'Be Internet Awesome' with Google

Google announced a $1m pan-African Google.org fund to support innovative ideas around privacy, trust and safety for families online across sub-Saharan Africa. It also launched its landmark child online safety programme, Be Internet Awesome, in South Africa, the Netherlands and Nigeria.

Fortune Mgwili-Sibanda, head of public policy and government relations at Google Africa.

Be Internet Awesome seeks to help minors explore the internet safely and confidently, while the Google.org grant will provide funding to help develop further programmes that aim to do this - for children and their families. Funding applications will be requested through an open call and the fund will be administered by a partner in South Africa.

"Google is committed to a safe internet for children. We are also passionate about the empowerment of organisations who share this commitment. The fund will be administered by a third-party partner on behalf of Google.org, and we will be sharing details on application criteria and deadlines soon," says Fortune Mgwili-Sibanda, head of public policy and government relations at Google Africa.

"We are excited to strengthen the work we have been doing with parents and children in the field of online safety, particularly in South Africa. In addition to Family Link, which allows parents to help their families develop healthy digital habits, we also launched Password Checkup, exactly one year ago, to empower users to check and strengthen online security settings for their Google Accounts," he says.

Be Internet Awesome teaches kids important skills for surfing the internet, like how to recognise potential online scams, using the internet securely and safeguarding valuable information, how to identify and refrain from cyberbullying, as well as what to do when coming across questionable content on the internet.

"Children are being exposed to the internet at their most vulnerable age so it's important for us, at Google, to ensure that they do so as safely as possible. At the same time, teachers and parents can use these resources in order to support and guide children as they navigate the Web," continues Mgwili-Sibanda.

Google has worked hand-in-hand with the South African Film and Publications Board (FPB) as a key policy partner in implementing the programme locally.

"The FPB has a responsibility to protect children from exposure to harmful content, thus the organisation needs to play a leading role in creating awareness around the dangers of the internet, as much as it is incumbent on us to also encourage the use of the digital space as an empowering tool," says Abongile Mashele, acting chief executive office, FPB.

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