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ICRA at a glance

The Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA) is an international, non-profit organization of internet leaders working to develop a safer internet. ICRA has long believed that self-regulation leads to the best balance between the free flow of digital content and protecting children from potentially harmful material.

The centrepiece of the organization is the descriptive vocabulary, often referred to as "the ICRA questionnaire." Content providers check which of the elements in the questionnaire are present or absent from their websites. This then generates a small file containing the labels that is then linked to the content on one or more domains.

Users, especially parents of young children, can then use filtering software to allow or disallow access to web sites based on the information declared in the label. A key point is that the Internet Content Rating Association does not rate internet content - the content providers do that, using the ICRA labelling system. ICRA makes no value judgement about sites.

The descriptive vocabulary was drawn up by an international panel and designed to be as neutral and objective as possible. It was revised in 2005 to enable easier application to a wide range of digital content, not just websites.

Most of the items in the questionnaire allow the content provider to declare simply that a particular type of content is present or absent. The subjective decision about whether to allow access to that content is then made by the parent.

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The ICRA Community

ICRA has a small permanent staff based in Great Britain and the USA. In addition there are "Points of Presence" in Spain and Germany. ICRA's work, however, is carried out by many people all over the world. First and foremost there are our members. These companies and organizations form the bedrock of ICRA, providing much of its funding. ICRA is proud to count many of the internet's leading names as its members.

As well as the full members, ICRA also has an ever-growing number of Associate Members. These are individuals and small companies that value child protection and who have made a commitment to make best use of the ICRA system as it applies in their particular field, notably by labelling all the sites they control.

ICRA also maintains relationships with a variety of other companies and organizations that in one way or another support its work. Known as Affiliates, the precise relationship with these varies greatly but they all help to further ICRA's work either directly or indirectly.

Finally, ICRA is part of a much wider network of organizations that help to promote internet safety. ICRA maintains a full listing of internet Hotlines through which you can report any illegal material you may find online. In addition, there are links to sites for children, parents and teachers that offer practical advice, activities and information related to all aspects of online safety.

The ICRA vocabulary at a glance

The broad topics covered are:

- The presence or absence of nudity
- The presence or absence of sexual content
- The depiction of violence
- The language used
- The presence or absence of user-generated content and whether this is moderated
- The depiction of other potentially harmful content such as gambling, drugs and alcohol

Within each broad category the web author is asked more detailed questions about whether a specific item or feature is present or absent from the site.

Cross-cultural, multi-lingual

The ICRA questionnaire can be completed in several different languages; however, the labels themselves are expressed as computer code. The ICRA labelling system is therefore independent of any given (human) language. Descriptors from other vocabularies may be used in conjunction with ICRA labels and the organization is willing to consider extensions to its vocabulary where circumstances demand it.

This website is offered in a variety of languages too, however, ICRA's working language is English. The English version of the website is therefore typically more up to date than other language versions.

The ICRAplus filter

ICRA makes a free filter available for individual users. This will block or allow access to labelled sites based on the user's preferences. The ICRAplus control panel is a mirror image of the questionnaire filled in by content providers and thus allows almost direct communication between webmasters and parents. In addition parents can create their own block or allow lists, set up different filtering profiles for different family members and easily override a blocked site that they deem appropriate for their child.

Uses ethanol. Eats vegetables. Recycles.

However, in order to create a comprehensive filtering system that will block or allow access to websites, including unlabelled sites, ICRA*plus* also allows users to install additional modules that can use other methods to filter internet access.

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Technical standards used

ICRA labels are expressed using the Resource Description Framework (RDF) as defined by the World Wide Web Consortium. Specifically, ICRA was instrumental in defining and now uses RDF Content Labels, a generic platform designed to support digital labels and trustmarks of all kinds.

Use of RDF means that ICRA labels are part of a much bigger global effort to make sense of the mass of online data known as the "Semantic Web." RSS news feeds, blogs, shared bookmarks and many other technologies are based on RDF and related standards.

In order to facilitate filtering for parents using PICS filters (such as Microsoft Internet Explorer's Content Advisor), since January 2006 ICRA has also provided a simplified PICS interpretation of the current vocabulary alongside the RDF labels.

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Spelling used on this site

As ICRA operates internationally, we receive a number of e-mails questioning our spelling of the English language. This of course stems from the differences between the spelling norms adopted by English speaking countries around the world. As we are based in Britain, we have used British spelling for words like "labelling", "favourite" etc. We have however used the "~ize" form of words like "organization" as this is acceptable everywhere... and we had a lot of e-mails from the US when an earlier version of this web site included the (normal for Britain) "organisation"!

The graphics (such as the one at the bottom of this page) are available in US-English (labeled with ICRA) and non-US English forms (labelled with ICRA), as well as other language variants... and with no words at all for complete safety.

That said, if you find any typos, do let us know!

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