uk.missingkids.com

USING THE INTERNET AS A POLICING TOOL TO FIND MISSING CHILDREN

Home Office Police Research Award Report

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The views expressed in this document are those of the author and not necessarily those of the author's force or the Home Office.

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GLOSSARY

ACPO	Association of Chief Police Officers
ACPO(S)	Association of Scottish Chief Police Officers
CA	Computer Associates
CEO	Chief Executive Officer
Hub Force	Police Force supplying regional service
ICMEC	International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children
ISP	Internet Service Provider
MoU	Memorandum of Understanding
NCMEC	National Center for Missing and Exploited Children
NMPB	National Missing Persons Bureau
NMPH	National Missing Persons Help Line
PACT	Parents and Abducted Children Together

DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to the memory of Peter Sharpe, QPM, the former Chief Constable of Hertfordshire Constabulary whose vision and drive first brought missingkids to the United Kingdom.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Many people have contributed to the success of the missingkids project and it would be impossible to name them all. However the following people merit particular mention:

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Children who go missing from home cause a significant workload for police forces in the United Kingdom. Independent research suggests that around 77,000 children under 16 years go missing for the first time each year. Not all cases are notified to the police. In 1990, 43,000 young people under the age of 18 years were reported to the police as going missing.

In most of these cases the child returns quickly and safely. However each year there are a significant number of high profile or long-term missing child cases. These can generate a considerable amount of media interest, require significant police resources and, of course, cause a great deal of anguish to the family involved.

A key factor in finding a missing child is to have pictures of the child readily available to the police and the public. This research report examines the usefulness of the Internet and specifically the web site uk.missingkids.com in transmitting and publicising images of missing children.

The missingkids web site concept originated in the United States of America. The project is delivered in the United Kingdom through a partnership between a network of hub police forces, the charity Parents and Abducted Children Together (PACT) and the commercial company Computer Associates. The Home Office, ACPO and ACPO(S) support use of the web site to display images of children. The National Missing Persons Bureau has a co-ordinating and quality control role.

Key significant features of the web site are:

- The only costs to the police are personnel time for case management and the minimal costs of Internet access.
- Cases may only be placed on the site with the full agreement of the parent/guardian/carer and the police investigating officer.
- The site is not intended to feature all child cases as it does not provide a 24 hour, 365 day a year input capability in all areas. It is a supplement to not a replacement of the Police National Computer.
- The site produces full colour posters automatically, which can be downloaded, printed and distributed by both the police and the public.

- The posters can be produced in a wide range of languages to assist with cases of international abduction through in-built translation software.
- The site contents can be searched by name, country of report or descriptive details to assist in cases of recovered children or those whose details are thought to be false.
- The site content is fully protected by complex security from unauthorised interference.
- Photographs featured on the site can be scientifically adjusted to show age progression if the child has been missing for some years.

Because awareness of the missingkids web site in the United Kingdom is still growing, to date around 75 cases have been featured and its success as a policing tool cannot be fully evaluated. Research from America, where the web site has been in use for several years, shows that a recovery rate of 91% is achieved on children featured. The work of the American National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) that contributed to this high level of success has been examined in detail. This research report highlights aspects of the work of NCMEC that could inform practice in the United Kingdom.

This report examines the effectiveness of the unusual police / charity / industry partnership that delivers the missingkids web site as a policing tool. The research found the following aspects of the partnership to be significant and transferable to other partnership policing contexts.

- The government agency should have decision-making primacy in the partnership.
- The motivation of all partners must be clearly stated and agreed by all parties.
- The commercial partner cannot exploit the access the project gives to the police service for commercial reasons.
- The charitable partner should not expect financial recompense for services unless this clearly forms part of a Service Level Agreement.
- All partnership matters should be conducted to business principles e.g. meeting minutes, Memorandum of Understanding.
- All partners should commit resources. There should not be any obligation to have equality of provision in material or human resource terms.
- There should be an agreed media strategy supported by all partners.

This report has reached the following conclusions and recommendations.

1. The Internet is an effective, speedy and secure way to transmit images for policing purposes.

2. The missingkids web site should be used by all UK police forces for appropriate cases of missing children.

3. The capacity of the web site to quickly and easily produce posters for distribution to the police and the public is a particularly useful feature.

4. Any investigation of a child who has been missing for longer than 24 hours, particularly if it is thought that the child has left their home district, will benefit from the child's image being featured on the site.

5. The missingkids web site is particularly useful in cases of international abduction because of its in-built translation facility.

6. Co-ordination of information and investigation of missing child cases would be improved if the facilities offered by the American organisation NCMEC were replicated in the United Kingdom.

7. Use of a police / charity / industry partnership to provide an Internet-based policing service can be a cost-effective and efficient solution, provided business principles are applied.

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 When a child goes missing, it touches a nerve in everyone. Thankfully most children are found within hours and returned to the safety of their family. Unfortunately that is not always the case. During this research the sad case of Sarah Payne starkly raised public awareness of the potential danger for any child who goes missing. This case also showed the public desire to help find a missing child as scores of volunteers combed the countryside and thousands of potential sightings were reported to the incident room.

The concept behind the missingkids web site taps into this need to find a missing child quickly and the public desire to help. By making a picture of a missing child widely and easily available to be printed as a poster, the web site can greatly speed up a process that used to take days or weeks.

1.2 The purpose of this research project has been:

- To develop a United Kingdom branch of the international missing children web site.
- To ensure that the web site could be accessed by all UK police forces to support investigations into missing children.
- To promote knowledge amongst police forces and the general public of the web site and its capabilities.

1.3 The aim of the project has been to improve the process of making pictorial images of missing children available to the police and the general public by using the Internet to store and publish those pictures.

1.4 The objectives of this project report are:

- To describe the capabilities of the web site as a policing tool.
- To examine the effectiveness of the police / charity / commercial partnership in providing a policing service.
- To make recommendations on the use of the Internet as a policing tool in missing child investigations and other policing contexts.
- To examine the work of the American National Center for Missing and Exploited Children and consider how good practice from that organisation could be incorporated into missing persons policy in the United Kingdom.

1.5 There are many reasons why young people go missing ranging from problematic family backgrounds to a desire to seek adventure. Whatever the reason for the child or young person going missing, that child is clearly at risk. It is therefore essential that the police and other agencies seeking the child have the best means available to achieve the rapid recovery of the child to a place of safety. This report does not seek to examine the context of the issue of children going missing. In the course of this research many processes have been identified that could improve police effectiveness in dealing with the issue of missing people. This report will give an opportunity to gather information on all of these potential process improvements into one place. The report shares with a wide audience recommendations on improving the investigation of missing child cases.

