

AUSTRALIA NETWORK



Senate Inquiry into the Welfare of International Students

Australia Network Submission

18 August 2009

Australia Network is an international media service funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade. The television and online network is part of ABC International and operates 24/7 to more than 44 countries across Asia, the Pacific and Indian subcontinent. The network projects a window of Australia into the region by using local themes and programs to build awareness and engagement.

Executive Summary

- Australia Network makes a significant contribution to informing international students about Australian society and values including education and English-language learning content. Moreover, opportunities exist to expand these roles.
- Australia Network is able to play a lead role in delivering a consistent and co-ordinated approach via its television and online platforms to help restore the education industry's reputation following recent negative domestic and international news reports about student violence and disreputable operators.
- Australia Network has best practice experience in the development and distribution of programming in Asia Pacific and can assist education providers and government agencies with media industry practices to ensure seamless delivery of content to international students.
- The delivery of education-based programs and digital interstitials need to constantly reinforce Australia's strength as a multi-cultural and inclusive society to reassure international students and their families about community standards and tolerance.
- Students are media savvy and expect free on-demand information about education and adjacent lifestyle and regulatory issues and are adept at using online video, social media and mobile devices.
- Opportunities fall into three categories:
 1. develop new content financed by the education sector on key issues;
 2. aggregate industry information on digital media platforms; and
 3. improve overall co-operation with Australia Network to engage students, returning alumni, and their families, and other key opinion leaders and "gatekeepers" including student counsellors, advisors and placement agents in their host countries.

Introduction

Australia network thanks the Senate Education, Employment and Workplace Relations Committee for the opportunity to comment on issues relating to the welfare of international students, and in particular on ways of ensuring the quality and adequacy of information, advice and support provided to such students.

The Australian education sector faces a number of significant challenges in relation to its international student population. Immediate issues include addressing violence against Indian students and the activities of disreputable education providers, migration agents and student recruitment agencies, as highlighted in a recent *Four Corners*¹ program and on Indian-based 24/7 cable news services. News coverage of these matters has bruised Australia's reputation in the domestic and international education sector.

While these issues require new solutions and policies in Australia there is equal need to communicate these outcomes to international students and families in their host countries. This is particularly important with competition from alternative education providers, such as the US, the UK, Canada, New Zealand, Singapore, Malaysia and China.

Australia Network is a 24/7 international media service funded by the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and managed by the ABC's International Division. The network is available to international students in the key source markets of Asia, the Pacific and Indian subcontinent across television and online platforms. Part of its role includes representing Australia to prospective international students by providing them with information about educational opportunities and student lifestyles.

Australia Network makes a significant contribution to informing international students about Australian society and values including education and English-language learning content. Moreover, opportunities exist to expand these roles.

Australia Network

The Australia Network broadcast service is beamed via satellite outside Australia into 44 countries (with the exception of China) through a series of re-broadcast agreements with television distribution partners. Re-broadcasters include subscription (Pay), free-to-air (FTA), direct-to-home (DTH) and Internet Protocol (IPTV) television providers, and they are available in an estimated 22 million television households in Asia and the Pacific.² Year-to-date ratings data indicates that Australia Network's monthly viewing base exceeds two million people.³

The network's online service (www.australianetwork.com) is available to any international student with access to Internet and web-based mobile devices, including those students among China's

¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/4corners/content/2009/s2637255.htm>

² Tam India Research and Synovate PAX cable and satellite survey.

³ Tam India Research and Synovate PAX cable and satellite survey.

338 million web users.⁴ Chinese students represent Australia's largest source market for international students.

The international television service broadcasts about 80% Australian-produced content, including news, current affairs, education, drama, documentary, lifestyle and children's programs.

The Commonwealth's objective for Australia Network (in part) is to provide a media and information service which will broadly support Australia's national and education interest in the Region by:

- a) Providing a credible, reliable and independent voice;
- b) Presenting through its news, information and documentary programs a 'window' on Australia and Australian perspectives on the world;
- c) Projecting images and perceptions of Australia in an impartial manner;
- d) Promoting Australia's engagement in the Asia Pacific region by fostering public understanding of Australia, its people and its strategic and economic interests; and
- e) Raising awareness in the Region of Australia's economic and trade capabilities, including in the education and tourism industries.

A critical part of the service is to deliver a news feed offering a balanced and accurate presentation of events from an Australian perspective. This provides an alternative to the more populist coverage delivered by other news outlets.

