



**workventures**

**Submission to the  
Inquiry into Cybersafety for Senior Australians**

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## Background

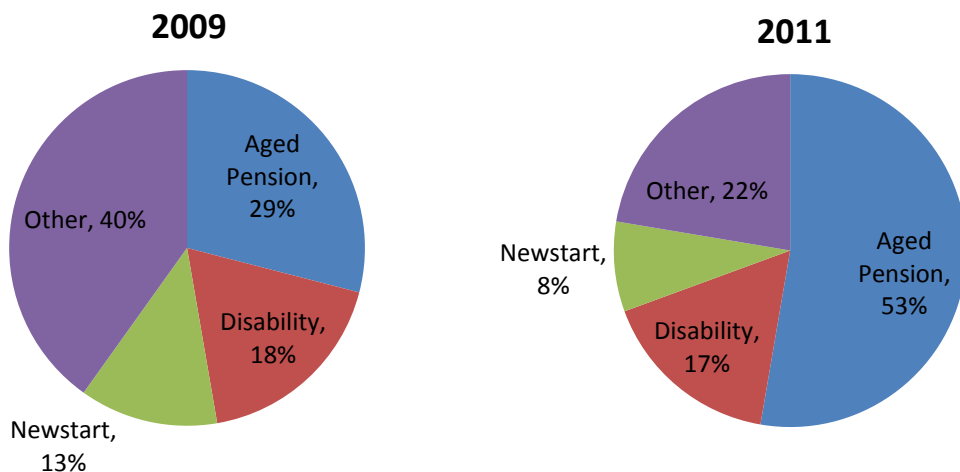
WorkVentures is a non-profit social enterprise that has been operating since 1979, helping people to gain the skills they need to find employment. In 1984 WorkVentures established Compuskills, our first computer training program for the unemployed. Since then our organisation has focused on using technology as a key that can unlock doors to new opportunities for those in need.

Since 2003 WorkVentures has been managing the computer collection and disposal processes for many leading corporations and government departments through our Connect IT program, with the goal of supplying low-cost refurbished computers to disadvantaged communities. We understand that people face challenges in their lives for a broad range of reasons, but lack of access to technology shouldn't be one of them.

Whereas the vast majority of corporate computers disposed through commercial organisations are exported either directly or indirectly, WorkVentures approach is different. We want to keep these valuable assets in Australia for the benefit of Australians. The Connect IT program was established in partnership with Westpac and Microsoft, and we now receive support from many organisations including Lend Lease, Stockland, UGL Limited, Fairfax Media, Minter Ellison and several New South Wales Government departments such as the Premiers Department. Since the program was launched more than 38,000 computers have been supplied to low income households.

Over the last three years WorkVentures has seen senior Australians grow to become the largest customer segment for our Connect IT program. Through our program we only supply computers to people receiving income support from Centrelink, to non-profit organisations and schools. Customers receiving the Aged Pension have grown from 29% of deliveries in 2009 to 53% in 2011 (see chart 1 below)

Chart 1 – Connect IT computer deliveries by benefit type



WorkVentures Connect IT receives considerable support from the Department of Human Services-Centrelink in promoting the availability of our refurbished computers to low income households. They recognise that out of the 1.5 million Australian homes (17%) that still don't have access to a computer in their home<sup>1</sup>, a disproportionately high number fall within their client base. For Centrelink to be able to improve access to self-service tools and support the

<sup>1</sup> ABS, 8146.0 Household Use of Information Technology, Australia, 2010-11

Government's goal for the digital economy, they seek to encourage low income households to get online.

The positive social and economic outcomes of getting Australian households online are well documented. The Allen Consulting Group's report<sup>2</sup> found that increased household Internet connections, particularly to high-speed broadband, generates direct and indirect benefits for households, business and government. The benefits to households "include: enhanced communication; time-savings; information; new online services; access to markets; and social inclusion".

As WorkVentures is supplying thousands of computers to senior Australians each year, primarily the first computer for those households, we're eager to share our experiences and views with the *Inquiry into Cybersafety for Senior Australians*.

## **1. The nature, prevalence and level of cybersafety risks and threats experienced by senior Australians**

WorkVentures Connect IT program provides free technical support throughout the life of the refurbished computer, not just during the warranty period. That means our relationships with our customers can extend for several years. In our experience the types of cybersafety risks and threats encountered by senior Australians includes:

- Viruses and malware inadvertently downloaded from emails and the Internet. We estimate that around 3%-5% of customers need to wipe and reload the operating system on the computer as a result of these issues each year.
- Scams - most commonly telephone scams where the caller claims to be phoning to help fix a technical problem on the computer, and the owner naively provides remote access to their computer, personal details and credit card information.

It seems that less experienced computer users, both young and old, tend to be more trusting of people and websites they encounter online. These problems can extend into retail stores, where they're more likely to be talked into buying hardware upgrades or software that is unnecessary given their needs. For inexperienced users it's difficult to find somewhere to turn where they can get trusted and independent advice that will help them navigate safely through these challenges.

## **2. The impact and implications of those risks and threats on access and use of information and communication technologies by senior Australians;**

In our experience the direct impact of these risks and threats are relatively small but manageable. Where our customers fall victim to viruses and scams, the direct cost may be a few hundred dollars and several hours lost.