2. THE BACKGROUND

2.1 Recent research by The Children's Society[1] suggests that around 77,000 children under the age of 16 years run away from home for the first time every year. Earlier research on police statistics[2] found that approximately 43,000 young people under 18 years were reported to the police as missing in 1990. The Children's Society report shows that 8-10% of these children under 16 years will stay away from home overnight. This means that between 4,000 and 7,000 children are at significant risk through being away from home for an extended period of time. The quoted research also indicates that females are more likely to run away than males and young people of African-Caribbean origin are more likely than average to run away. Young people who are looked after by the local authorities are particularly likely to be reported missing.[3]

2.2 Home Office research[4] conducted in 1999 showed that police forces in the United Kingdom were failing to address key aspects of the missing person issue. Few forces could supply accurate data on the number of persons going missing. Liaison with other forces on cross border cases was sketchy. Child runaways, particularly looked after children, were not being investigated in a way appropriate to a vulnerable missing person.

2.3 An essential investigative tool in any missing person investigation are a picture of a missing child and posters to publicise the image of the child to the public. The traditional way of doing this has been to design, produce and print posters, which are then distributed to relevant police stations by mail, internal despatches or other methods. All of these processes are time consuming and delay the availability of the picture to the public. In addition the poster is generally only visible to the small number of people who happen to notice it on police station notice boards. In high profile cases, the press and television can be enlisted to broadcast the missing child's image. However this coverage is temporary, possibly even being only one day's copy in most cases. The police have therefore not previously had a simple, quick and permanent way of transmitting and

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[1] Still Running: Children on the Streets in the UK – Safe on the Streets Research Team

[2] Young Runaways: Exploding the Myths – Abrahams and Mungall (1992)

[3] op cit. and Going Missing: Young People Absent from Care – Wade *et al* (1998)

[4] Missing Presumed… by Geoff Newiss, National Crime Faculty (1999)

publicising images of missing children throughout the time that the child is missing. The missingkids web site provides the police service with this essential policing tool for those investigating missing children.

2.4 The early history of the missingkids web site

2.4.1 The missingkids web site was originally conceived in the United States of America. In 1981, 6-year-old Adam Walsh was abducted from a shopping mall in Florida. His desperate parents, John and Revé Walsh, came to Washington, DC, seeking help. They discovered that there was no national response to the problem. Eventually the Walsh's son Adam's body was discovered. This was a tragic end to the life of Adam Walsh, but it became the beginning of the story for the missingkids web site. The Walsh family turned their anger and grief into action. In 1984, John Walsh co-founded the private, non-profit National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC).

2.4.2 The missingkids web site itself began from a chance meeting between John Walsh and the Chief Executive Officer of Computer Associates, Charles B. Wang. Hearing the story of how difficult it had been to quickly circulate details and a picture of John Walsh's missing son, Mr Wang recognised the usefulness of the emerging Internet technology in rapidly transmitting images from place to place.

2.4.3 Using the skills of his company to develop the site and enlisting political help to influence policy, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children became the hub for the web site http://www.missingkids.com the first link in the world-wide network. The National Center has gradually built into the co-ordinating body for all activity on missing, abducted and exploited children in America. A key factor in this was the introduction of legislation directing all police services in America – of which there are over 17,000 – to advise the National Center of cases of missing children. The wide range of work of the National Center is described in greater detail in Appendix A.

2.4.4 Because of the rise in the number of international parental abductions and the worldwide nature of the Internet, it was a natural step to expand the use of the missingkids web site beyond the United States of America. Through contacts in other aspects of NCMEC's work, the Head of the Paedophilia Unit at New Scotland Yard introduced the missingkids web site concept to the United Kingdom. It was

agreed to run a trial of the concept from December 1998 in the Metropolitan and Hertfordshire police areas to assess its usefulness.

2.4.5 After six months it was concluded that the concept was showing useful potential as a policing tool and it would be rolled out for use by all police forces in the United Kingdom. Two years on from that decision, the network of participating forces now covers the whole of the United Kingdom. Awareness of the site is growing and the numbers of children featured on the site is growing gradually.

2.4.6 Whilst the UK site has been developing, the site has come into use in many other countries including the Netherlands, Belgium, Italy, South Africa, Australia, India, Canada, Brazil, Argentina and Chile. The eventual hope is that all police forces in the world will know and use the web site to transmit images of children who have gone missing. This will make it harder for those who abduct children unlawfully to have any hiding place and hopefully, it will ensure that missing and abducted children can be restored to their home quickly and safely. The American site achieves a positive resolution in over 90% of the cases that they feature on the site. This level of success has been achieved in the United Kingdom by the Hertfordshire hub. It is to be hoped that this success rate will soon be replicated throughout the UK and all round the world.

3. OPERATION OF THE WEB SITE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

3.1 Support and Funding

3.1.1 Before explaining the technical aspects of the web site, it is important to understand the unique partnership behind the concept. The web site is for the sole use of the police service and all cases are placed on the web site by the police service. However Computer Associates and other commercial enterprises as a philanthropic gesture have donated the technical equipment and expertise behind the web site. The design of the web site and day-to-day management of the site is provided by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in Washington. The web site is therefore a partnership between the police, industry and an international charity. It is clearly understood that the police service has primacy in case management of missing children and that the site is there to support this case management.

3.1.2 The contributions of the partners in the missingkids project are difficult to precisely quantify. However, the financial cost to the police service has been very low. The police provide professional expertise in identifying appropriate cases, negotiating with the relevant parents or carers and personnel time in placing cases on the site and removing them when the child is found. The Police National Missing Persons Bureau (PNMPB) at New Scotland Yard manages quality control of case content and audit of prompt case removal. In addition, there has been a commitment of time to the project during the implementation phase of several officers who have demonstrated the concept and trained staff in its use. Now that the project is established, the costs to the police service will be reduced further. The resource impacts will be staff time for management of the site in the various hub forces and at the Police National Missing Persons Bureau, and the minimal cost of the telephone link and calls to the Internet server.

3.1.3 The contribution of Computer Associates and other commercial partners to the project has been considerable. CA provides the software that runs the site and the Internet portal. This includes the complex security arrangements within the site to prevent unauthorised interference with site contents. The Sun computer servers in this country and the mainframe in the USA are also supplied free of charge. In addition each hub force that places cases on the site has been supplied with a computer, scanner, printer and Internet linking hardware together with all

associated software required. CA also provides back-up technical help with hardware and software and has trained the staff using the site at no cost. The generosity of Computer Associates contribution to the project cannot be underestimated. The contribution is also not linked to any desire for commercial advantage. This would not have been an acceptable arrangement to the police service in this country. The contribution is solely because of the CEO Charles B. Wang's personal commitment of his company's skills and resources to helping to find missing and abducted children.

