
Guidance and information

Sydney Global Commerce Conference

As part of its commitment to protecting consumers in the escalating market of global transactions, the Commission hosted the Sydney Global Commerce Conference at the Sydney Hilton on 9–11 November 1998.

Australian and international experts from enforcement agencies, consumer organisations and the major industry stakeholders spoke at the conference on the main consumer issues surrounding global commerce, the enforcement aspects associated with cross-border trade, and the role that industry will play in the development of consumer confidence in the new global electronic marketplace. Keynote speakers included Orson Swindle (US Federal Trade Commission), John Bridgeman (UK Office of Fair Trading), Daniel Petre (PBL Online), Richard Thomas (Clifford Chance, UK) and Stephen Locke (Andersen Consulting, UK).

The conference was attended by over 150 Australian and international delegates and 22 speakers.

Since the conference the Commission has been putting together working groups to develop a number of key compliance and enforcement strategies coming out of the conference.

Enforcement strategies include:

- enforcement tips for the global marketplace;
- an education program for enforcement staff;
- protocols for targeting associated industry participants;

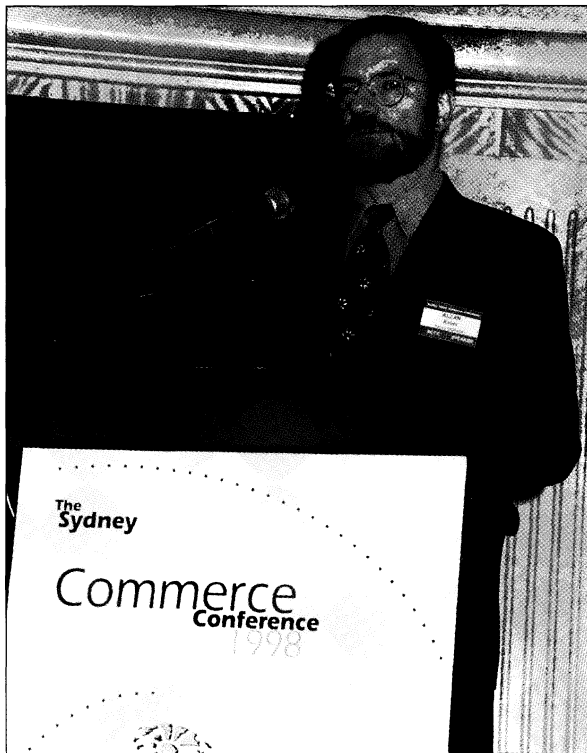
- guidelines for cooperative arrangements with Internet service providers;
- consumer education materials and an Internet database of consumer information;
- compliance information materials;
- a 'quality trader' database;
- arrangements for international cooperation between enforcement agencies;
- arrangements for regular staff exchange and/or meeting of senior level staff;
- a database of problem traders and practices;
- International Internet Sweep Day 1999;
- International email/phone-in day 1999;
- a directory of consumer protection agencies;
- International Society of Consumer and Competition Officials;
- promotion of the finalisation and adoption of the OECD guidelines on consumer protection for electronic commerce; and
- global market standards.

Compliance strategies include:

- a 'quality trader' consumer charter;
- encouragement and embracing of the concept of a quality trader;
- consumer education campaigns;
- compliance education campaigns;
- industry-wide consumer issues committees;
- certification schemes;

- investigation of the viability of independent industry-based dispute resolution systems;
- formation of a working group with government and consumer agencies;
- strategies for credit card companies and other payment systems;
- international standards for consumer protection in electronic commerce;
- international standards for the Internet industry; and
- international standards for consumer protection in distance selling.

Many of the papers presented at the conference are available from the Commission's Internet website.



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Adjudication page on ACCC website

The Commission has recently added a new page to its Internet website, containing information on its adjudication role and its authorisation and notification processes.

Under the authorisation and notification provisions of the Trade Practices Act the Commission has the power to provide exemption from legal action for some mergers and certain anti-competitive conduct that might otherwise breach the Act.

In broad terms, the Commission is empowered to grant such exemptions only where it is satisfied that the anti-competitive conduct in question is offset by accompanying public benefit.

The Commission cannot compel parties to use the authorisation or notification processes. However, it has a statutory obligation to rule on the applications it receives.

The new Adjudication page of the Commission's website contains:

- a brief guide to the authorisation and notification provisions;
- a more detailed guideline on authorisation and notification;
- a specific guideline on authorisation and notification for third line forcing; and
- a leaflet on the Commission's responsibility for consideration of Certification Trade Mark applications.

From time to time it will also include Commission determinations and draft determinations on specific matters.

The Commission's website address is:
<http://www.accc.gov.au>