

The sting in the tail

By  [Danette Breitenbach](#)

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The digital world is part of our lives and it is fun, but it has a sting in its tail as many who have innocently shared their information in this world have discovered.



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We have to raise the awareness of protecting our data and information says William Bird, the director of Media Monitoring Africa (MMA) and a speaker at the recent IAB Summit held at Turbine Hall in Johannesburg.

South Africa is slower than the international norm, but that is because our internet access is not as fast in terms of rollout he says, however, this presents an opportunity in the regulatory environment.

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“The fact that we lag behind the rest of the world has provided us with the opportunity to learn from international best practice,” he states. He adds that all over, the world is slow to catch up with reality - even before the internet. The internet has only served to speed up the rate of this making it even more difficult than before.

“However in South Africa the draft Cyber Crime Bill has been introduced, but while this is a necessary regulation, and action needs to be taken against cybercrime, it is taking place in a policy vacuum. “We are still waiting for the ITC White Paper policy. What we are doing is putting the cart before the horse,” he says.

This situation has come about because people clearly do not understand the implications or there is a deliberate effort to undermine access to information and freedom of expression. “Either way if the Bill is effected it will undermine whistle-blowing and media freedom, to name, but two activities. This is very dangerous. Instead we need to look at legislation that is in line with what is being adopted in the rest of the world,” he explains.

But regulation from the State is only one side; with self-regulation and policing making up the other side of the coin. The current scenario in the country is one where there are lots of gaps that need to be filled he says. “For example the Penny Sparrow Facebook comment is a very offensive one in this country and we need a way to deal with that. Facebook needs to say it understands and will operate accordingly in this country.”

In this regard the State and the industry stakeholders need to come together. Apart from this he says what needs to start happening is for people to develop an understanding of the online world and to learn to regulate themselves. “This is imperative, for example in the context of young people in this world.”

Sadly, it is necessary to focus on the negative, but he says one should not lose sight of the benefits. “The online world has the potential to improve our world and the world of many people if it is used for social good. Yes, it is used to make money but that is only one part of the online world; its ability to address issues, improve governance and hold politicians, for example, to account are only a few of the ways and means it improves our lives. Ultimately the online world must be utilised to meet the needs of our society.”

ABOUT DANETTE BREITENBACH

Danette Breitenbach is a marketing & media editor at Bizcommunity.com. Previously she freelanced in the marketing and media sector, including for Bizcommunity. She was editor and publisher of AdVantage, the publication that served the marketing, media and advertising industry in southern Africa. She has worked extensively in print media, mainly B2B. She has a Masters in Financial Journalism from Wits.

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