon Business, Perlico, Magnet, Blacknight, Novara, MyHost, Strencom, EuroKom, Protocol Internet, Clearwire, ICE Comms and Bitbuzz.

### **Conclusions**

Ireland's excellent record continues. In 2007 the Hotline did not receive a single report that referred to illegal child pornography that was found to be located in Ireland. All cases proved to be hosted or distributed from outside the jurisdiction. This is corroborated by the fact that none of the other 29 INHOPE member hotlines around the world notified us of any content reported to them that was traced to Ireland.

The massive increase in Internet usage, not just in Ireland but throughout the world, brings all sections of society to the Internet. Thus cyberspace

increasingly contains not just the decent law abiding members of society but also those with disreputable and evil intentions. Therefore there is no room for complacency, particularly as the techniques used by criminals are growing in sophistication. It is important that through cooperation of government, Gardaí and industry, we continue to implement and evolve measures that will dissuade people from using Irish Internet facilities for illegal purposes. The Hotline is central to this and provides a means to allow swift and effective action.

The Internet is a global network where content accessible to Irish Internet users can originate anywhere in the world. Measures taken in Ireland alone are insufficient. International cooperation is required to have effective action across boundaries.

The Hotline service relies on the public to report suspected illegal content, especially to support the fight against child pornography, on the Internet. The Internet is so vast that neither ISPs nor law enforcement can be expected to know about illegal content on the Internet unless it is brought to their attention.

## **ANALYSIS INTRODUCTION**

### **Numbers of reports received**

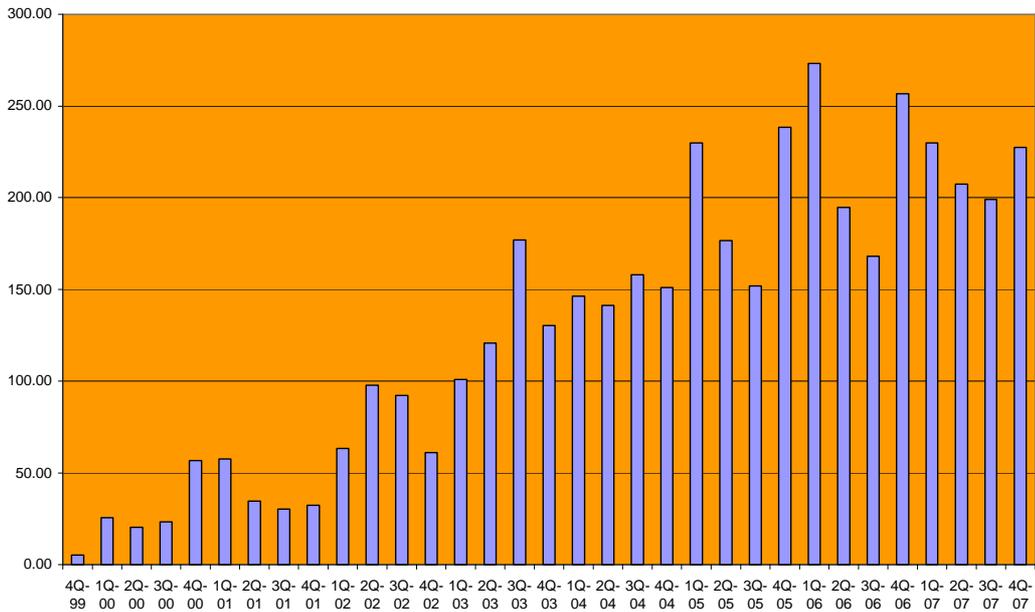
Unfortunately there is a small minority who will misuse the Internet. The Hotline is a means whereby the majority of users can draw attention to this misuse and have something done about it.

In the period from 1st January 2007 to 31st December 2007 the Hotline processed 2,590 such reports. This is a decrease of 3.25% on the 2,677 processed in 2006.

The Hotline has now dealt with some 12,836 reports since it was established in November 1999.

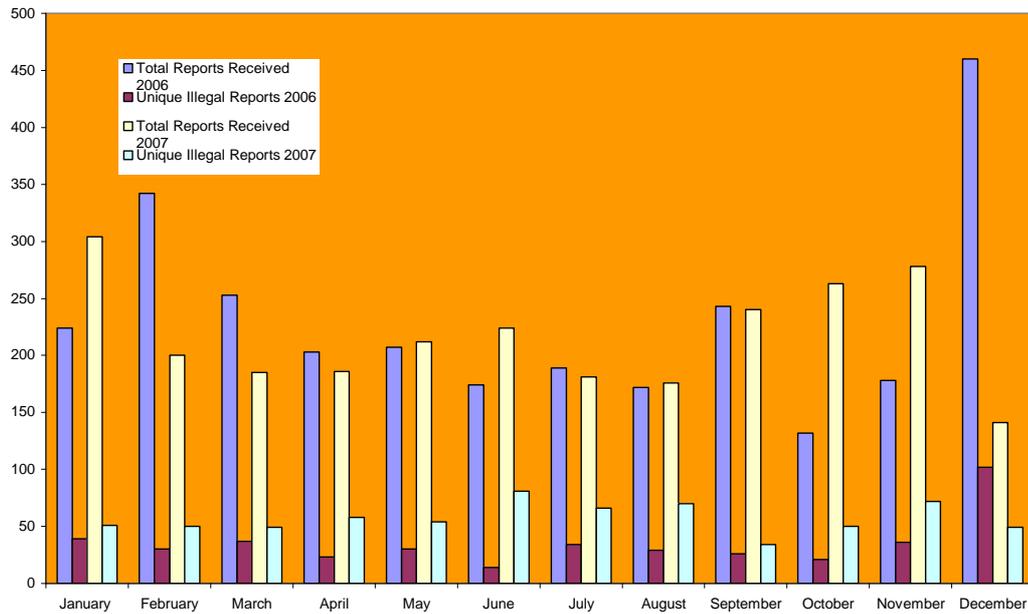
The reporting rate tends to be highly variable with some months being exceptionally high while others are relatively low. To smooth this erratic data in to a more understandable form, the number of reports received per month is averaged for each quarter year. This is presented in the graph below.