Our primary concern is that bad experiences may turn senior Australians off computers altogether. Whereas a teenager would see computers as an inevitable part of their life, meaning that when they encounter a problem they have no choice but to persist, a senior who encounters the same problem may be tempted to put computers in the "too hard basket". We see examples of customers who give up and say "I've survived without

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<sup>2</sup> The Allen Consulting Group, Quantifying the possible economic gains of getting more Australian households online, November 2010

computers for this long...” Then through word of mouth, their network of friends may become similarly discouraged.

### **3. The adequacy and effectiveness of current government and industry initiatives to respond to those threats, including education initiatives aimed at senior Australians;**

WorkVentures undertakes several initiatives to help protect senior Australians who purchase refurbished computers from Connect IT from cyber threats:

- Installing anti-virus software – Microsoft’s Security Essentials anti-virus and malware software is preinstalled on every computer
- Warning in setup guide – Every customer receives a setup guide that provides an overview of these threats and encourages them to update their anti-virus software weekly and to run regular virus scans
- Tutorial program for new users – In partnership with Easy Computing (Australia) we supply a series of video tutorials called “Take The Teacher Home”, designed by seniors for seniors. The tutorials take people through the basic functions of the computer, helps them develop confidence in writing letters, sending emails and accessing the internet. The series includes useful advice on avoiding viruses and other problems online.
- Promoting ThinkUKnow – ThinkUKnow is an internet safety campaign developed in partnership between the Australian Federal Police and Microsoft Australia. While the program is focused on protecting children, their website contains other useful information relevant to senior Australians including protecting yourself on the internet e.g. using email and shopping online. When available WorkVentures includes documentation from ThinkUKnow with our computers, and shortly we will start to add a sticker promoting the program on every computer we supply.

Beyond our internal efforts, some of the other initiatives that we’ve seen as effective in raising awareness of cybersafety are:

- Training from the Australian Seniors Computer Club Association (ASCCA). In addition to the training packages WorkVentures supplies with our computers, we refer hundreds of senior Australians to ASCCA for training each year.
- Training provided through the Broadband For Seniors project.
- Articles in Centrelink’s News For Seniors magazine that help raise awareness of scams and provide helpful advice to help Seniors avoid these threats both on the telephone and through the Internet.

In addition our clients tell us reports on current affairs programs that highlight specific problems, for example scam callers purporting to be from Microsoft; help raise the awareness of the types of problems that senior Australians may encounter and heighten their sense of caution.

However even with all of these worthy initiatives and media reports, we regularly hear from senior Australians who have fallen victim to scams, viruses and other cyber threats. They’re not alone in being susceptible to these issues, but our perception is that senior Australians have lower levels of awareness about cybersafety than other segments of the community. While many senior Australians are enthusiastic about computers, they sometimes lack the

accumulated knowledge that comes from years of using computers, and is helpful in assessing what is or is not safe online.

#### **4. Best practice safeguards, and any possible changes to Australian law, policy or practice that will strengthen the cybersafety of senior Australians.**

In our opinion the current industry and government programs, while admirable, are insufficient. We encourage the government and IT industry to collaborate to expand the national awareness and education campaigns in relation to cybersafety, particularly for seniors.

As technology becomes ubiquitous and even the latest of late adopters join the online community, there will be an ongoing and growing need to promote cybersafety. Every time the IT industry thinks it has a technical silver bullet that will protect us, it's likely that the cyber criminals will find a new point of vulnerability, a new hole, a new backdoor that they'll use to wreak havoc. Where possible we need to stay ahead of the cyber criminals, and where we can't stay ahead we need to be right behind them to minimise the damage they cause.

One approach to be considered is creation of a role similar to that of the Chief Scientist, who is appointed by the government with an objective of "advancing science for a healthy, sustainable and prosperous Australia". A new Chief Technology Officer role could be created, with a mandate for promoting the use of technology and embedding issues of cybersafety in the national consciousness. This role would be responsible for working with industry experts and government agencies to coordinate activities like:

- Promoting innovation and the use of technology to boost productivity and competitiveness
- Advocating cybersafety and raising awareness of the latest threats through all forms of media
- Coordinating responses to cyber threats across industry, various levels of government and law enforcement organisations
- Conducting long-term national awareness campaigns to promote cybersafety. For example, we would envision a campaign similar to the "Life Be In It" campaign promoted exercise and healthy lifestyle choices over many years.
- Providing educational materials to electronics retailers and other organisations like WorkVentures who are supplying technology to senior Australians when buying their first computer.

Alternatively the Department of Broadband, Communications and the Digital Economy could appoint someone who could be their public face in promoting issues relating to technology and cybersafety.

## Conclusion

At WorkVentures we're proud of the role we play in supplying thousands of computers to senior Australians and other low income households each year. When we talk to seniors who have purchased a computer they rave about the benefits of being able access to online services, of the reduced social isolation that comes from the contacting family, friends or people they've never met but have similar interests, and of the joy they get from using computers for entertainment.

America's Edward Kennedy once coined the term "ripples of hope", which are acts or ideas that can improve the lot of others. At WorkVentures we see our initiative to supply refurbished computers as providing ripples of hope in the lives of senior Australians and other low income households. We want to avoid that hope and opportunity being diminished by cyber-crime, and encourage the government to provide leadership in expanding educational campaigns to raise the national awareness of the importance of cybersafety.