

Safer surfing for children

A secure new environment for Thai youngsters.

By: Don Sambandaraksa
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The Cartoon Network has launched its Thai language localised portal, cartoonnetwork.co.th to meet the high demand from young Thai Internet surfers and provide them with a safe and secure online community as well as tap into Thailand's rapidly growing online advertising market which last year reached \$22 million.



Speaking at the launch in Bangkok recently, Turner Entertainment Network Asia's regional director Benjamin Grubbs, said that the children's TV channel has been in operation since 1994 and today has 15 million viewers in 23 markets and nine languages, including Thai. Ninety-five per cent of its content is available in Thailand which is viewed by 345,000 households or 700,000 individuals through True Visions pay TV. It is this highly educated and affluent demographic that is targeted by the new online site, which features video on demand and a large amount of downloadable content and casual games based around its iconic characters such as Ben 10, the Powerpuff Girls and Tom and Jerry, all localised into Thai.

However, one of the key features of the site is online safety which is addressed at many levels. To ensure our site is safe, a dedicated and strong team provides 24-seven monitoring and keeps an eye on user generated content - blogs, in-game and live chat, as well as message boards, he said.

In addition, children under 14 will have to have parental consent before being granted full access to the site. This is done by an army of customer service representative who will randomly call up parents and verify details.

As a proponent of online safety, working with parents is key in tackling cyber bullying, he added.

The Thai Cartoon Network site offers video on demand as well as blogs, chatrooms and games, all in a safe, monitored environment.

Away from the entertainment, the other side of the equation is providing a premium channel for online advertising. When it comes to online advertising, Grubbs said that Thailand is now the fastest growing market in Southeast Asia. Total online advertising spend in 2008 totalled \$22 million and this year it is expected to grow by 29%. Taken another way, Thailand makes up 30% of the total online advertising revenue in Southeast Asia and is also one of the largest e-commerce markets. The Cartoon Network has partnered with AdMax to provide advertising space and campaigns via the portal.

Tom Srivorakul, AdMax's managing director, said that the latest figures from Nectec (the National Electronics and Computer Technology Centre) show 13.4 million people online now in Thailand, a figure that has doubled in the last three years. Twenty per cent of Thai Internet users are under 20 years old and over a million are under 15 years of age. Another important statistic signalling the shift in the balance between new and traditional media is that the 15 to 24 age group spend as much time online as they do watching TV.



Benjamin Grubbs, regional director of interactive media at Turner Entertainment Networks Asia.

AdMax offers advertisers what Tom calls a safe and respectful way to tap into this young market through videos, mini-games, banners and advertisements placed before games, as well as event micro-sites and special online activities.

However, the executives were tight-lipped when asked for investment figures or if the portal was self-sustaining or if it was to lead more people to subscribe to the pay TV channel. Grubbs said that the first and foremost reason for the launch of the site was to address the huge demand that Thai users have been asking of the Cartoon Network on its Asean site and that the advertisement market followed second after the realised how promising the market was. Tom said that it was a huge win-win situation for all involved.

Currently, all videos are hosted globally out of the US. Later in the year, the Cartoon Network will be launching massive multiplayer online role-playing games (MMORPGs) on the portal and will locate game servers domestically to ensure low latency and a good gaming experience. As user generated content and services grow, the monitoring team will also grow as native Thai-language speakers will be needed to monitor web site activities.

Regionally, localised sites have already been launched in Japan, Korea, Taiwan (in traditional Chinese), India, the Philippines as well as Australia and New Zealand. He joked that the Cartoon Network even has to do localisation for the site for Australia and New Zealand as humour down under differs significantly from other English-speaking countries. After Thailand, the next market for a localised site will be Vietnam.

Grubbs said that the Cartoon Network has worked with schools and communities in many countries in promoting online child safety and, where the needs exist, to work towards healthcare and education. He said he was looking forward to engaging authorities here on similar projects in the near future but admitted that he has not yet had talks with either the Ministry of Culture or the Ministry of Information and Communication Technology.

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