

# Will Get Safe Online ever achieve critical mass without the resources to do its job?

Get Safe Online (GSOL) is a uniquely British institution; under-funded, under-resourced but fighting on against the odds to achieve its objectives. An example of Public-Private Partnership (PPP) that appears to be working well, GSOL is not a government agency, but a separate legal entity that draws funds from Whitehall and other sponsors to raise public awareness of Internet security.

Though established in its present format as recently as 2005, the organisation has launched an impressive array of online resources designed to reduce the likelihood of private and business users experiencing security problems while on the Internet.

Typical of these is the personal security checklist on its web site; offering the kind of advice which old IT hands might argue should be obvious to anyone, but which have been set out in one place to promote good user practices.

Despite their name, these 'personal' guidelines are equally applicable to businesses, particularly the very small and SME operations who use the Internet extensively within their operations. Specifically for the business community is a resource which includes highly relevant advice on how to avoid staff wasting time on the Internet, and the merits of encrypting business data to prevent theft.

With a growing number of Internet users who do not have any previous IT experience, the kind of advice being offered there can make all the difference between using the Internet safely and falling prey to any one of the pernicious scams that are circulating.

## Advice across a broad spectrum

GSOL casts a wide net: elsewhere on its site is advice on the safe use of online dating services, for example, and a risk-assessment quiz. It reacts rapidly to new threats as they emerge: it is taking 'mishing' on board – a distinct flavour of phishing which uses mobile phones.



*Tony Neate,  
MD of Get Safe Online*

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It is not surprising, therefore, that GSOL attracted favourable comment from the Committee report, being described as “... the closest thing in this country to a comprehensive, unified source of information on online security and safety.” As the study goes on to say, it is sponsored jointly by the Government, the Serious Organised Crime Agency, major IT companies such as Microsoft, and companies from the financial services sector like HSBC.

Despite this impressive roll call of Blue Chip organisations contracted to support it, GSOL is delivering services within constraints that few executives in the commercial world would be prepared to accept. Discovering that it is based at the Cabinet Office at the heart of UK Government, it would be easy to assume that GSOL is just another well-oiled quango.

In practice, Get Safe Online is a company limited by guarantee, giving it a legal identity distinct from the government and its sponsors: the only funds that it has to spend are whatever it can raise through its own initiatives.

## Part-time management

Run as a not-for-profit organisation, it has a conventional board structure and a steering committee on which each of the lead sponsors – including the Government – are members. Describing the structure as ‘conventional’, however, belies the fact that the four members of the GSOL management team are all part-time, contracted for two or three days a week depending on their role.

MD Tony Neate is no exception, a remarkable situation given the responsibility that the company has for communicating the ‘message’ of Internet safety and security. Like his colleagues at the centre of GSOL, Neate is passionate about his responsibilities and the challenges facing the organisation as the number and variety of threats facing the Internet user grows exponentially.

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**Risks from removable devices**

Tiny handheld devices now have memory capacities that dwarf computer disks of a decade ago. For example:

- A portable music player could store 60 gigabytes of data - enough to copy a typical hard disk.
- A thumb-size memory stick can store 512 megabytes - enough for a personnel database and hundreds of word documents. This is equivalent to 364 floppy disks.
- Many phones, PDAs, cameras can be connected to PCs with a cable or infra-red link and can be used to transfer computer data.
- Many computers have CD-ROM burners which can write 640 megabytes of data to a blank CD.
- With broadband internet connections, employees can email vast quantities of data out of the office without anyone knowing.

The risks are obvious:

- A salesman quits but takes your customer database with him.
- A corrupt employee sells private data to criminals.
- Industrial espionage.
- Sabotage or extortion.
- Even if such data transfer is legitimate, there is a risk that these devices could be lost or stolen.

up a gear? "There is certainly a great deal of goodwill and enthusiasm for the work that is being done by Get Safe Online.

"When we invite the organisations that are making those supportive noises to become sponsors, however, we are told that they don't have the funds to commit. In terms of the total marketing budget of the larger organisations, what we are seeking represents just a small percentage of their annual spend in that area. Yet the same sum of money is essential to us if we are to provide advice and information at a rate that matches the emerging threats."

It is clear that administration costs within GSOL have been pared to the bone: the organisation is now in a position where virtually every pound of new money can be devoted to providing services. Neate is keen to see the web site develop to include video clips and podcasts, for example – making it more 'digestible' to the younger generation regarded as being at serious risk from the Internet.

Advertising and marketing will absorb whatever else GSOL can attract by way of additional funds: without a constant campaign through the media and every other available opportunity, awareness of Get Safe Online and its activities will remain limited.

In a 30-year career as a detective in the Police Service, Tony Neate dealt with a complete cross section of serious crime before moving in 1989 to the Commercial Fraud Squad where he ran investigations into large-scale serious and organised fraud for the next six years.

Moving into the investigation of hi-tech crime, he set up the Hi-Tech Crime Unit in South Wales Police, dealing with offences that have come to be associated with Internet usage today - hacking, online child abuse, denial of service attacks, cyber stalking, email abuse and phishing.

A subsequent appointment in 2001 with the newly formed National Hi-Tech Crime Unit based in London made Tony Neate a natural candidate for his present post when he retired from the Police in 2006. Is he frustrated by the lack of resources needed to help GSOL step

Part of the page on the GSOL site covering the threat to an SME of its data being stolen on removable drives.



[www.getsafeonline.org](http://www.getsafeonline.org)  
Expert advice for everyone

**Any risk of selling out principles?**

There must surely be a temptation for GSOL to 'sell out' to sponsorship from a vendor which sees the audience being addressed by the organisation as a lucrative marketplace that would justify its investment – a security software manufacturer, perhaps, 'branding' the site with its own identity and software products.

No matter how hard pressed Get Safe Online might become, Tony Neate and his colleagues could never accept such a proposition: they are insistent that the integrity of GSOL and its activities would never be compromised.

"For the same reason, we would never agree to being 'taken over' by the Government, although we value the contribution made by our directors from the Home Office and the Department for Business, Enterprise and Regulatory Reform." §