3.1.4 The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children, who are a United States charity, originally set up the web site and still provide the 'web master' who deals with design and enhancement of the site. During the course of the project, the National Center has provided advice and expertise. As well as this, two staff from the Metropolitan Police have been trained in age progression skills by the National Center at no cost. As the project has developed, an International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children (ICMEC) has been developed as a linked but independent part of the web site concept. The police service and ICMEC work co-operatively on relevant issues.

3.2 Management of the Web Site

3.2.1 The uk.missingkids.com web site is managed in the UK by a network of hub forces – one force per ACPO region. Each hub force has been provided with equipment and training to input material to the web site.

These forces will provide web site services to the other forces in their region. The Police National Missing Persons Bureau will carry out quality control and monitoring of the web site. The ACPO Missing Persons Forum encourages use of the web site by police.

3.2.2 The hub forces are:

- London – Metropolitan Police
- East and South East – Hertfordshire Constabulary
- East Midlands – Northamptonshire Constabulary
- West Midlands – Staffordshire Constabulary
- North West – Lancashire Constabulary
- North East – South Yorkshire Police
- South West – Avon & Somerset
- Wales – South Wales Police
- Scotland – Scottish Criminal Records Office
- Northern Ireland – Police Service of Northern Ireland

3.2.3 All police forces have access to free use of uk.missingkids.com to publicise details of children that go missing. Any child classified as Missing, Abducted or Unidentified and aged under 18 years at the time of their disappearance (this relates to a person's true age, not mental age) may be featured on the site. No adults are to be placed on the web site unless they were under 18 years of age at the time they disappeared, or they are believed to be in the company of a missing child who is also being featured on web site. ICMEC instructions specifically state that police "…*may not place a photograph, poster, or any other information on this web site unless the case is related to a missing, abducted or unidentified child*". It is also not felt appropriate to feature post mortem photographs of unidentified children on the site.

3.2.4 A Guide has been produced to assist police forces that wish to use the site. This is published as a separate document, which has been circulated to all UK police services. The business relationship between the investigating force and the hub force managing the site is contained in a memorandum of understanding within the Guide document. The Guide is available to be downloaded from the web site.

3.3 Special Features of the Web Site that Assist Police

Once details are on the site, police services and the general public throughout the world can access them. To assist users of the site, the web site front page has a "Most Recent Cases" hyperlink. This takes the web site visitor through to those particular children. Once there, there is a further hyperlink to "All UK Cases". It is

therefore very simple for a user to see all of the current cases from this country. If a police user at, for example a port, wanted to check if an incoming child was reported missing, there is a more complex search facility available. This search page can work against various criteria including country of origin and descriptive details, as well as name searches.

It should be emphasised that the site is **not** intended to replace in any way the U.K. Police National Computer system missing/wanted person facilities. Police users should always use the PNC facility in conjunction with the web site. The added value of the web site is the clear and easily available picture of the child.

3.3.1 Production of Posters

The web site can be used to produce posters of missing children quickly and easily. The child's image has a link (View Poster), when the site user clicks on this, a poster is automatically produced ready to be printed. The key aspects of the poster facility are:

- The poster content is agreed by the hub force with the investigating force.
- Content includes key contact numbers for persons with information about the missing child.
- The freephone line available through the National Missing Persons Bureau is publicised on every poster.
- The posters are produced in colour but can be reproduced in black and white with no loss of image quality.
- Posters can be printed in many different languages using the web site's in-built translator facility.

An example of a typical web site produced poster is at the end of this section.

To improve public visibility of the missing children, posters from uk.missingkids.com will be displayed from early 2002 in the stores of a major supermarket chain, Tesco Stores Plc.

Missing Person

CHRISTOPHER GILLHAM

DOB: may-15-1993
Missing: mar-29-1997
Age Now: 8 years
Sex: M
Hair: Lt. Brown
Eye: Blue
Height: 3'4" - 102 Cm
Weight: 0 lbs - 0 kg
Missing From:
LONDON
UK

Age Progressed

Christopher believed to be in company of his father who had contact rights. Father failed to return child to his mother who has full custody. Believed last seen in Canary Islands September 1999 with father who is described as being:- 6' tall; dark hair, blue eyes and medium build.

ANYONE HAVING INFORMATION SHOULD CONTACT
Metropolitan Police Service
National Missing Persons Helpline - Freecall 0500 700700 OR
Belvedere Police Station, 2 Nuxley Road, Belvedere, Kent, DA17 5JF, England. Tel. 01322-441212

Figure 1 - Example of Website Poster

3.3.2 Protection of Site Content from Unauthorised Tampering (Hacking)

The site is freely accessible by the public, but is protected by complex security to prevent unauthorised interference with information on the web site. This system ensures:

- All hits on the site are logged and can be tracked back to the originating computer.
- The information on the site is on two levels: a public domain and police domain. The police side is protected by password and digital encryption technology that has proved highly resistant to 'hackers'.
- The protection that is built into the software has proved extremely resilient and there has been no unauthorised use of images from the site.
- It is possible to trace back to the original computer any access to the site. The site could act as an investigative tool to identify users of the site.

3.3.3 Age Progression

A particularly useful aspect of the site for police forces is the availability of age progression techniques. Children, particularly those in parental abduction cases, can be missing for some years. Obviously, as a child grows, their appearance can change quite significantly. The web site has available trained staff who can enhance a photograph of a child to look as that child may appear at its current age.

The way that this is achieved is:

- Reference photographs from parents, siblings and other relatives who are felt to resemble the child, which were taken at the current age of the missing child are obtained.
- Computer software is then used to blend the images.
- A degree of artistic licence and skill is applied to the merged images to obtain a finished product.

(An example is shown at the end of this section of age progressed images together with a picture of the child on recovery. This illustrates the effectiveness of this technique.)

Although the technique is resource intensive, age progression techniques can be obtained at no charge through the web site. Because the technique is felt to be of such usefulness in relevant cases, the National Missing Persons Bureau and Metropolitan Police have a number of trained staff available to produce the images. As forces have started using the web site, several old cases of outstanding missing children have been featured. By using age progression, the image featured on the site can be a better reflection of the child's current appearance.

3.4 Summary of Main Web Site Features

- The web site is available for use by all UK police forces through a network of regional hubs.

- The web site is provided through a partnership between the police, industry and charity. It is provided free of charge as a philanthropic gesture.

- The only costs to the police are personnel time for site and case management and the minimal costs of Internet access.

- Cases may only be placed on the site with the full agreement of the parent/guardian/carer and the police investigating officer.

- The site is not intended to feature all child cases, as it is not a 24 hour, 365 day a year service. It is a supplement to not a replacement of the Police National Computer.