*Average Monthly Reporting Level by Quarter Year*



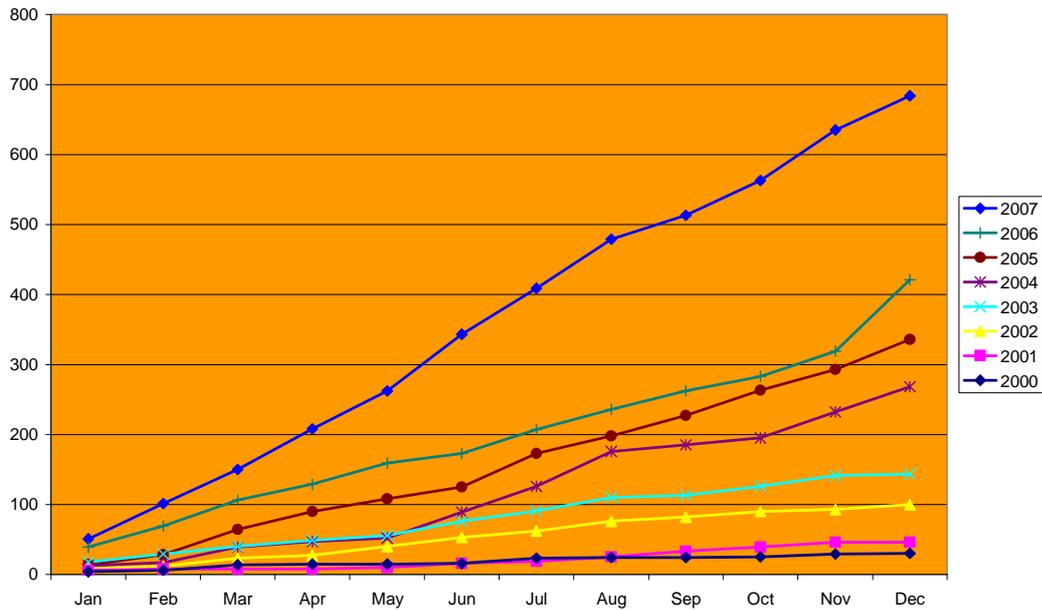
The average number of reports received per month over 2007 was 216 per month compared to 223 per month in 2006. Whilst this slight decrease is of concern and the Hotline will continue to promote greater usage, these figures do conceal the fact that a greater proportion of reports received in 2007 were determined to be of illegal content when compared with 2006. For example in the first quarter of 2006 Hotline received 819 reports of which 106, or 12.9%, were found to be illegal. In the same period for 2007, although Hotline received only 686 reports, of those 146, or 21.3% were found to be illegal. This trend continues through the whole year as the graph below demonstrates.

### Total Reports and Illegal Component, Comparing 2007 To 2006



Of the 828 reports determined to be illegal by Hotline in 2007, 718 of these were confirmed as child pornography or other illegal child content. This proportion is a massive increase on previous years as the graph below demonstrates. It is clear that in every single year since its inception Hotline.ie has received proportionately more reports of confirmed child pornography and other illegal child content.

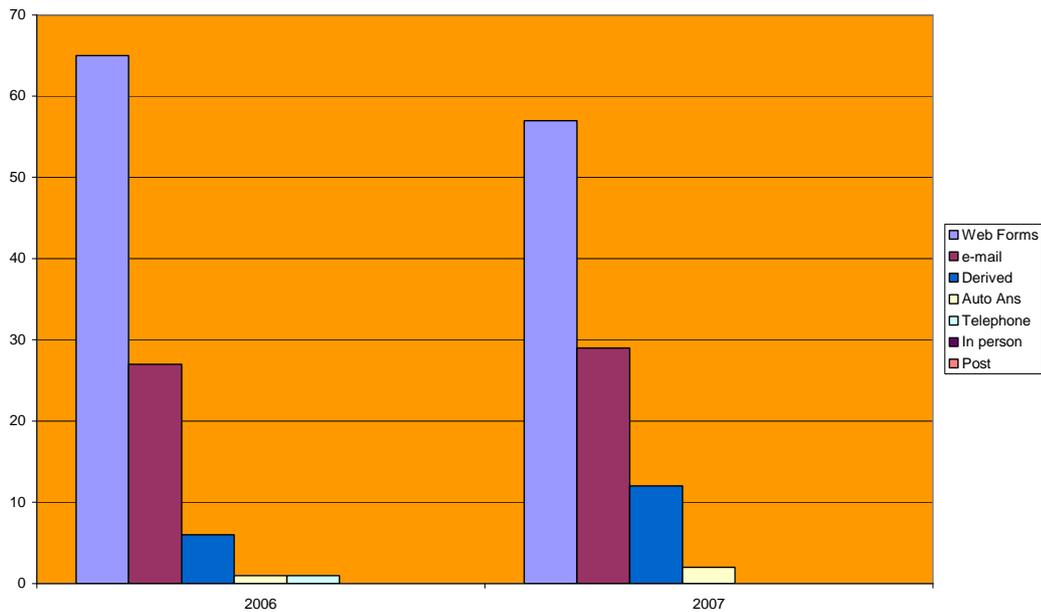
### Unique Illegal Reports Received Per Year



### Method of Reporting Used By the Public

The Hotline is not permitted to undertake any pre-emptive searching for illegal content on the Internet. It can only assess material reported by the public. Therefore report numbers represent the reaction of the public to material they have encountered when using various Internet services or which was sent to them as e-mail.

The graph below shows how people reported to the Hotline. The Hotline prefers to receive reports through the report forms provided on the [www.hotline.ie](http://www.hotline.ie) website. Due to the prompts for relevant technical details required, reports received by this method tend to be of superior quality. It also permits the Hotline Analysts to process reports more efficiently.