For example, the ABC's Asia-Pacific News Centre (APNC), which provides news and current affairs programming for both Australia Network and the ABC's international radio service, Radio Australia, provided extensive coverage of attacks against Indian students in Melbourne and Sydney.

These reports featured the concerns of students and protests in both cities, as well as the response of Federal and State governments, police and universities, and included live crosses to India.

In addition, the network's *NewsHour* staged a special edition that included long-form packages and interviews with the Premier of Victoria, John Brumby, and the Australian High Commissioner to India, Mr John McCarthy, and Vasana Srinivasan, President of Indian Associations Victoria. Video content was posted on the *NewsHour* web site and australiannetworknews.com.

As indicated above, Australia Network's role includes specific educational obligations. The Commonwealth's objectives for the service include "raising awareness in the region of Australia's economic and trade capabilities, including in the education and tourism industries."

Australia Network and its predecessors, ABC Asia Pacific Television and Australian Television International, have been producing news and programs on education and related issues since 1998.

Roughly 10% of the daily television schedule covers Australian-themed education content and English-language learning programs aimed at the international student market. These education

⁴ <http://www.internetworldstats.com/asia/cn.htm>

programs have included magazine lifestyle⁵ and observational documentaries⁶ about the experiences of international students while studying and living in Australia. A good example is the *This Australian Life* series, (for further information see attachment A).

English-language learning (ELL) content⁷ represents about 3% of the Australian Network schedule and includes programs on IELTS (International English Language Testing System) preparation⁸ and ELL learning stories about Australian life and culture.⁹

Australia Network's online ELL service (www.australiannetwork.com/learningenglish) offers a wide range of digital video and text-based teaching tools for the international student sector.

The ABC's international radio and online service, Radio Australia, also provides English- language learning content and information about living and studying in Australia in Asian languages.¹⁰

Select Australia Network education and English-language learning content is also accessible within Australia on the local ABC iView Internet television service.¹¹ This content is geo-blocked outside of Australia.

Australia Network regularly holds discussions with representatives of the higher education, VET¹² and ELICOS¹³ sectors, as well as, federal government departments and Australian Educational International¹⁴ counsellors in select embassies.

Australia Network's in-depth news coverage and production of education and related programming reinforces the importance of strengthening co-operation between media and the education sector.

Opportunities for further informing audiences

Australia Network believes there are opportunities to play a positive role in facilitating information and producing programs about educational issues and experiences of students studying and living in Australia. This includes:

- offering a full range of video interstitials on student safety, accommodation and social inclusion

⁵ See, e.g., <http://australiannetwork.com/life/>

⁶ E.g. *Down Under Grads* and <http://australiannetwork.com/postcards/studentpostcards.htm>.

⁷ E.g. *Passport to English*, *English Bites*, *The Business of English* and *Living English*.

⁸ E.g. *Study English* and <http://www.ielts.org/>

⁹ <http://australiannetwork.com/nexus/>

¹⁰ This includes several radio series of bilingual English lessons available online and as podcasts. Each series includes English language dialogues and explanations and background information in Asian languages: Chinese, Vietnamese, Indonesian and Khmer. Since 2005, Radio Australia has produced three series in conjunction with AMES (Adult Multicultural Education Services): *English for Tourism*, *English for Business* and *English for Study in Australia* (not yet available in Vietnamese). Each series includes 26 radio episodes and a website with audio, transcripts and study notes in the above languages. *English for Study in Australia* addresses some of the concerns relating to living and studying successfully in this country.

¹¹ <http://www.abc.net.au/iview/#/australiannetwork>

¹² <http://www.vcaa.vic.edu.au/VET/Index.html>

¹³ <http://www.elicos.com/>

¹⁴ <http://www.aei.gov.au/>

- helping convert student inquiries into paid enrolments, and
- providing coverage and online referrals to agencies offering student support, employment rights information, visa guidelines, etc.

However, to do so will require funding. Further, it will require input from education peak bodies and student recruitment agencies, including IDP Education,¹⁵ Universities Australia,¹⁶ ACPET,¹⁷ English Australia¹⁸ and TAFE Directors Australia,¹⁹ to ensure best practice.

Australia Network is open to developing and executive producing content interstitials and episodic programming for wider on-air and online distribution. This content would be able to be re-distributed and used by education, government and non-government agencies to maximize audience reach. Such programming would complement Australia Network's objectives.