- The site produces full colour posters automatically, which can be downloaded, printed and distributed by both the police and the public.

- The posters can be produced in a wide range of languages to assist with cases of international abduction through in-built translation software.

- The site contents can be searched by name, country of report or descriptive details.

- The site content is fully protected from unauthorised interference.

- Photographs featured on the site can be age progressed if the child has been missing for some years.

Figure 2 - A comparison of an age progressed photograph with that of the recovered child

4. AN ASSESSMENT OF THE USEFULNESS OF THE WEB SITE AS A POLICING TOOL

4.1 A Review of Cases featured on the site

4.1.1 Since the beginning of the project, around 75 cases have been featured on the web site. The exact number is not clear as details of some early Metropolitan cases were not retained when the cases were deleted from the site when the children were recovered safely. Of the 52 cases featured that have been subject of detailed analysis, 21 have been concluded with the child's recovery. This represents 40.3% of the cases featured. In one case, the recovery was the finding of the child's deceased body. In the other 20 cases the child has been recovered safely. In a further 4 cases, the child has been located by local law enforcement agencies and legal action is in progress to recover the child to the lawful guardian. A summary of a few case histories that illustrate the ways the site has proved useful are contained in Appendix C.

4.1.2 All cases featured on the site have been analysed using the following criteria:

- The time from missing report to placement on the site.
- The time the report remains on the site.
- The time from placement to recovery.

The results of this analysis have been examined and show an observable trend: the shorter the time lapse between the missing child report and the child being placed on the site, the greater the chance of recovery. The longest time lapse that has resulted in recovery so far is 7 months between report and site placement. Unfortunately the sample size is as yet too small to assess the statistical significance of this finding. This graph clearly shows how the gap in time to recovery grows significantly as site placement is delayed.

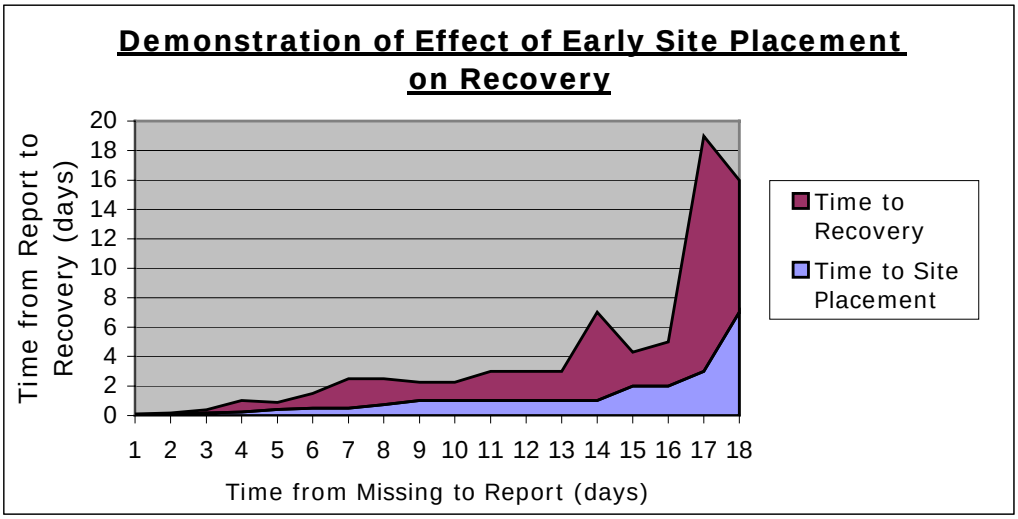

Figure 3 - Graph illustrating the effect of early site placement on recovery

4.1.3 It has been the long-standing hope of the Implementation Group for the web site that there would be a child recovery that would be directly attributable to the web site. However, the nature of police work is such that any successful case resolution is difficult to attribute to one single cause. In addition, the information that leads to recovery would often be indiscreet to investigate e.g. confidential information sources ('informants'). There have been strong links suggested by investigators. These are also summarised in Appendix C. The UK experience is a reflection of the American situation. The web site contributes by making posters of the child freely available and potentially widely distributed. This greatly increases the chance of useful information being received, and hence greatly increases the chance of the child's recovery.

4.1.4 In the early days of the site, mistakes were made and telephone contact details featured on the posters were not always answered 24 hours a day. It is for this reason that the web site Implementation Group has agreed a tie-in with the National Missing Person Bureau so that their free phone facility can be featured on UK generated posters. This facility combined with the improved ability of the National Missing Persons Bureau to co-ordinate cases will hopefully mean that information received about missing child can be received and referred to the investigating officer for action in a cohesive way.

4.1.5 Whilst the prompt feature of a case on the site has shown a tendency to be a positive factor in recovery, this is not an exact science. Even though several

cases have appeared on the site within a few weeks or months of the child going missing, these have not resulted in recovery. When these cases are examined, all of them feature children who are in their late teens. This may indicate that the children featured are of an age when they have gone missing to live independent lives and have no wish to return to their families.

4.1.6 Any child under 18 years must be considered at risk when missing. Investigators need to fully assess the appropriateness of the child being featured on the site in the context of the background to the case. It is also important that cases featured on the site are subject of review at regular intervals and, if the child's image on the site is no longer appropriate for whatever reason, the case should be withdrawn. It is recommended that part of the function of the National Missing Persons Bureau in its quality control of the site content is to prompt case reviews by investigating officers.

4.1.7 The review of cases featured on the site has indicated the following key conclusions:

- Chances of recovery are improved if there is a short time delay between the missing report and the child's image being featured on the site.
- In cases with a long time delay since the missing report, age progression can assist the chances of success.
- Investigators can usefully use the in-built translation facility in cases of international abduction.
- Cases featured should be subject of regular review, particularly with older teenagers; it is recommended that this should happen at least every 6 months.
- There is a need for a central co-ordinating function to make the web site most effective. The National Missing Persons Bureau's enhanced role is beginning to provide this function.
- Contact details featured on site posters must be available to the public 24 hours a day.

4.2 Issues relating to provision of an Investigative Policing Tool through Partnership

4.2.1 The missingkids web site is provided through a partnership arrangement between the police, industry and a charity. The missingkids web site is controlled and

driven by the police, even though the key financial backing comes from philanthropic sources. An essential success factor in the missingkids partnership has been the acceptance of the police as the project leaders at all stages. The commercial and charitable representatives accepted that the project would only succeed if it was led by police and accepted by the police establishment.

4.2.2 The nature of the political environment in the police service is such that it is difficult for those outside the service to understand. The commercial and charitable partners have had difficulty understanding the implementation process in the UK. In most other countries there has been a national law enforcement agency, which can agree and implement the use of the site. In the UK it has been necessary to deal on a much more local basis with the 55 police forces in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland to achieve the national network.

