CHAPTER 3:

CONSUMER PROTECTION AND COMMUNITY EMPOWERMENT

As a media regulator, MDA performs the role of a trusted steward of public values by putting in place content regulation and classification standards, which are developed in consultation with the community and the industry. These standards help consumers make more informed media choices and provide for wider access to content, while reflecting community standards, values and mores.

FOSTERING
A CONDUCIVE CYBERSPACE AND GOOD DIGITAL CITIZENSHIP

Singapore is one of the most wired countries in the world. Our mobile penetration rate is 156 per cent[1], and 84 per cent[2] of our households have broadband access. While this connectivity brings about convenience and opportunities, it also brings with it new challenges. Cybercrime, cyberbullying and other forms of irresponsible online behaviour are issues that many connected societies, including Singapore, are grappling with.

As a result, there is a need to raise awareness of these issues, cultivate good digital citizenship and foster a discerning and responsible online community.

In this regard, MDA provides secretariat support to the Media Literacy Council (MLC)[3], which was set up in 2012 to spearhead public education programmes on media literacy and cyber wellness.

The MLC has introduced various programmes and initiatives to reach out to multiple stakeholders through partnerships and the creation of educational resources for students, teachers and parents. It has made the global initiative, Safer Internet Day, which is held in February every year, a marquee event in Singapore for public education. The 2014 edition, themed "Let's Create a Better Internet Together", was launched via a multi-platform campaign to promote values and encourage civil and responsible online interactions. In particular, the 2014

[1] http://www.ida.gov.sg/Infocomm-Landscape/Facts-and-Figures/Telecommunications
[2] http://www.ida.gov.sg/Infocomm-Landscape/Facts-and-Figures/Infocomm-Usage-Households-and-Individuals
[3] www.medialiteracycouncil.sg

Scan this QR code to view the video for *Safer Internet Day 2014*.

Safer Internet Day 2014, headed by the Media Literacy Council, took place on 11 February 2014.

campaign raised the awareness of the Media Literacy Core Values of respect, responsibility, empathy and integrity, as well as skills such as discernment and the ability to inspire.

Working with the MLC, MDA also partnered the Ministry of Education (MOE) on the Cyber Wellness Student Ambassador Programme (CWSAP) for students from primary schools to junior colleges. Based on a peer-to-peer learning model, the CWSAP is a student-led initiative to promote cyber wellness peer advocacy and influence. MDA hopes to bring the programme to newer heights to cultivate a new generation of young leaders and ambassadors who will champion and advocate media literacy projects in their schools.
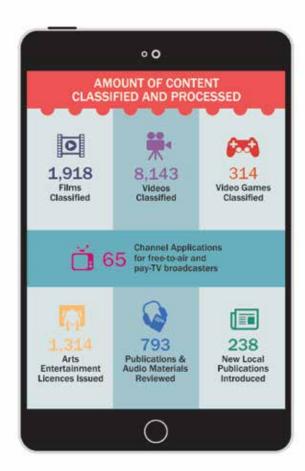
MDA is also co-secretariat to the Inter-Ministry Cyber Wellness Steering Committee (ICSC). To date, the ICSC has supported campaigns and programmes which reached out to over 242,000 students, parents and teachers in public education on cyber wellness.

Students take the lead in promoting cyber wellness to their peers in the CWSAP. (Photo courtesy of MOE)

PROVIDING MORE
MEDIA CHOICES

AMOUNT OF CONTENT CLASSIFIED AND PROCESSED

1,918 Films Classified

8,143 Videos Classified

314 Video Games Classified

65 Channel Applications for free-to-air and pay-TV broadcasters

1,314 Arts Entertainment Licences Issued

793 Publications & Audio Materials Reviewed

238 New Local Publications Introduced

In 2013, MDA revised the Content Guidelines for Local Lifestyle Magazines to provide clarity to publishers and allow consumers to make more informed choices. The main changes to the guidelines include grouping magazines into three categories - teen, general-interest and adult-interest - with specific guidelines for each. To bring about greater parity in the sale of local and foreign magazines, local magazines which carry adult-interest content are now required to be shrink-wrapped with consumer advice "Unsuitable for the Young". This also allows local magazines to carry mature content while signaling to parents that such content is not appropriate for the young. The guidelines were reviewed in consultation with the Publications Consultative Panel, a community group comprising members from a cross section of society, as well as the Magazine Publishers Association of Singapore (MPAS).