The graph also shows derived reports. These are reports generated by the Hotline when a source reported by a member of the public contains links to another Internet location which is assessed as also providing illegal content.

### **Reporting trends since establishment**

Until 2007 there had been a steady increase in the numbers of reports received by the Hotline. However, 2007 marked a change which taken in the light of Internet usage growth is of some concern. The Hotline management tries to ensure that the reporting facilities are such that members of the public encountering what they suspect may be illegal content can easily report it. This requires a combination of promoting visibility of the Hotline and keeping the reporting facility appropriate to a changing Internet environment. Below is a table showing the year on year growth in reports processed since establishment.

Year	2000*	2001	2002	2003	2004	2005	2006	2007
<b>Reports received</b>	394	465	943	1,587	1,790	2,390	2,677	2,590
<b>Year on year growth</b>	-	18%	103%	68%	13%	34%	12%	-3.25%
<b>Total Reports up to 31st December 2007</b>								12,836
* Includes 16 reports received in Nov./Dec. 1999								

A comparison of ComReg’s “Quarterly Key Data Reports” of March 2007 and March 2008 shows considerable growth in Internet subscriptions rising from 1,035,800 subscribers in 2006 to 1,213,100 in 2007. While this 17% increase is very significant, it is important to note that of the total subscriptions, broadband subscriptions in particular rose greatly from 517,300 (50% of all Internet access) to 886,200 (73% of all Internet access).

It is against this backdrop that the number of reports to the Hotline must be considered. Research from many sources has shown that each broadband connection is typically used for longer periods of time and by multiple users who access far greater volumes of data than users on a dial-up connection.

It could therefore be expected that reports from the public should have grown at a related rate so it is surprising that there has actually been a 3.25% decline. Comreg data would suggest that on pure statistical grounds reporting should not have levelled off. However, as will be demonstrated in the next section of this report, the suspicions of the Internet users who are reporting are increasingly being borne out by the Hotline.

There are a variety of reasons that could explain why the overall number of reports made to Hotline.ie has declined slightly in 2007. These could include:

1. Natural statistical variation (if reporting has reached a plateau).
2. Some new Internet users may not know where to report or what to do when they encounter something they suspect to be illegal.
3. Widespread advertising of illegal material may have declined meaning that users are not being confronted by it and so are not reporting.
4. Spam, which previously was quite often used by those advertising illegal material, is now so prevalent that users simply delete it and don't notice references to suspicious content even if it is present.
5. There appears to be growing sophistication of Internet users of what constitutes illegal content and there are relatively fewer reports of material that is not illegal.
6. There is a possibility that illegal content has migrated to areas of the Internet such as to UseNet, IRC and P2P which are more obscure to the average user than the World Wide Web.
7. If the above is the case there is also a possibility that users of these services are more reluctant to report than is the case with web-sites or spam.

Hotline management would like to believe that the persistence of the global agencies dealing with the issue is having an impact. There is evidence from law enforcement and INHOPE members that similar trends are being noted to varying degrees in other countries.

However, even if these trends are real and not temporary anomalies, there is no room for complacency. The effort to defeat illegal content and use of the Internet must continue unabated.

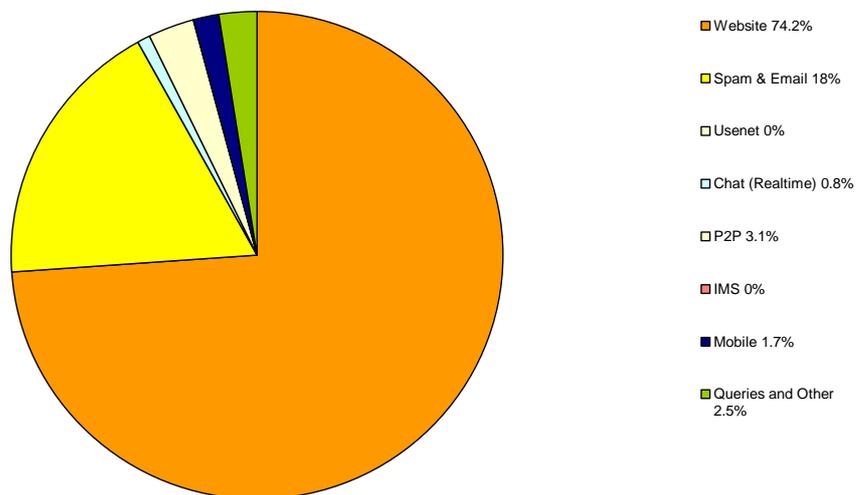
## INTERNET AND REPORTING SERVICES

### Internet Services

The Internet is a communications network of computers and whenever a user connects to the Internet their computer has a unique identifier on the Internet. The Internet hosts many different types of services, with the "World Wide Web" being just one of these. Peer to Peer (P2P), another service running over the Internet is increasing in popularity. P2P services are presenting a growing challenge for hotlines across the world because of the way they work. For the purposes of file sharing the service does not use a central server, every person's computer essentially becomes a server for the files they wish to offer.

The charts below show the Internet Services reported to the Hotline where reporters have encountered material they suspect to be illegal.

*Internet Services to Which Reports Referred: 2007*



The Hotline received 1912 reports in relation to websites, which represents an increase of 22% in comparison to 2006. At the same time the number of the reports about unsolicited email (or spam) decreased from 950 to 466, or 51%. This represents the continued downward trend in the reporting of spam which began in 2006.

