

Universities join ISPA

Both the University of Cape Town and Rhodes University have become affiliate members of the Internet Service Providers Association (ISPA), reflecting a growing recognition on the part of universities that they are now acting as Internet Service Providers (ISPs).



These are the association's first tertiary education institutions on board as members. According to Ant Brooks, GM of ISPA, organisations that are classified as 'information systems service providers' by the Electronic Communications and Transactions (ECT) Act can be held liable for content carried over, hosted and/or cached on their networks.

"While not providing Internet access services to the public, universities do provide access to closed user-groups. For this reason, it is beneficial to such institutions to join ISPA, as the ECT Act gives ISPs immunity from third-party content carried over, or hosted on their networks. However, ISPs only gain legal protection if they are a member of an industry representative body (IRB) that is recognised by the Minister of Communications. ISPA is just such an entity," he says.

Ideal for educational institutions

"The affiliate membership category allows organisations in related fields to participate in ISPA's activities, and to gain the protections offered by its status as an IRB. This membership category is ideal for educational institutions, which pay the same fees as small members, although affiliates remain non-voting members of ISPA."

Affiliate members are still required to comply with the Code of Conduct and are also entitled to connect to ISPA's Internet exchanges in Johannesburg and Cape Town, as if they were small members.

ISPA currently has five categories of membership, namely: large, medium, small, affiliate and honorary. The Tertiary Education and Research Network of South Africa, which supplies international and national network services to universities and operates the South African Research Network (SANReN), is an honorary member of ISPA.

"ISPA sees UCT and Rhodes joining as a sign of things to come and, as we move forward we anticipate having more tertiary education institutions seeking to become members. Considering the benefits to be gained by joining as affiliates, particularly in light of the strict laws governing the electronic domain, ISPA would certainly like to encourage more

universities to consider joining our organisation," he concludes.

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