In addition, a gap currently exists between the capabilities and experience of the Australian education sector (government and non-government) in exploiting digital content and technologies to improve communication and engagement with the international students, including Australian alumni. International students are increasingly discovering, consuming and interacting with media content and information through online and mobile platforms and these usage patterns are likely to inform their information and communications expectations both in their home countries and in Australia.

For example, recent research shows there is an estimated 460 million internet users in Australia's top five student source markets—China, India, Korea, Malaysia and Nepal.²⁰ Similarly, there are an estimated 800 million cell-phone users in the top three student source markets of Korea,²¹ China²² and India.^{23,24} As Chinese students represent 23.9% of international student enrolments in Australian educational institutions,²⁵ it is worth noting that an estimated 155 million people in China can access the internet via mobile phones.²⁶ (Information on internet and mobile usage in Asia is provided in Attachment B).

The majority of the Australia education industry has not adjusted communication channels to keep pace with these usage patterns. As a result, Australia's ability to provide information about issues such as student safety, accommodation, social inclusion, employment and visa processing, as well as promoting educational opportunities, is reduced.

¹⁵ <http://www.idp.com/>

¹⁶ <http://www.universitiesaustralia.edu.au/>

¹⁷ <http://www.acpet.edu.au/>

¹⁸ <http://www.englishaustralia.com.au/>

¹⁹ <http://www.tda.edu.au/>

²⁰ <http://www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm#asia>

²¹ <http://www.futurizekorea.com/255>

²² <http://www.chinatoday.com/data/data.htm>

²³ http://www.neoncarrot.co.uk/h_aboutindia/india_telecom_stats.html#mobiles

²⁴ See also http://www.nationmaster.com/graph/med_mob_pho_sub-media-mobile-phone-subscribers

²⁵ <http://aei.gov.au/AEI/MIP/Statistics/default.htm>

²⁶ <http://www.them.pro/China-internet-statistics-2009>

An appropriate response would be to increase the volume of education-based content delivered over digital distribution channels to better meet the expectations of international students using the internet and mobile information devices.

Moreover, there are opportunities for Australia Network and Radio Australia to use these platforms to deliver information about various issues affecting international students in their home countries, so that they are better informed when they arrive in Australia to study. Australia Network—and ABC International more generally—have a significant pond of intellectual capital in the digital media space that could add significant value to the international education sector

Examples of reliable and independent information to assist international students that Australia network could provide might include:

- **Safety:** providing information and video content that improves awareness of issues that could help international students avoid harm and danger. Digital content could include commonsense safety tips on inner-city and suburb living, travel, drinking and potential danger spots, so students can avoid compromising safety. Video material on safety matters produced in low resolution can be shared among students on mobile devices. Australia Network is well positioned to help develop and produce this content.
- **Housing:** digital content on safe, affordable and secure accommodation options including on-and-off campus rentals, share and home stays. Web links to information about rental agreements, tenancy rights and the common protocols of renting and sharing accommodation. Information and video clips could be pooled on a state-by-state basis, allowing students to share stories and access suitable referrals. Where possible, video clips would be offered in local languages online. Australia Network and Radio Australia have the resources, experience and expertise to develop and produce content in this field.
- **Social inclusion:** inviting students to upload user-generated content on their experiences both in learning and social environments in Australia. Most students will have video capabilities on their mobile phones and such testimonials are likely to encourage greater interaction. This opportunity will build cultural understanding and a foundation for enhanced communication. Australia Network has a record of producing interstitial programs showcasing cultural events and is experienced in producing quality content in this genre.
- **Student visa information:** Australia Network, Government departments and immigration brokers could collaborate on producing video interstitials about visa requirements to simplify the application process.²⁷ The benefit of using video to communicate complicated information is twofold: it demystifies the process and will empower students and family to build a level of confidence before engaging in the visa process. It is also an effective way for students to share this information on mobile platforms. Clips would be available on Australia Network online, industry sites and the primary video channels in the region to improve reach. Where possible,

²⁷ <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=keBOZ9rFuuk>

local-language versions would be available on YouTube and its Asian equivalents, such as *Pandora TV*,²⁸ *Youku*, *Todu* and *Nico Nico Douga*.

- **Employment:** creating online conduits between employers and students. This has several advantages, including reinforcing the message that students on accredited visas are legally entitled to work a limited number of hours each week; promoting the idea that Australia recognizes that many students need to work in an effort to pay for tuition fees and cost-of-living; and lifting the veil on how Australia has been able to attract so many students. Australia Network has a team and access to a pool of talented producers to help develop, produce and distribute clips in this domain.
- **Related Matters:** Australia Network has an opportunity to support the education sector by leveraging its media platforms and brand equity in the region. This will have a flow-on benefit of lifting Australia's ranking on search engines leading to increased student inquiries and paid enrolments and the availability of accurate information to the wider student community.