4.2.3 It has been a fundamental principle that the site is not to be exploited for commercial gain. From the earliest development stage of the site in the USA, it has been understood that the web site is operated for the benefit of law enforcement agencies. Normally, there is a synergy within partnerships built on the mutual gains that each side makes. In contrast to this, the police receive tremendous benefits compared to the commercial and charitable partners. This imbalance has not affected the effectiveness of the partnership in any way.

4.2.4 It has been a concern from some police services throughout that the commercial success of the supporting companies may be linked to the web site. Police forces are users of Computer Associates, Hewlett Packard and other supporter company products. However, the support of the web site has not been mentioned or used in any way to attempt to gain commercial advantage in buying decisions. Other than minimal branding of the site with the commercial logos of the companies, the extent of the financial and resource commitment of Computer Associates and other companies is not exploited for marketing gains.

4.2.5 The motivation for the commercial partners' involvement at the beginning of the project in America in 1994 was a philanthropic gesture to support missing children being found. This has remained the motivation to this day. This was strikingly evidenced in a practical way at the 2000 ACPO IT and Security Exhibition in Birmingham. As well as donating a section of their stand, Computer Associates staff put as much energy into promoting support for the web site as

they did into selling their products.

4.2.6 One of the delays in the early implementation of the site was the expressed need from the police side to have a clear Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) of the partnership arrangement. This took some time to agree and, whilst it has proved a necessary document of reassurance to hub forces as the network has grown, there has never been any cause for concern that partners would not fulfil their part of the MoU. The reality has been that the commercial and charitable partners have been tremendously supportive of the project at all stages.

4.2.7 The contribution of Computer Associates and other computer hardware and software companies to the growth of the site has been purely as a philanthropic venture to aid the recovery of missing and abducted children. It has been gratifying that the support given in America because of the backing of the CEO Charles B. Wang has been replicated in the UK. The UK operation of Computer Associates has committed much staff time and other resources to the development of the web site in the UK. It has always been clear that their role is to support the police in developing the site. As well as supplying equipment and technical expertise, Computer Associates and its staff have contributed PR advice, meeting facilities, printing and publishing of materials and other help.

4.2.8 The National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC), an American charity, also have a fundamental role in the management of the web site. NCMEC staff using donated equipment and software control the design and management of the site. Cultural misunderstandings of the police environment have caused a few minor difficulties. The use of e:mail to communicate has generally made dealing with America as simple as working with a UK partner. It has always been clear that NCMEC would bow to local police judgement on issues. There has never been any dispute of the fact that the police are the lead agency.

4.3 Related Issues to Web Site Effectiveness

4.3.1 When this research project commenced in March 2000, the implementation of the missingkids web site had been in progress for over a year. At that stage, the proposed network of forces was apparently well advanced and it was hoped that the national network would have been in place within a few months. The reality has been that it has taken until June 2001 to achieve the final links in the

national network.

4.3.2 This has proved frustrating in the context of the research because it has inhibited attempts to objectively assess the contribution the web site has made to missing child cases featured on it. There was no single factor that caused the implementation delays. However, a key factor that must be acknowledged is that the project has achieved progress whilst being implemented to a great extent in the 'spare time' of the staff involved. It is impossible, given the many other delaying factors caused by bureaucracy and other negative factors, to objectively judge whether the project would have achieved a national network sooner if staff had been dedicated full time.

4.3.3 It was the hope of the Implementation team at the beginning of the project that at least one case would be resolved in which the web site had made a clearly demonstrable contribution. It became clear when the original web site source in America was visited that there is virtually never an unequivocal link between recovery of a child and the web site.

4.3.4 Part of the development within the web site project is to ensure that, as far as practicable, similar services to those of NCMEC in America are available to support missing children from the UK. Services that are replicated in the UK include:

- The free phone contact number that is available through the National Missing Persons Bureau.

- Speedy image transfer is available through the missingkids web site. Police forces have the web site poster production facility.

- Investigations are managed and co-ordinated by the police sometimes using HOLMES major incident IT facilities.

- The National Missing Persons Bureau has a linking and co-ordinating function within its current resource limited capability.

  In addition to the National Missing Persons Helpline, The Children's Society, Salvation Army, REUNITE and other charities provide support services of various kinds to missing person enquiries. Unfortunately, whilst there are

some links between organisations, all those involved do not have regular opportunities and protocols for liaison and co-operation.

4.3.5 An additional factor that limits effectiveness in the UK is the fact that funding for missing person issues is relatively limited. Many of the organisations mentioned in the previous paragraph are solely reliant on charitable donation. Their ability to contribute is therefore directly related to their income. Even in the case of government agencies, resource commitment outside of major enquiries such as the Sarah Payne case is limited. Few forces have officers dedicated to missing person issues. It is normally a small part of a wider responsibility. The National Missing Person Bureau has had to negotiate over many months to achieve funding to increase the staffing level from one person.

4.3.6 Obviously funding in a government organisation has to be prioritised as accurately as possible to key issues and organisational risks. The police service has only recently woken up to the true risk level of missing persons and missing children. Issues such as repeat runaways from children's homes and the general assumption of speedy recovery in most missing person cases has an overly significant influence on risk assessment. Recent research[5] indicated that 206 people reported missing had been discovered dead. Whilst this is only a small proportion of the missing, the resource commitment needed to resolve a suspicious or unexplained death should be taken into account when the resources committed to missing persons issues are considered.

4.3.7 Another factor adversely affecting the risk assessment is the lack of clear management information. All of the literature researched makes the point that the true number of persons who go missing each year – including children – is not known. Most police forces do not have an effective database for missing person information let alone an IT tool that assists and informs investigation. It could be argued that, if the Police National Computer (PNC) was used to its full capability, it could greatly assist missing person investigation. However, the PNC lacks image capability and it is likely to be some years before PNC attains rapid image transfer. It was interesting to note when visiting the Scottish Criminal Record Office that the system in Scotland already has an image capability.

[5] Missing Presumed… Police Research Group paper by Geoff Newiss

4.3.8 The ideal solution would be if all police forces used a common IT system for the management of missing person cases. This could then finally give the truest possible picture of the extent of the missing person issue. This could then lead to the issue being adequately funded and supported. The current work by the Metropolitan Police on the MERLIN system and work in Gloucestershire and other forces on the IMPACT system may provide the basis for a national solution.

5. SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

5.1. The partnership arrangement behind the implementation illustrates key points that have proved to be critical success factors in the development of the web site as a policing tool. These critical success factors should be borne in mind in any future such partnership between commercial and charitable partners and the police service.

The following is a summary of the identified critical success factors.