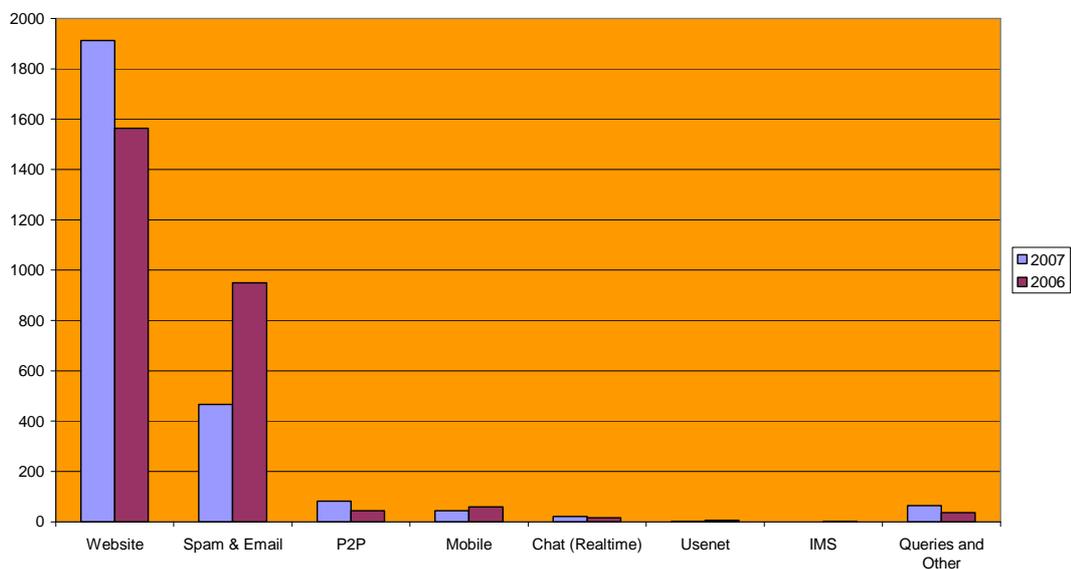
As in general the amount of spam is increasing, the Hotline believes that users are becoming exhausted by spam and using spam reduction services or simply doing bulk deletions without reading the subject lines as they did in the past. This may explain why the number of the reports received in relation to spam is decreasing. Another possible reason is that many newer users receiving a spam blatantly advertising child pornography for the first time may be deeply shocked and their immediate reaction could be to delete it to just get it off their computer. The Hotline continues to recommend that users should try to report it first, because it is only when the Hotline receives the information that something can be done.

Due to awareness campaigns by banks, ISPs, and Safer Internet Awareness Nodes, many users have more knowledge about “phishing” and other identity theft scams, where criminals try to fool online users to disclosing their personal information. Nevertheless, these remain prevalent and are becoming more sophisticated and some users are being caught. While representing a small proportion of reports made, the Hotline urges caution and advises users to check carefully any request to provide personal information. This can be done by a quick phone call to your bank or the online supplier that appears to be requesting the information.

As Peer to Peer services become more popular, one would expect more reports in relation to it, especially as finding files for download usually involves submitting a search. The number has risen by 84% but this actually only translates to an increase of 37 reports. Hotline analysts are slightly surprised that they do not receive far more reports regarding P2P services as even the most innocent of searches, one containing the word child for example, turns up an alarming number of results for very suspiciously titled files. It is possible that many users who encounter these sorts of files are concerned only with deleting them from their system as quickly as possible. Whilst we strongly recommend that users who come

across these sorts of files do not open them to see what they are, we urge them to report the incident to Hotline so that it can be investigated. Sadly, there are people who will give a file an illegal sounding title to a perfectly legal file in order to attract more attention to it. However, Hotline analysts have found that many of these files turn out to be some of the most severe forms of child pornography, which is why it is so important for people to report anything they find on a P2P service which seems suspicious.

### *Comparison between 2007 and 2006 of Reported Internet Services*



This graph strongly indicates that the fall in raw reports to the Hotline in 2007 is primarily due to the massive drop in spam being reported. There are probably a number of reasons combining to cause this change. These include more spam filters in place and user indifference. There is so much spam they are neither inclined to read it nor report it except in exceptional circumstances.

Reports made to the Hotline using the reporting forms on the Hotline.ie website are anonymous by default. The Hotline will only investigate the reported material and does not concern itself with what the reporter may or may not have downloaded. However, the ISPAI and Hotline do not

condone the infringement of copyright by using P2P services to share copyrighted artistic works without appropriate authorisation.

Hotline investigation of reports about P2P services are more difficult and time consuming than for World Wide Web content and spam. However, the possibility of conducting successful Hotline investigation of P2P reports can be achieved when all the relevant information is provided. That is, name of P2P service used, exact name of the file found, specific search terms used, the time and date when content was found and, if known the apparent IP address of the host.

Social Networking sites remain extremely popular in Ireland, especially amongst teenagers. Many queries received by the Hotline refer to concerns regarding activities around users individual profile pages or the abuse of an individual via their profile page on a social networking site. In many cases the content of the page itself is not illegal and therefore is outside of Hotline's remit meaning that there is no action that can be taken by the service. If the reporter has left contact details Hotline analysts will always reply with this information but often will also advise on possible steps that the reporter may wish to take or provide alternative points of contact for the concern (if any exist). Unfortunately, as social networking sites often resemble nothing so much as an enormous playground, there is not always anything that can be done.

Overall, the most popular sources reported to the [www.hotline.ie](http://www.hotline.ie) service remain websites and spam. It is crucial for the Hotline to have all the information possible so it may trace the origin of the illegal content. For this reason the Hotline requests that reports are submitted via the forms provided on our website [www.hotline.ie](http://www.hotline.ie), where form fields prompt the reporter for the required information and explanatory help is provided.