²⁸ <http://www.pandora.tv/info/?mode=pandora>

Conclusion

- Australia Network is well positioned to offer strategic media leadership in the development of online and TV programming that addresses key issues outlined in the terms of reference.
- Australia Network has already established its media footprint and continues to build brand equity in countries which represent 80% of the source market for international students studying in Australia and the key region for returning Australian educated alumni.
- Australia Network has taken the initiative to promote Australian education in cooperation with a number of Australian international education institutions.
- Australia Network provides a suitable backdrop to immerse international students in themes and narratives by providing reliable and independent information that can enhance their understanding and awareness of social and education issues in Australia.



This Australian Life

This Australian Life explores Australian life as it really is through the eyes of guests from the Asia-Pacific region.

The series takes viewers into the lives of ordinary Australians in all kinds of situations.

Each week a Guest – a recent arrival to Australia - will enter a real-life situation by living with an Australian family, or becoming involved with a community group. They participate in the lives of their hosts, finding out how people work and play – and discovering what is important in their lives.

What are the challenges, the hopes and the disappointments of daily life in Australia? What is surprising and different about Australian life compared to the lives of the Guests back home? From the ordinary routines of everyday life, to the challenges, excitements and disappointments that everyone experiences, the Guest is immersed in the real, intimate workings of Australian homes, families and workplaces.

Each program culminates in an event -- it could be a football match, a wedding, a barbeque, or an amateur play. The Guest joins in with their new friends.

Each episode focuses on an aspect of life in Australia, and explores it not only through the Guest's experience, but also through background segments and commentary by a resident expert on Australian life, actor/writer William McNnes.

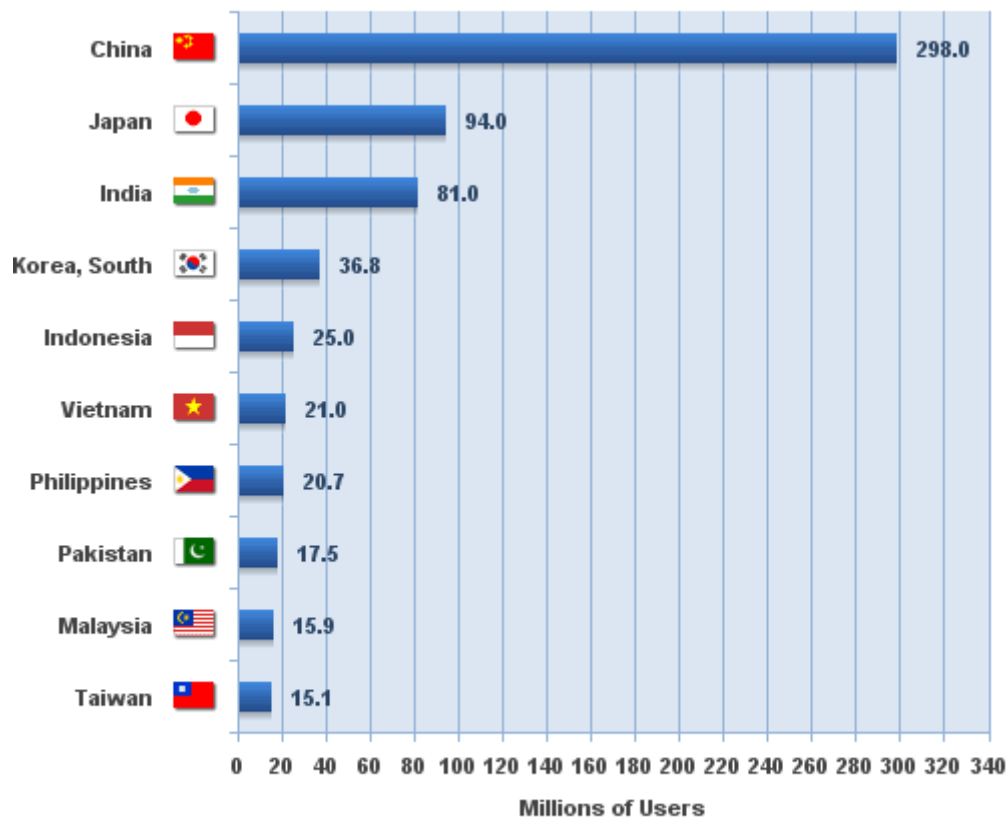
Series themes include sport, nature, community events, entertainment and work, that are explored in various situations ranging from the remote outback to the city.

