What it is

In 2010 in Riga, Latvia, brothers Ilja and Mark Terebin started the website ASKfm. By the end of 2018, the site has 215 million users, 50% of whom are under the age of 18. The site is used in 150 countries, and is highly integrated with popular social media platforms (Instagram, Twitter, Facebook, Tumblr, Snapchat, etc.).

ASKfm is a question asking/answering website that gives users the ability to ask and answer questions anonymously, unless the user chooses to be identified. The questions may be in text or video format. The site is often linked to popular social media platforms, such as Instagram and Snapchat, so that questions may be asked by users’ followers. The unique selling point of ASKfm is that it guarantees anonymity when asking controversial questions, unless the user chooses to ask a question publicly. ASKfm offers the ability to report and block inappropriate activity and content. Once a report is submitted, the ASKfm team reviews it and takes appropriate action, according to their website.

Importance to Law Enforcement

Law enforcement should be aware of the potential cyberbullying that can occur if the app is misused. This is mainly due to the anonymity that the app provides its users. The user base consists mainly of young people who are more vulnerable to receiving hateful comments from their peers who are misusing the app. Additionally, sexually explicit questions are common among teens and predators posing as teens. ASKfm has also been regarded as a gateway to private conversations, because conversations that begin through this platform often move elsewhere.

Fast facts

215 million
50% under 18
150 countries
Investigative Information

To contact ASKfm with questions, or in the event of an emergency, you may email lawenforcement@ask.fm. It’s also important to note that ASKfm is an Irish entity and data controller, so disclosure of user data is governed by Irish laws. However, the Guide for Law Enforcement on the ASKfm website provides a section for further information about legal process in the United States arising from the storage of user data in the U.S. ASKfm requires proper legal process in order to release account records on a non-emergency basis. To obtain records the following should be submitted: ASKfm username, email address associated with the account, the full name of the user (as registered with ASKfm) and/or the full URL of the question and answer at issue. In addition, the request should indicate when and where the results should be returned. You can access the full Guide for Law Enforcement on the ASKfm website here, for additional details.

References


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