



Press Release

Media giants move to combat child sex abuse images on the Internet

Google has agreed to introduce changes which will prevent child pornography from appearing from more than 100,000 different searches.

The company's chairman Eric Schmidt, writing in the Daily Mail ahead of a Downing Street summit on internet pornography, says: 'We've listened. Google has agreed to introduce changes which will prevent depraved images and videos from appearing for more than 100,000 different searches. 'We've fine-tuned Google Search to prevent links to child sexual abuse material from appearing in our results.'

Microsoft, which operates search engines Bing and powers Yahoo, will confirm at the Downing Street talks that it is introducing similar restrictions.

The restrictions, which have been designed to apply in English-speaking countries, will be expanded to cover the rest of the world and 158 other languages in the next six months.

Mr Schmidt also reveals that Google has developed breakthrough technology that will allow illegal videos to be 'tagged' so that all duplicate copies can be removed across the internet.

Prime Minister David Cameron, in an interview with this newspaper, said the move represented 'a really significant step forward' but was not enough – and threatened legislation if the firms refuse to do more.

ECPAT Child ALERT endorses this move. *“This move is overdue. One has to wonder why it has not been done before”* says Alan Bell, Director of this child rights based organisation. *“This move will be a disruption and a deterrent to those who seek to view child sex abuse images. It is not a final answer as methods to avoid the restrictions will no doubt be developed. However it is a move in the right direction. To achieve the best result these moves must be coupled with education and public awareness. Filters and blocks do not address the underlying cause – that of the demand for these types of images. More effort will be required to help people understand the damage and trauma caused to the victims and stronger child protection measures need to be developed and widely adopted.”*

The new initiatives will include the introduction of new algorithms [sets of instructions for software] that will block child abuse images, videos and pathways that lead to illegal content, covering 100,000

unique searches on Google worldwide. So the effort we have made in the UK is going to be a huge benefit across the world.

Other measures agreed include stopping auto-complete features – which will prevent search engines from prompting child abuse search terms even if a person was not looking for them.

Google and Microsoft will also work with the National Crime Agency and the Internet Watch Foundation to bring forward a plan to tackle 'peer to peer networks' – file-sharing networks which paedophiles use to contact each other.

Google's new technology, developed by 200 of their IT experts, will put a unique identification mark on illegal child abuse videos, meaning all copies are removed from the web once a single copy is identified. The firm is offering to share the technology, similar to existing 'photo DNA' used for still images, with rivals.

Prime Minister Cameron says 'Both companies have made clear to me that they share my commitment to stop child abuse content from being available not only in the UK but across the world. If the search engines are unable to deliver on their commitment to prevent child abuse material being returned from search terms used by paedophiles, I will bring forward legislation that will ensure it happens. So the threat of legislation has not gone away. I believe we are heading in right direction but no-one should be in doubt that there is a red line: if more isn't done to stop illegal content or pathways being found when you use a child abuse search term, we will do what is necessary to protect our children.'

Crucially, the system is designed to identify new code words or terms paedophiles start to use and will block search results for these too.

Other measures being discussed at the Downing Street summit today include family-friendly filters to screen out all adult content. As revealed in Saturday's Mail all 20million households that are connected to the internet are being contacted by their service providers and given an 'unavoidable choice' about whether they want to be able to access porn.

Last week 348 people were arrested in Canada – and 386 young kids rescued – in one of the largest child sex investigations ever seen.

ECPAT Child ALERT is a charitable trust working to prevent the commercial sexual exploitation of children.

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