

NSPCC FLAW IN THE LAW



Partners

*Leo Burnett
change*

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Flaw in the Law campaign set out to change UK legislation.

Three in four UK adults believed it was illegal for anyone over 18 to send a sexual message to a child. In reality, there was no law to always protect children in England, Wales and Northern Ireland from being sent sexually explicit messages from adults online.

The NSPCC was determined to close a legal loophole that could leave perpetrators free from prosecution from sending sexual messages to children.

Achieving our goal within our given budget of £42,000 seemed like a monumental challenge. At the start of the campaign, the Government publicly claimed that a new law was not required, as it was covered by existing legislation.

Our rallying cry and tone was positive and non-partisan to appeal to and involve all layers and sides of Parliament. Engendering support from the community through widespread awareness among the public would be key to putting pressure on politicians to bring about the change.

Incredibly our public campaign delivered over 50,000 petition signatures which also triggered letters to the minister from each signatory in support of the campaign. In response, the UK government announced that it would address this flaw in the law.

As well as a fantastic legislative change that would positively affect vulnerable children, it was a major PR victory with the Prime Minister making the announcement at the global summit #WeProtect Children Online, as he proclaimed:

“There can be no grey areas here. So we are changing the law. Just as it is illegal to produce and possess images of child abuse, now we are making it illegal to solicit these images too”.

Here’s our story...

277 words

This is a story about how OMD UK and Leo Burnett Change worked with the NSPCC to change legislation in the UK. It was a unique and challenging objective, but one that we are proud to have achieved.

British children today are increasingly inundated by social media connections and unfiltered online communications. An amazing 93% of 5-16 year olds are accessing the internet six times a week on average, putting them at high risk of viewing uncensored content.

The NSPCC, being concerned for the online safety of children, was determined to close a legal loophole they had identified which could leave perpetrators of sending sexual messages to children online free from prosecution.

In the last year, ChildLine had received a 168% increase in contacts from children about online sexual abuse. Despite this rising tide of online predators, the public wasn’t aware that the law hadn’t kept up as three out of four adults in the UK believed it was illegal for anyone over 18 to send a sexual message to a child.

However, the NSPCC knew that if they if they acted fast with our help, there was an opportunity for them help to put an end to the outdated law. We needed to stand up together as a nation and lobby the UK government to fix the Flaw in the Law.

OUR AUDIENCES

For the campaign to be a success we needed to ensure we appealed to four key audiences:

Government ministers and their advisers: their agreement would be crucial to achieving legislative change, so the campaign needed to be purposefully pitched as not being overly critical of government, but rather as an area where legislation hadn’t kept up with changes in technology.

Opposition and backbench parliamentarians: their support would enable us to exert consistent parliamentary pressure on the Government. The strategic message and tone of the campaign needed to be positive and non-partisan, so as not to generate resistance within the Government.

The general public: demonstrating mass support was key to persuading politicians to act.

The media: mainstream support through the country’s news outlets would be critical to instilling urgency for the government to act, amplifying the issue to a national level.

OUR STRATEGY

Research told us an effective way to educate and engage the public on this complex issue and the importance of dedicated legislation would be through video content.

Leo Burnett Change developed a campaign video and social media graphics to contrast the existing laws that meant it was not always illegal for an adult to send a sexual message to a child with crazy historic laws which make no sense today but are still in place. The campaign took a complex issue and made it easy for people to grasp, using humour to grab people’s attention. It



was important as the charity should not come across as demonising the internet, rather modernising how children are kept safe from grooming.

The video was a great way of sharing interesting and important information with British people as well as driving them to an online petition where they could show support for Flaw in the Law.

Within the video, we contrasted this Flaw in the Law with a series of crazy laws, including it being illegal to:

- **Handle a salmon in suspicious circumstances**
- **Wear a suit of armour in parliament**
- **Carry a plank of wood in the street**
- **Be drunk in licensed premises**

This digital content caught the UK's imagination.

This activity was party of an integrated campaign and forty leading national media outlets covered the campaign, including BBC News, Daily Mail, ITV and Sky News, helping the Flaw in the Law reach millions of people.

Social media was identified as the campaign's key above-the-line channel. It would be the best place to generate a groundswell of support, generate a wider reach through online sharing and drive further petition signatures. For this we needed to ensure the pathway to signature generation was as short as possible and provide a seamless user experience from the video to the sign-up page.

The petition was promoted across social media, including YouTube, Facebook and Twitter, and to NSPCC supporters via e-mails. These social media channels were selected to both drive awareness of the issue and to drive signatures of the petition. In total, there were more than eight million social media impressions, including almost 7,000 Facebook shares and 176,000 views of the campaign video.

Every signature we generated triggered a letter to the Minister, supporting our campaign objective. The campaign's positive, quirky tone cut through the multitude of petitions people now receive.

The parliamentary engagement afforded by the volume of letters sent allowed the NSPCC to work with the opposition and backbench peers to push an amendment to the Serious Crime Bill, which eventually resulted in the Government agreeing to create the new offence. In the House of Commons, the NSPCC held a photo call for MPs so they could appear beside a campaign banner to show support. Over 50 MPs attended, with many subsequently supporting the campaign by tabling questions and speaking in debates. Both the Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Theresa May, and the Shadow Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Yvette Cooper MP, publicly paid tribute to the campaign for raising the issue. A snapshot of the positive mentions in Parliament are below:

Home Secretary, the Rt Hon Theresa May MP, said: **"Members have supported the campaign by the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, and I pay tribute to them for highlighting this gap in the law."**

The Shadow Home Officer Minister Seema Malhotra MP, said: **"an important campaign – even the phrase 'Flaw in the Law' has captured the imagination – which has made it**

much easier for Government and Opposition Members to get behind the reform."

The Solicitor General, Robert Buckland QC MP: **"let me put on record my thanks for the work of the National Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Children, because it is largely as a result of its efforts and those of its supporters that we are debating this new clause...Right hon. and hon. Members will be aware of the 'Flaw in the Law' campaign that was launched last year by the NSPCC."**

NSPCC's chief executive Peter Wanless was delighted to announce **"a victory for our Flaw in the Law campaign, but more importantly a major step forward in preventing online child abuse."**

In just under four weeks we delivered over 50,000 petition signatures and on the 11th of December, after heavy lobbying from NSPCC and the concerned public, we managed to put our campaign on the UK Prime Minister's agenda.

The Government committed to introducing a new criminal offence of sexual communication with a child, achieving the campaign's objective.

The public manner of the government's concession also demonstrates the campaign's success. The Prime Minister made the announcement at high profile global summit, #WeProtect on 10th December 2014, less than seven weeks after the campaign launched. This was despite the Government previously claiming the new law was not required as the offence was covered by existing legislation.

The campaign unequivocally achieved its stated objective with the Government committing to changing the law so that it is always illegal for an adult to send a sexual message to a child.

The new law will have a significant impact on keeping children safe online. For example, Detective Inspector Robert Chitham of the Kent Police Paedophile Online Investigation Team said:

"If such a law was enacted, it would significantly enhance our ability to deal more effectively with online offences, and go a long way to safeguard children exposed to such offences."

The new law will both prevent abuse occurring by enabling the police to intervene earlier, and also better protect children by deterring abusers from making unwanted sexual contact.

Thanks to the NSPCC and the rallying cry of the UK population, the British Government have now taken action to close the Flaw in the Law!

1,323 words