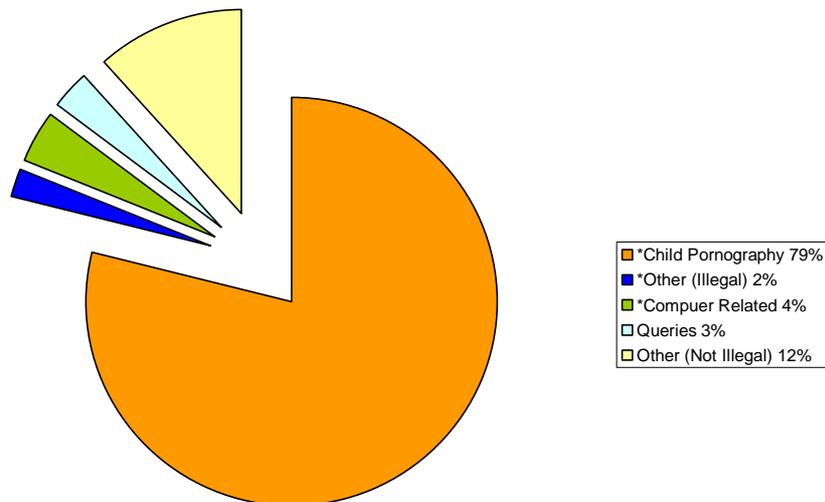
## REPORTED SUSPICION

### Suspicion cited in reports

When a report is filed, the reporter's suspicion, whether stated or implied, is recorded in the Hotline database. Upon completion of the content assessment by the analyst, their expert opinion is recorded in the database as the "Hotline Determination".

In 2007, the suspicion given or implied by reporters in 2,044 reports (79% of all reports submitted) was child pornography. Of these 2,044 reports, the Hotline analysts determined that 718, or 35% were indeed child pornography.

*Suspicion cited in reports*



\*Child Pornography includes: Child Grooming, Child Erotica, Child Trafficking, & Child Sex Tourism  
\*Other (Illegal) includes: Drugs related, Promoting Violence or Hatred, Racism, or Terrorist Activities  
\*Computer Related includes: Financial Scams, Virus Attack

While the Hotline accepts reports of other illegal content, the top reason for the submission by the public of reports remains child pornography. However, not only child pornography disturbs users.

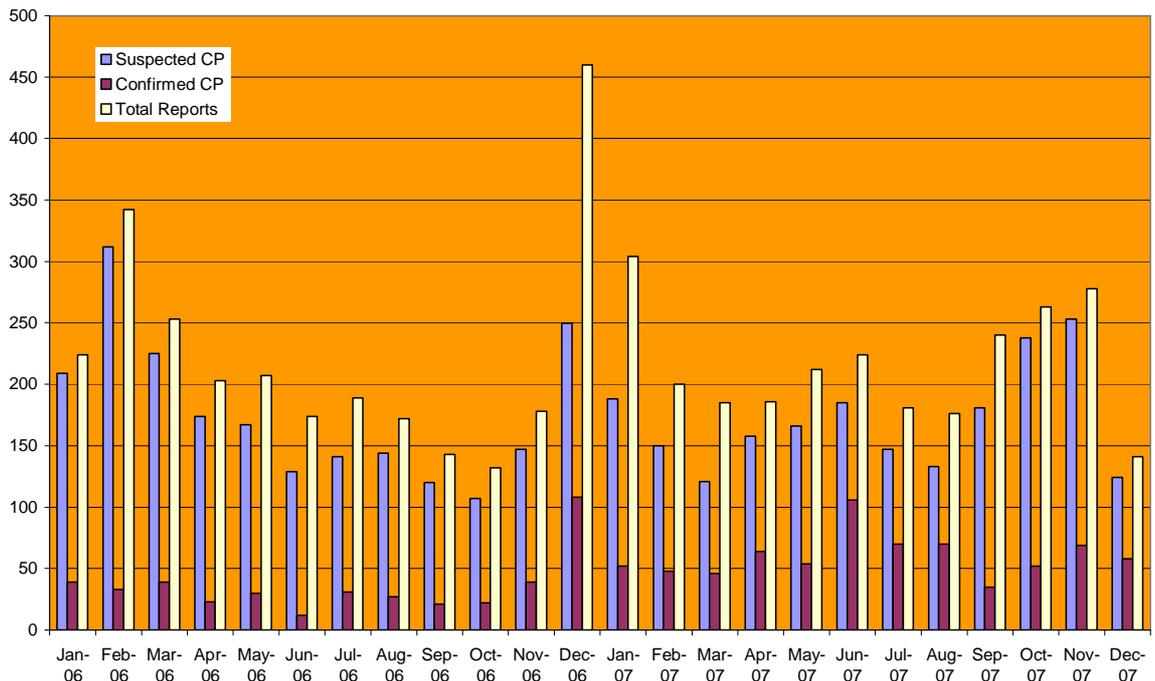
The Hotline continues to receive reports in relation to adult pornographic material. A considerable proportion relate to extreme adult content, where the Hotline Analysts often understand the reporters' concerns. However, unless the material is illegal under the Child Trafficking and Pornography Act, 1998 the legal situation is too unclear for action to be taken. To date, this material has been located outside the country and the Hotline is not in a position to take further action. Therefore this type of material is assessed as "not illegal".

### **Hotline Determinations**

In 2007 there was no child pornography content found to be hosted in the Republic of Ireland as a result of any report received by the Hotline. This maintains the clean record enjoyed by Ireland since the Hotline was established over eight years ago. This fact is corroborated by the 29 other member hotlines of the INHOPE network in operation around the world during 2007.

As can be seen from the graph below which shows both 2006 and 2007, in every month the number of confirmed reports of child pornography is a relatively small percentage of overall reporting. However, averaged over 2007, 28% of reports received were assessed as probably illegal child pornography, whereas the average for 2006 was much lower at 15.8% of all reports (these figures include duplicate reports). This rather large jump could be explained by the fact that in spite of this rise, overall reporting numbers fell for 2007, suggesting that people are becoming more aware of what actually constitutes illegal content and are not reporting so many instances which turn out to be "not illegal".

### Comparison of Suspected to Determined Child Pornography Reports



It is worth mentioning the number of reports where the Hotline could not find the content to which the reporter was referring. Out of the 2,590 reports received in the period, 439 were classified as "not found". This would include situations where insufficient detail was provided by the reporter, or incorrect details were provided in the report such as an incorrect URL, or the content was already removed by the ISP, or the target of the report was inaccessible at the time of assessment due to a DNS look-up error or a Web server being unavailable. In 2006 this figure was slightly lower with 397 reports being classified in this category. This could be result of a variety of situations, including:

1. the ISP has already taken it down but allows a "404 error" rather than displaying a notice; or
2. the criminals themselves have moved the content to another location to avoid detection.