- The government agency should have primacy over decision making in the partnership.
- The motivation of all partners must be clearly stated and agreed by all parties.
- The commercial partner cannot exploit the access gained to the police service for commercial reasons.
- The charitable partner should not expect financial recompense for services unless this clearly forms part of a Service Level Agreement.
- All partnership matters should be conducted to business principles e.g. meeting minutes, Memorandum of Understanding.
- All partners should commit resources. However there should not be any necessity to have equality of provision in material or human resource terms.
- There should be an agreed media strategy supported by all partners.

5.2 In relation to investigation of missing children cases, the following key points have been identified:

- There is a need for a co-ordinating body to link all missing person investigation activity.

- There is a need for a national database system to allow accurate management information on missing persons to be collated. Good practice in Scotland and with the Metropolitan Police and other police forces may provide a lead.

- The provision of funding and personnel to missing persons issues nationally and in individual forces needs to be re-considered in the light of the potential organisational risks.

- There is scope to expand the functions and staffing of the National Missing Persons Bureau further. This would allow the best practice model of NCMEC to be closely replicated.

5.3 Conclusion

The review of the cases featured shows that the web site can be useful in finding missing children. As the network is used more widely, as the posters are displayed in a wider range of public venues, this level of success will grow. Perhaps in the future the UK site will have the 90%+ success rate that the American site achieves.

This report has reached the following conclusions and recommendations.

1. The Internet is an effective, speedy and secure way to transmit images for policing purposes.

2. The missingkids web site should be used by all UK police forces for appropriate cases of missing children.

3. The capacity of the web site to produce posters quickly and easily for distribution to the police and the public is a particularly useful feature.

4. Any investigation of a child who has been missing for longer than 24 hours, particularly if it is thought that the child has left their home district, will benefit from the child's image being featured on the site.

5. The missingkids web site is particularly useful in cases of international abduction because of its in-built translation facility.

6. Co-ordination of information and investigation of missing child cases would be improved if the facilities offered by the American organisation NCMEC were replicated in the United Kingdom.

7. Use of a police / charity / industry partnership to provide an Internet-based policing service can be a cost-effective and efficient solution provided business principles are applied.

8. The National Missing Persons Bureau can provide a key link for use of the web site. It should have the resources and authority to prompt forces to feature missing children, encourage case reviews regularly and to advise and assist investigations e.g. with age progression technology.

The web site is already a success because it has provoked debate that has led to the improvement of the management and investigation of missing child cases. No matter what is achieved in the future, this will have been a worthwhile contribution to the police service.

APPENDIX A - THE WORK OF THE NATIONAL CENTER FOR MISSING AND EXPLOITED CHILDREN, WASHINGTON DC

Introduction

1. As part of the research and development of uk.missingkids.com in the UK, the originating centre of the web site, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in America was visited. The research visit was spent intensively examining the work of the National Center and its operations. The findings from this visit have already informed the development of missing person management in the UK and go well beyond the web site concept. The most impressive point about the National Center is the way that the range of services for missing children are drawn together into an efficient and effective whole by being in one place. There is certainly much to learn from this arrangement.

2. Based in Alexandria, Virginia, which is just outside the American capital Washington, the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) is the key American resource centre for child protection. NCMEC serves as a focal point in providing assistance to parents, children, law enforcement, schools, and the community in recovering missing children and raising public awareness about ways to help prevent child abduction, molestation, and sexual exploitation. NCMEC has worked on more than 73,000 cases of missing and exploited children, helped recover more than 48,000 children, and raised its recovery rate from 60 percent in the 1980s to 91 percent today, thereby gaining national and international recognition as "the" resource for missing and exploited children.

3. Surprisingly, with it being America's main resource centre for child protection issues, NCMEC is a non-government, non-profit charitable organisation. NCMEC spends 91 percent of its revenue directly on programs and services. NCMEC operate from the Charles B. Wang International Children's Building, which was provided by philanthropic donation. NCMEC is a somewhat unusual charity in UK terms because of its close links to and involvement in issues that would be seen as the work of statutory agencies in this country. However, the links to relevant statutory agencies are very close, even to the extent that there are 2 FBI agents stationed in the NCMEC headquarters to provide liaison support to American

police forces.

4. In 1989 NCMEC had a staff of 40. Today NCMEC has developed into a 125-person organisation. Most work provided by NCMEC is conducted, developed, analysed, and completed on-site at its headquarters utilising state-of-the-art technology, highly trained professionals, and committed staff, interns, and volunteers.

5. NCMEC has several key functions relating to children:
   - Work to record and trace missing and abducted children.
   - Investigation of child exploitation through the Internet.
   - Education and training of law enforcement officers and other child care specialists.
   - The provision of information literature on child safety to parents, teachers and carers.
   - The subsidiary International Centre to promote worldwide activity.

   The work carried out by NCMEC in all these areas is recognised as providing a lead to organisations throughout the world. Many of the functions of the National Center are similar to functions available to police services in the United Kingdom. However the drawing together of the wide range of functions into a cohesive service to support missing and exploited children is something from which we could learn in the UK.

Work with Missing and Abducted Children

1. The National Center provides a comprehensive service to law enforcement agencies and the families of children that go missing. The obvious work in the context of this report is the web site. However this is a small part of NCMEC's support to this field of policing. In addition to the web site, NCMEC also have a 24 hour free Helpline, a case management unit and partnering agreements with commercial organisations to get children home.

2. The web site works in a very similar way in the USA to the UK. However there are a few differences that, if the opportunity were available may be usefully developed in the UK. The first of these differences is the 24 hour hot line facility 1-800-THE-LOST (843-5678). The free telephone line allows calls relating to missing children to be received at one point and then appropriately actioned. All

calls to the hot line are taped in case information is received that could form part of a case file or investigation. Using the AT&T Language Line service, the hot line can receive calls in 140 different languages making it accessible immediately and effectively to the wide range of cultural and ethnic groups in America. The number receives over 600 calls a day on average of which around 270 are referred on for further action within the National Center. Since the project started in 1984, the line has received over one and a half million calls (1,552,180).

3. All calls about missing children are referred to the National Runaway switchboard for referral to the Case Management unit. This unit is available 24 hours a day and seven days a week either directly or by an on-call process. The Case Management Unit (CMU) will only deal with cases that have been reported to the police, though part of the initial case management can include counselling to the family to involve the local law enforcement agency if not already reported. All cases are subject of a risk assessment. Children under 13 years of age are immediately classified as endangered runaways, a 13-17 year old will only become endangered if missing for over 30 days or there are physical or mental illnesses or impairments that increase the risk factor. The CMU works to very strict guidelines that are constantly monitored. The first target is that all reported cases will get a call back to the affected family by a case worker within one working day of the call being received. The family are then advised of the steps that they can take in co-operation with their local law enforcement agency to find their child and the help that is available. This is a tremendous logistic achievement given that the Unit at the time of my visit had only 4 full time Case Managers and 12 Support Case Workers.

