

# Protecting youth on mobile

Russel Stromin, head of the Code of Conduct Committee of the Wireless Application Service Providers' Association ([WASPA](#)), notes that the problem of children and teenagers accessing pornography via their cellphones is becoming widespread and that measures do exist to block sites.

In South Africa, some operators have developed ways for parents to block their children from accessing adult content via their handsets:



- Vodacom's parental control can be accessed by dialling 111\*123# from the cellphone you want to block or call Vodacom customer care on 082111
- To block an MTN handset, dial \*101# from the handset you would like to restrict content on and follow the easy-to-use menu prompts
- Cell C and 8ta do not have this functionality yet. 8ta says it will be launching parental control in the first quarter of 2012. Note, however, that internet access can be de-activated on any mobile. Simply request this from your provider.

"As the industry body for the mobile applications industry, we encourage our members to provide parents with tools to protect their children," adds Stromin.

All the cellular providers are able to block access to specific sites but it would be up to them to decide. Sites that are found to operate illegally may be blocked for everybody. Sites that contain adult content will be blocked for those phones with parental controls activated. Simply dial your provider's customer service number and request they block the site.

## "Do not affect other inappropriate use of cellphones"

Stromin notes that these measures can help parents prevent their children from accessing adult content on sites, but they do not affect other inappropriate use of cellphones, for example sexting. Sexting is the practice of sending flirtatious SMS that contain explicit pictures of the sender.

"Apart from anything else, these pictures seldom remain private and often go viral or even end up on porn sites," he explains. "Blocking your child's handset won't help you with this type of problem. For that, it is important to build a relationship with your children in which these matters are discussed openly. Parents need to remind their children that once 'out there', a picture can never be retrieved or deleted. They will have to live with it for the rest of their lives. The means blocking your children's cellphones from accessing adult content is a good start, but it's only the beginning of what parents need to do."

The association's website also contains a link to the cellphone safety website, which includes additional ways to block access to adult sites using third-party applications and to the Parents' Corner blog, where advice and war stories can be shared.