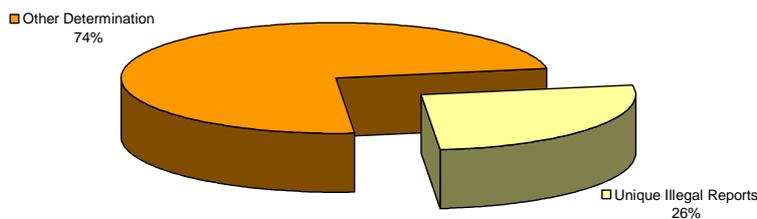
157 reports, or 6%, were outside the remit of the Hotline, such as complaints about telecommunications services or queries about services offered by ISPs. By comparison, 145 reports or 5% were outside the remit

of the Hotline in 2006. The Hotline generally tries to redirect the reporter to the appropriate service where known, however it is under no obligation to do so.

## FORWARDING REPORTS

In 2007 the incidence of unique reports (duplicates excluded) assessed by the Hotline and determined as being illegal has increased again compared to 2006. Of the total number of reports received by the Hotline in 2007 26.4% were determined as being probably illegal under Irish law compared with just 15.7% in 2006.

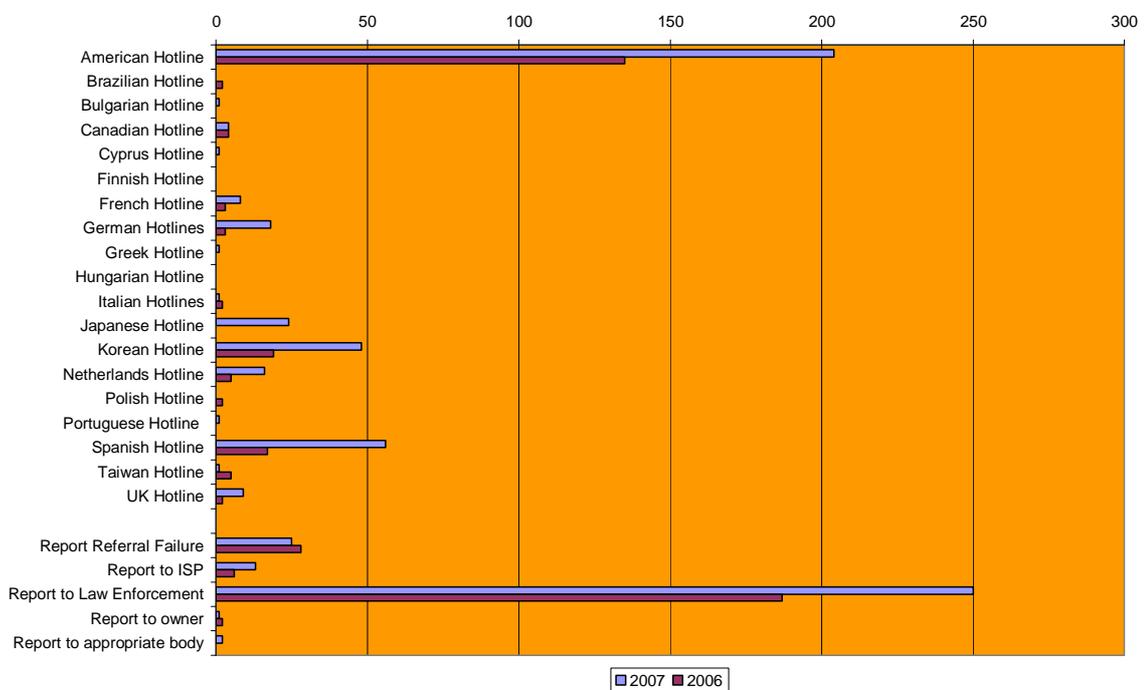
*Unique illegal reports 2007*



In more than half of reports confirmed as probably illegal child pornography, the severity of content was assessed to be very high. Most of this material was found on the open preview pages of pay-sites that are operated by organised criminals. Other cases where severity is high is where photo or video sharing sites or P2P services have been misused by paedophile rings. Where the content is less severe, it is not unusual for the material to be hosted in countries where the age of consent is lower than in Ireland. Hence while the content may be deemed illegal under Irish law it is not so under the local law and these sites will continue to operate. In such cases the Hotline will forward the report through the appropriate channel to the apparent country of origin. It is up to the receiving country to decide whether or not it also breaks their law and whether it is appropriate to remove material from the Internet.

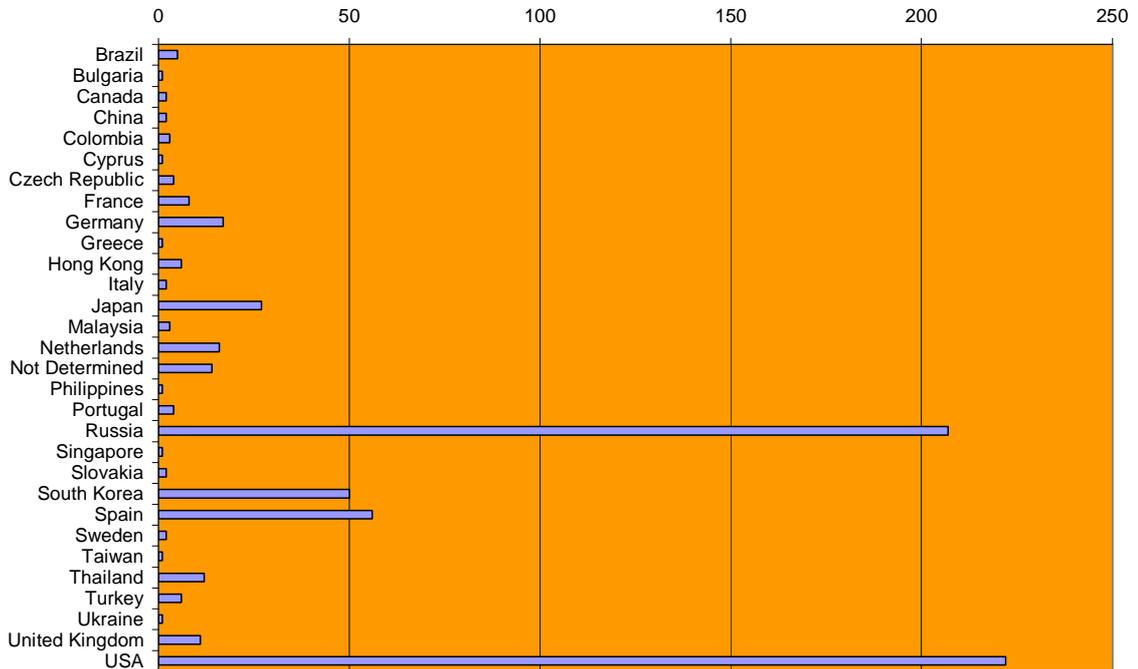
All reports where the content was confirmed as probably illegal child pornography were traced to locations outside of Ireland and forwarded for action to either other INHOPE hotline members or to An Garda Síochána to be routed through police channels. The fact that no reports received by the Hotline were traced to Ireland shows that the strategy in this country must be working and appear to be preventing such misuse of local Internet facilities.