4. It is not the job of the CMU to deal with the case. The National Center has no investigative authority within its remit. As in the UK, primacy in management of missing children cases is very firmly in the hands of the police. However the CMU has a liaison and facilitation role that is intended to enhance the police function. For example, it is commonly the case that the CMU can bring together disparate information from a variety of sources and advise the investigators of potential leads that may not otherwise come to light.

5. A key task of the Case Management Unit is the preparation of case details for featuring on the web site. The unit will manage the consent process and ensure that the relevant information is obtained and forwarded to the National Center for

insertion as a case entry. In appropriate cases this can involve the creation of age progressed images or obtaining images of an abducting parent. The CMU agree the entry details and poster appearance with the local investigating police officer and also the range of poster distribution.

6. Once a child is located, NCMEC have a comprehensive package of support services to assist in the recovery of a child. Legal advice can be given to U.S. and foreign law enforcement agencies when necessary. In addition, the National Center has arranged sponsored travel arrangements with hotels, airlines and other transport services to ensure that a family's finances do not determine their ability to quickly recover the child. After the recovery, counselling services can be provided for the child and the family to help in the return process.

7. At the time of my visit to NCMEC, the Case Management Unit had an active caseload of 5,600 active cases. All of these cases, no matter how long they have been on file, are subject of a review every 30 days to ensure that all possible steps are being taken to find the missing child. If appropriate, the family is given an update on progress. In addition the unit chases up leads referred to law enforcement agencies to find results and ensure that relevant enquiries have been carried out. This chase up process is helped by the fact that FBI agents work at the International Children's Building and will apply pressure if police action is not carried out expeditiously.

24 Hour Communications Facility

1. The work of the Missing and Abducted Children unit is considerably enhanced by the availability of a 24-hour help line. This free call number 1-800 –THE-LOST (843-5678) means that families of the missing and law enforcement agencies have a simple and universally available means of contacting the National Center to give or receive information about missing children. The National Missing Persons Helpline charity in Britain provides a similar service. This NCMEC facility ensures that all leads can be referred to a single source and monitors that appropriate action is taken on information received. Since the Internet has grown in use, there is a facility within the web site to contact the help line through the site.

Cyber Tip Line

1. As the use of the Internet has grown, the use of the Internet for the purpose of transmitting pornography and exploitative images of children by paedophiles and others has grown. Reports of this type of child abuse were originally reported through the normal help line. However, the reports have significantly increased and require specialist action. The Cyber Tip Line receives reports and, where appropriate, investigates the matter before passing on information to local law enforcement agencies for action.

2. Due to the nature of the Internet, the Cyber Tip Line does not solely work on American cases. There are co-operative agreements with similar organisations all round the world. The National Center works in co-operation with INHOPE - The Association of Internet Hotline Providers in Europe. The UK connection is the Internet Watch Foundation. The Cyber Tip Line has dealt with 42,185 tip-offs since March 1998 including 1,136 from the UK.

3. The Tip Line monitors the Internet and receives reports about:
   - Possession, Manufacture and Distribution of Child Pornography
   - On-line Enticement of Children via Chat Rooms, unsolicited e:mail, etc.
   - Child Prostitution
   - Child Sex Tourism
   - Non-familial Child Sexual Molestation.

4. The National Center has worked with law enforcement agencies and software manufacturers to develop investigative computer tools to trace and identify people who attempt to abuse children through the Internet. NCMEC has also negotiated agreements with the major Internet Service Providers (ISP) so that, when inappropriate web activity is identified, the service provider will immediately deny that user access and supply personal information to investigators. The National Center publishes successes weekly and has contributed to several high profile cases in the UK including the recent 'Wonderclub' paedophile ring arrests. The expertise and facilities available through NCMEC will no doubt prove a useful network contact for the recently formed Internet Crime Unit within the National Crime Squad.

Education and Training Provision

1. The National Center is recognised as the primary source of expertise in child related matters in America and, in fact, as world leaders in the field. Because of this, NCMEC offers training opportunities for law enforcement agencies on a wide variety of topics. Monthly seminars are held for police chiefs and sheriffs focusing on issues, policies and procedures in the search for missing children. In addition, NCMEC has worked with the law enforcement agencies to develop specialised programmes to train officers in technology, Internet safety and the investigation of child abductions. Experts from NCMEC have spoken at conferences on child safety issues all round the world to law enforcement and other relevant agencies.

2. NCMEC is also the world's leading trainer in age progression technology. This training has been provided free of charge to Metropolitan Police and National Missing Persons Helpline staff to make the technique available in the UK.

3. As well as providing training and advice to law enforcement staff, the National Center provides a comprehensive information service to the public on child safety issues. NCMEC has a library of resources available through the Internet and has produced specialist advice documents for child Internet safety, school safety, safety of young teenage girls and many other subjects. All of this information can be downloaded from the missingkids site without charge.

4. To assist in public awareness of child safety issues, NCMEC have produced public information advertisements for TV, cinema and radio. The National Center has also supported many child safety focused initiatives. Several of the ideas generated through this programme are being evaluated for potential use in the UK as an adjunct to the web site. Ideas include free identifier cards for parents to keep of their children. These have a photo and fingerprint of the child and space for descriptive detail. These are distributed through sponsor organisations like supermarkets and car dealers. Merseyside Police are already using the photo system with all primary school children in their area so they have a recent digital picture of every child on file. The web site in the UK, working with The Children's Society, has produced anglicised versions of some of the American material including the 8 key steps for child safety and Internet safety information.

The International Centre for Missing and Exploited Children

1. Recognising that the problem of missing and exploited children was not confined to America, the International Centre was founded in April 1999. Its mission is to create and lead a co-ordinated, global response to the problems of international child abduction and child sexual exploitation. The International Centre has been a key support in the establishment of the missingkids web site in the UK. The world wide base is within the NCMEC building in Alexandria.

2. The UK and Europe branch has now been established using the name Parents and Abducted Children Together (PACT). The UK patron for the charity is Cherie Booth QC, the wife of the Prime Minister. This has proved a great help in getting the issue of child exploitation recognised.

3. The International Centre promotes the acknowledgement by all countries of the 1980 Hague Convention on the Civil Aspects of International Child Abduction. This convention should mean that child recovery should be facilitated when a child is removed from their home country. The aims of the Convention are:
   - To trace abducted children
   - To secure their prompt return to the country of habitual residence
   - To organise or secure effective rights of access.