The program website will feature streaming video as well as additional information about the theme of each episode and profiles of the Guests and Hosts. The website will become a valuable resource for people wanting to learn more about life in Australia. *This Australian Life* is a fascinating outsiders' experience of life inside Australia.

James Roberts, Series Producer
Phone: +618 8343 4229
Email: james.roberts@australianetwork.com
Or Barry Mitchell, Executive Producer
Phone: +618 8343 4450
Email: barry.mitchell@australianetwork.com

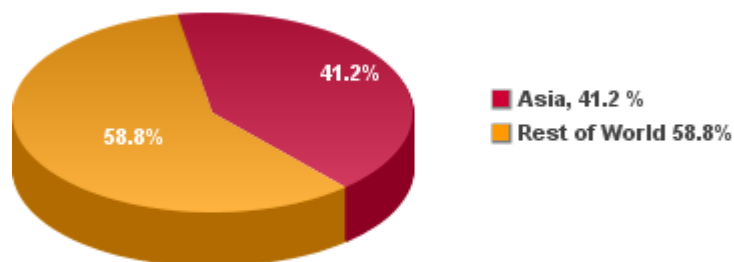
Attachment B

Asia Top 10 Internet Countries



Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com/stats3.htm
Estimated Asia Internet users 657,170,816 for 2009 Q1
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Asia Internet Users Asia vs. World



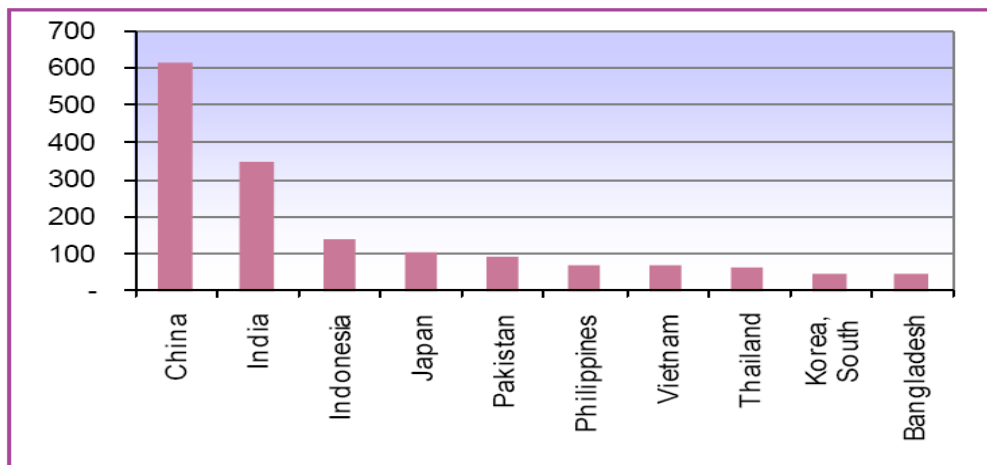
Source: Internet World Stats - www.internetworldstats.com
1,596,270,108 estimated World Internet users in 2009 Q1
657,170,816 estimated Internet users in Asia
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Mobile Phone Statistics

Country	Users (millions)	Penetration %	Mobile Internet (WAP) Users %	Dominant Technology	Most Popular Use (non-Voice)
Australia	17.98	88%	40%	2.5G	Internet/social Networking
China	545	37%	7%	2.5G	Podcasting/video
Hong Kong	6.56	91%	67%	3G	Instant messaging
India	261	18%	2%	2.5G	Mobile gaming
Indonesia	80	34%	3%	2.5G	Internet/SMS/ringback
Japan	152	88%	91%	3G	Internet/video/commerce
Korea	43.5	89%	86%	3G	Internet/video/commerce
Malaysia	23.41	85%	3%	2.5G	SMS
Philippines	55	60%	17%	2.5G	SMS
Singapore	5.41	122%	16%	2.5G	Photography/music
Taiwan	24	104%	8%	3G	Internet
Thailand	28.29	47%	10%	2.5G	Music
Vietnam	35	40%	N/A	2G	SMS

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Asia Pacific: Top 10 Markets by Customers, EOP (m), Q4 08



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²⁹ <http://www.nationalmaster.con/countries>

³⁰ <http://internationaltelecommunicationsunion.com>