*Location to which reports determined as referring to illegal content were forwarded in 2007*



Most of the reports determined as probably illegal under Irish Law were traced as apparently located in either the USA (222 reports) or Russia (207 reports). As there is no INHOPE member hotline currently in Russia, these reports were passed on to An Garda Síochána who in turn liaise with international police organisations such as Interpol and Europol to forward information about illegal content to the appropriate jurisdiction.

*Countries where CP content appeared to be hosted in 2007*



The USA was the highest recipient of reports from the Hotline. The reports are forwarded to NCMEC CyberTipline, the US INHOPE member Hotline, who in turn works with US law enforcement to tackle illegal material found on Internet services.

The high incidence of report forwarding to the USA does not imply that all of this child pornographic content is being compiled in the USA nor that all the child victims in this content are to be found in the USA. The USA has numerous organisations providing hosting and Internet facilities at international level which gives a very open Internet environment. Many innovative web services are hosted on these servers, often based on economies of scale and advertising models supported by the US market, which offer free limited services to users around the world. Despite strict terms and conditions of service, unfortunately, these facilities do get exploited by criminals from around the globe. To change the way in which these facilities do business in an attempt to suppress illegal content, would be to punish the overwhelming majority of legitimate users for the misuse perpetrated by a very few. However, the US CyberTipline, ISPs and law

enforcement authorities do act. Often material reported to the Hotline after business hours on one evening will be found to have an "already removed" notice displayed when the Hotline investigates the following morning.

## **THE HOTLINE**

The Hotline exists to receive reports from the public about potentially illegal material so that it may be assessed and, if considered to be probably illegal, to instigate its removal from the Internet. The Hotline cannot engage in pre-emptive searching for illegal material, it can only react to reports from the public.

The www.hotline.ie service was established by the Internet Service Providers' Association of Ireland (ISPAI) in November 1999 as a result of recommendations made by the Working Group on the Illegal and Harmful Use of the Internet. The Working Group was established by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

The www.hotline.ie service provides a secure and confidential environment where the public can anonymously report potentially illegal material encountered on the Internet. The reports can be made using the secure website at www.hotline.ie. Alternatively, reports can be made by email to report@hotline.ie, by phone (lo-call number 1890 610 710) or fax (lo-call number 1890 520 720).

When the Hotline receives a report it follows a procedure which has been agreed with the Internet Advisory Board (IAB), An Garda Síochána and with the Internet Service Providers.

The Hotline is recognised as the established service in the country to combat illegal content on the Internet.

The Hotline is run as a service of the ISPAI, a not-for-profit limited company, established in 1998 by Internet Service Providers operating in the Republic of Ireland. The ISPAI is completely funded by the industry on a cost-sharing basis. A General Manager, who is an employee of the

ISPAI, manages the administrative, financial and operational functions of the Hotline. The General Manager reports to the ISPAI Board of Directors. The Internet Advisory Board, established in February 2000 by the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform, monitors the effectiveness of self-regulation of the Internet Service Provider industry on behalf of Government and specifically oversees and approves the operational procedures of the Hotline.

Members of the Board include representatives of relevant Government departments, Internet service providers, An Garda Síochána, Internet user groups, Data Protection Commission, education, child welfare bodies, media industry, a legal advisor and the Hotline.

The Hotline would not exist without the commitment of the ISPAI members, whose membership fees provide funding for the Hotline. These member ISPs take the interests of their customers and Internet safety seriously and are particularly conscious of the increasing use of their Internet facilities by children.

At the end of 2007, the ISPAI had 22 members who support the Hotline. These were: Eircom, BT Ireland, O2, Vodafone, Meteor, HEAnet, Irish Broadband, UPC (Chorus/NTL), UTV-internet, Irish Domains, Verizon Business, Perlico, Magnet, Blacknight, Novara, MyHost, Strencom, EuroKom, Protocol Internet, Clearwire, ICE Comms and Bitbuzz. The ISPAI hopes that with public and political awareness of Internet issues remaining ISPs operating in Ireland will choose to join those members actively contributing to generating a safer Internet environment.

The usefulness of the Hotline would be extremely limited if it could only deal with Internet content hosted or distributed from within the Irish jurisdiction. The Hotline addresses the issue of responding to reported content that is outside the Irish jurisdiction through membership of

INHOPE (The International Association of Internet Hotlines) and cooperation with An Garda Síochána.

INHOPE facilitates and co-ordinates the work of Hotlines in responding to illegal use and content on the Internet. It facilitates good working relationships between hotlines and the exchange of reports by ensuring trust built on a rigorous hotline approval process. The ISPAI Hotline is a founding member of INHOPE.