Last year, MDA also classified 8,143 videos, 1,918 films and 314 video game titles for distribution. The same year also saw MDA issuing 1,314 arts entertainment licences and processing 65 channel applications for the free-to-air and pay-TV broadcasters. MDA also reviewed 793 publications and audio materials, with 238 new local publications being issued permits.

KEEPING PACE
WITH MEDIA CONVERGENCE AND NEW CONSUMER TRENDS

MDA's approach to Internet regulation has been and remains light-touch. However, as more Singaporeans access news content over the Internet, there is a need to ensure greater parity between traditional and online news platforms.

On 1 June 2013, MDA introduced individual licensing for websites that report regularly on news and current affairs in Singapore and enjoy significant reach among Singaporeans. This is to place them on a more consistent regulatory framework with traditional news providers.

Under the licensing framework, MDA will approach websites to be individually licensed if they fulfil the following criteria:

- Report an average of at least one article per week on Singapore's news and current affairs over a period of two months, and

- Visited by at least 50,000 unique IP addresses from Singapore each month over the same two-month period.

There is no change to the content standards for these news sites. All Internet Content Providers continue to be guided by the Internet Code of Practice, which outlines the content the community deems as offensive and against public interest.

So far, ten news sites have been issued with individual licences.

SAFEGUARDING
PUBLIC AND CONSUMER INTERESTS

Protecting consumers and the public is an important objective under MDA's regulatory remit. This year saw MDA implementing more measures to protect consumers while safeguarding public interests and community mores.

The Cross-Carriage Measure (Measure) is aimed at addressing content fragmentation in the pay-TV market. Under the cross-carriage regime, pay-TV retailers who acquire any exclusive content on or after 12 March 2010 must offer that content to subscribers through the set-top boxes of other qualified pay-TV retailers.

The Measure has been successful in achieving its intended objective. Today, there are over 60 common channels which include entertainment and sports channels such as Celestial Movies, National Geographic Channel, Fox Sports and STAR Sports. Furthermore, pay-TV retailers have shifted their strategy to compete for subscribers based on value-added services, such as mobile apps that allow subscribers to watch TV on the go.

In 2013, MDA issued a direction to SingNet requiring that the 2013/14 – 2015/16 seasons of the Barclays Premier League be cross-carried on the StarHub platform, as its agreement with the Football Association Premier League contained clauses that prevent or restrict or are likely to prevent or restrict the same content from being acquired by other parties. MDA's direction was upheld by the Minister for Communications and Information following SingNet's appeal.

Under the mandate to protect consumer and community interests, MDA issued a notice to Internet Service Providers to block *Ashley Madison* on 8 November 2013, as a statement of the types of content that the community objects to. MDA had assessed that it would be against the public interest to allow *Ashley Madison* to operate and promote its website in flagrant disregard of Singapore's family values and public morality, as the site aggressively promotes and facilitates extramarital affairs and had declared that it will specifically target Singaporeans.

The move was met with strong support from members of the public, who urged the Government to take a clear stance against websites such as *Ashley Madison*.

In the year in review, MDA also looked into 101 Licensing, Content and Media Market Conduct Code breaches. The most significant was the nine-hour, island-wide Mio TV service disruption on 15 May 2013, which affected some 26,000 households. As investigations revealed that the disruption was caused by SingNet's negligence in routine maintenance activities, it was fined S$220,000.