4. In the United Kingdom, an average of four children a week are wrongfully taken or kept in other Hague Convention countries. In the last three years, the UK has seen a 58 per cent increase in the number of international parental child abductions.[6] The UK web site currently features several children who have been subject of such abduction. In some of these cases, the children have been located in Hague Convention signatory countries but it has still not been possible to return the children to the parent who should have lawful custody.

5. The implementation of the web site in the UK has facilitated the development of the International Centre in Europe and assisted in their recognition as a key partner of the National Missing Persons Bureau in the investigation and resolution of missing child cases.

[6] REUNITE – International Child Abduction Centre statistics 1998

Summary of Findings from the Research Visit

1. The work of the National Center in Alexandria, Washington DC has much that could usefully inform the management of issues around missing and exploited children in the UK.

   - The web site has already been brought into use.

   - The International Centre to support international work will potentially grow in support of this work in the UK and Europe.

   - The Case Management Unit function within the missing children section has already influenced the thinking behind the enhancement of the National Missing Persons Bureau at New Scotland Yard. The development of the Bureau to include a case analysis function will bring improvements in the management and co-ordination of all cases.

   - Material obtained from the National Center may be of use in enhancing the training given to police officers of all ranks on missing person issues.

2. This information will be evaluated by the ACPO National Missing Persons Consultative Forum as it develops its Manual of Guidance on management of missing person cases.

3. It should be borne in mind that the National Center has developed in a different context. NCMEC was set up to fill a vacuum in provision. This is not the situation in the UK. The police services in this country are more easily co-ordinated than the 17,000 law enforcement agencies in the United States. Equally, there have been numerous charities and other bodies that have addressed children's issues for many years.

4. The need in the UK is not to start from scratch. The need is to draw together the excellent work done by The Children's Society, NSPCC, the National Missing Persons Helpline, Reunite, the Internet Watch Foundation and numerous others, blend it with the work done by police services in the UK, and produce a comprehensive and cohesive service.

5. A key issue within this will be funding streams. NCMEC is a charitable body, but it nevertheless receives considerable federal support funding for certain aspects of its work. It would be a matter of difficult negotiation to produce a situation where essential work relating to missing and exploited children was funded, co-ordinated and monitored for outcomes without non-governmental partners losing their identity and autonomy.

6. As with many aspects of policing in the 21st Century, the answer will lie in encouraging appropriate partnership activity. Work to develop this partnership is already going on and resources and support need to be given so that the work can reach a satisfactory conclusion. That satisfactory conclusion should be viewed as the provision in the UK of as cohesive and comprehensive service for missing and exploited children as is provided by the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children in the United States.

APPENDIX B - TIMETABLE OF THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE WEB SITE IN THE UNITED KINGDOM

Date	Key Event	Comments
27th Oct 97	Presentation of the concept at New Scotland Yard	Recommendation to Head of SO3(3): The system which is being offered would clearly be of benefit, not only to the MPS but to all United Kingdom forces. It is a very professional and well managed site, which will be particularly useful when attempting to locate wards of court who have been taken out of the country
Nov 97 – June 98	ACPO Review of missing persons issues on behalf of Peter Sharpe, CC Hertfordshire	Need for image capability part of recommendations
June – Dec 98	Negotiations for pilot of web site	
Dec 6th 98	Launch of trial use of web site	Hertfordshire and Metropolitan forces only involved. Positive media coverage in national press.
Feb 99	10,000 visits to site per week Report author joins project	High publicity case featured
June 99	Trial completed – authorisation for national implementation.	Regional concept agreed because: • Work spread between several forces • Local ownership in regions • Ease of quality control • Minimise training needs • Interim step to full coverage
June 99	Regional choices for hub forces contacted	Hub choices based on IT development, size of force and personal networks of CC Sharpe.
Sept 99	First new hubs brought on line	Staffordshire and South Yorkshire
Jan 00	Hub network agreement complete for all regions	Hertfordshire to cover East and South East

14th Mar 00	National media launch at CA HQ	Timed to coincide with media launch of new European HQ. Intensive national media coverage including national BBC, ITV, Sky news.
14th Mar 00	650,000 visits to web site on day of launch	
Mar-Jun 00	Links to web site established from major UK media and child charity web sites	Children's Society represent charity sector on national user group.
Jul 00	Agreement with National Missing Persons Helpline to use freephone number on posters.	
2nd Oct 00	ICMEC Europe launch in London	
5th Oct 00	ICMEC fund raising ball	£150,000 raised to support project. Large feature in 'Hello' magazine
Dec 00	missingkids launch in N. Ireland	
Mar 01	missingkids given as best practice in ACPO and Home Office guidance documents	Final publication in Spring 2002.
20th Jun 01	Installation and training in Scotland	UK network complete Scotland first site with 24 hour 365 day facility *NB Final ACPO(S) legal approval awaited
October 01	Agreement reached with Tesco to display posters in stores.	Posters to be displayed from early 2002
Winter 01-02	Web site guide for forces published	Circulated to all UK forces
Early 02	Home Office Research report published	Circulated to all UK forces

APPENDIX C - CASE HISTORIES

1. A case from Northern Ireland features two boys who went missing 26 years ago. Whilst this is an extremely long time scale, being featured on the web site has re-activated interest in the case and there is hope of a resolution. This resolution is likely to be in the re-opening of a murder inquiry as the new publicity has brought forward potential witnesses. It must be borne in mind that policing circumstances in Northern Ireland have been considerably different to the rest of the UK for some years. One of the boys in this case has been subject of a remarkable age progression. The family of the missing boy has drawn comfort from this action.

2. Another current case has a time lag of 9 years since the child went missing. This is the Ben Needham abduction from Kos, Greece and is exceptional in that interest in the case has been maintained throughout the 9 years through media interest and unconfirmed sitings. Again an age progression has been done for Ben. The image generated considerable renewed media interest throughout Europe. Unfortunately this has not produced any new information that can be positively confirmed.

3. Age progression has helped in the case of a Metropolitan boy who was subject of family abduction in 1996. Subsequent to an age progressed photograph being circulated to Spanish police – where it was believed the child has been taken – the boy has been located and legal steps are being taken to recover the child to his mother.

4. A further 5 Metropolitan Police cases have used the in-built translation facility to encourage enquiries from local police forces that have resulted in useful investigative leads in Pakistan, Italy and Russia.

5. During the Sarah Payne investigation, a sighting was reported at a motorway service area in Cheshire. By use of the poster download, the motorway service areas and garages along the potential route between Sussex and Cheshire had posters distributed overnight.

6. Investigators of a parental abduction to France believe that the child was quickly returned when the abducting parent saw posters displayed of the child at the Paris Eurostar terminus. This used the translation facility and obviously the worldwide nature and speed of operation of the web site. The parent declined to confirm the reasons for prompt return.

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