The Hotline provides assistance to An Garda Síochána by filtering reports to determine what is probably illegal and is also located in Ireland or has an Irish dimension. This assists the Gardaí to dedicate their specialist resources to pursuing investigations within the jurisdiction by not having to deal with the majority of reports that do not contain illegal content or relate to material held in other jurisdictions.

The Safer Internet Programme of the European Commission (EC) has been instrumental in developing the Hotline network and INHOPE in Europe. The [www.hotline.ie](http://www.hotline.ie) service has benefited from project funding since this programme was initiated in 2000. In 2007, the Hotline received funding for up to 50% of its eligible operating costs from the EC Safer Internet Plus Programme.

*Presenting to community groups in Lucan and Cabinteely, Co. Dublin*



The Hotline has run visibility events to promote Internet safety issues and the importance of making reports to combat the prevalence of illegal content on the Internet. The Hotline has participated and contributed to various forums like the National Parents' Council (Department of Education) and the High-Tech Crime Forum (Irish Banking Federation) with the view to developing safer internet initiatives. It has also provided support and speakers for events run by educational organisations, industry associations and child welfare organisations during 2007 such as Barnardos, the Library Association of Ireland, many school parent teacher associations and community groups. In addition, the Hotline has provided training to staff of other INHOPE member hotlines by presenting at INHOPE training courses and general assembly meetings. Numerous interviews were given on TV, radio and the written press throughout 2007.

It is vital that all relevant agencies work together to promote Internet safety and provide a safer Internet environment for all.

## CONCLUSIONS

At the end of 2007 the Hotline had received 12,836 reports since its establishment in November 1999. Although the level of reporting was slightly down on 2006, a relatively consistent upward trend of reporting has been achieved over the eight years of the Hotline's operation. Most importantly in 2007, accurate public reporting to the Hotline has resulted in 62% more illegal content than in 2006 being forwarded on to appropriate authorities for action. While all the material was found to be located outside Ireland, we have contributed very strongly to the disruption of paedophile and other criminal activity on the Internet.

Internet subscriptions grew overall by roughly 17% in the year (according to ComReg). This, coupled with more than a doubling of subscriptions to always-on broadband in the period, makes it clear that the Irish population is spending significantly more time online than just a year ago. Huge amounts of leisure time, especially amongst children and youths, are now being spent browsing the Internet. While most will have positive experiences of Internet usage, statistical probability alone dictates that an increasing number of users will accidentally discover a static amount of illegal content existing on the Internet. These users must be made aware of the necessity of reporting and where they can make reports so inroads can be made to reduce the amount of such material in circulation.

The Internet is so vast that neither ISPs nor law enforcement can be expected to know the whereabouts of illegal content on the Internet unless it is brought to their attention. The Hotline provides this facility and it is vital that the public know of its existence. To this end the Hotline runs visibility events to promote Internet safety issues and the importance of reporting suspicious content. These are important not only in terms of maintaining visibility but also in making new Internet users in Ireland aware of the service.

Public awareness also assists in keeping up the attack on illegal content and, in the case of child pornography helping to prevent the sexual exploitation of innocent children. It is vital that the public do not ignore suspected illegal content they encounter on the Internet but report it to the Hotline.

Anecdotal observations made by the Hotline analysts reveal that much of the content being determined as illegal, particularly the child pornography, is of an increasing level of severity. Where severe examples of pornographic material featuring children used to be relatively unusual, it now appears to be the norm for material reported to the service under the suspicion of child pornography to fall into one of the highest categories of severity. This frequent and repeated exposure to some of the severest child pornography available naturally has an effect on the Content Analysts working for Hotline, as well as obviously being a cause for concern for all Internet users. It is important to note, however, that illegal material of this nature still makes up only a very small percentage of all material available on the net, and the likelihood of users, especially young users, coming across it accidentally is extremely low. This sort of material is nearly always hidden at the “deep web” level.

Analysts are still concerned about the lack of reporting from the public regarding Peer to Peer (P2P) services. It is via P2P sites that Analysts have seen some of the most disturbing and abusive images of children and when they have searched for a file that has been reported it is clear that many files on P2P services are if nothing else, very suspiciously named. The Hotline continues to speculate that it is possible that P2P users' first reaction on encountering these sorts of files is to want to delete the listing of filenames as quickly as possible. However, it is very important that these should be reported so that people who are misusing P2P services by sharing illegal content can be tracked down. It is true that many files are simply given these inappropriate names to try to attract

more attention however it is equally true that many of them do lead to illegal content.

It is extremely heartening to see that for the eighth year running Ireland has maintained its clean record. No reports received by the Hotline and confirmed as child pornography were found to have been directly distributed from, or hosted on, ISP facilities in Ireland. This is corroborated by the fact that none of the other INHOPE Hotlines around the world had occasion to forward reports to Hotline.ie for action. This suggests that measures being taken by the ISPAI and its members are proving successful in making it too difficult or risky for people to conduct this sort of illegal activity from Ireland. Members of the ISPAI work hard to actively protect their services and their users from being exposed to illegal content and to promote and support the Hotline service.

Of concern however is the number of companies that provide Internet access or hosting services who continue to resist pressure to join in self-regulation and formally commit to the ISPAI Code of Practice and Ethics. They appear content to reap the benefits for their customers by riding on the backs of the ISPAI member companies who are financing the Hotline and making a concerted effort to tackle these important Internet safety issues.

A key aspect of this Code is commitment to the Hotline and adherence to its procedures for “notice and take down” agreed with Government and An Garda Síochána in the event of illegal content or customer use being discovered on their facilities.

Subscribing to the ISPAI also contributes to the financing of the international efforts mounted by the Hotline and its INHOPE counterparts in the global fight against criminal use of the Internet, especially for the distribution of child pornography. The objective of this work is to generate a safer online environment for ISP’s customers. It is incumbent on the Irish

Internet services industry to work in concert against the possibility of illegal content being hosted in or distributed from this country; so the zero incidence record of which Ireland should be very proud is not lost.