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Making the Internet Safe for Kids: The Role of ISPs and Social Networking Sites

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1. Summary and Introduction

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for this opportunity to present Google's perspective on "Making the Internet Safe for Kids: The Role of ISPs and Social Networking Sites." We appreciate the Subcommittee's leadership in addressing an issue of such great concern to America's families.

Google has a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to child pornography and those who would promote it. Child pornography is illegal around the world and has no place in a civilized society. When we become aware of child pornography anywhere in our search engine index or on our site, we remove it immediately and report it to the appropriate authorities. We do not accept any advertising related to it. We cooperate assiduously with law enforcement authorities to help track down online criminals and child predators. As a company, in our actions and in our guiding principles, we are deeply committed to protecting children on the Internet.

We believe that a successful approach to combating child exploitation online must encompass three elements:

- Strong law enforcement efforts to pursue and convict the purveyors of illegal content and activity;
- Powerful technology solutions and other resources for families to control their online experiences, according to individual values; and
- Strong industry practices that support these efforts.

Google is pursuing this approach through a number of initiatives:

- We enforce a strict policy prohibiting any advertising related to child pornography.
- We remove child pornography immediately when we become aware of it in our search engine or in our websites. We also report it to the appropriate authorities, including the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC).
- We provide valuable support to law enforcement efforts, by responding to hundreds of child safety-related requests per year, as well as data preservation requests.
- We empower families to be safe online with tools like our SafeSearch filter and our support for efforts like the WiredSafety educational campaign.

The Internet provides an unparalleled opportunity for people to connect with information and with each other. Google's mission is to make such information more accessible and useful. But as we are all aware, some online activities can pose risks to children and families, and some online behavior violates the law and should be eradicated. Much can be done to combat these risks, consistent with the open character of the Internet and the diversity of individual family values.

We look forward to describing the ways in which Google is working today – and we look forward to working with you, the law enforcement community, and the broader Internet community to increase our efforts to stop child exploitation and preserve the Internet as a trusted and safe environment.

2. Industry Practices Combating Child Pornography

Child pornography is a horrible crime. It has no place on the Internet nor in our users' search experience. As we describe below, we strictly prohibit the advertisement of child pornography in our AdWords program and use both automated and manual filtering techniques to detect and report individuals who attempt to advertise such material. We also report all instances of child pornography to the appropriate authorities as soon as we become aware of it in our index or on any of our websites.

a. Google Standards for Advertising

We devote significant resources to detecting and reporting child pornography that someone may attempt to advertise through our ads service.

To explain our service generally, Google's AdWords service allows any potential advertiser – from a neighborhood dry cleaner to a Big Three automaker – to easily create text-, image-, or video-based ads and to display them online in a targeted manner. AdWords is principally a self-managed program, meaning that most advertisers create and control their advertisements through an online interface. Google has hundreds of thousands of advertisers, with millions of ads being displayed in any given month. Screening these ads is a challenge we take very seriously.

Google recognizes that the success of any of our products ultimately depends on quality. We have therefore implemented rigorous quality standards for advertisements submitted through AdWords. In keeping with our company values and mission, Google has policies restricting the types and content of advertising we accept. The AdWords service employs numerous automated and manual checks, program policies, and enforcement mechanisms to assist in providing our users, publisher partners, and advertisers with advertising services that are high-quality and relevant.

As a starting point, our AdWords program Content Policy explicitly states that “[a]dvertising is not permitted for the promotion of child pornography”. The policy is available online at <https://adwords.google.com/select/contentpolicy.html>. The Terms and Conditions for AdWords, available online at <https://adwords.google.com/select/tsandcsfinder>, requires users to agree that they will not use the service to advertise anything illegal.

We enforce our Content Policy through a screening process that combines automated and manual review. The AdWords system begins performing automated policy checks as soon as an advertiser submits an ad. Text ads entered through our online system are subject to real-time automatic screening for potentially sensitive or objectionable terms. If the ad and the list of associated keywords are flagged in this automated screening process, the ad is subjected to further review by the Google AdWords team, and will not appear anywhere until it has been reviewed and approved by a team of trained employees. All ads flagged as relating to adult content are manually reviewed by our trained specialists.

Thanks in part to input we received from this Subcommittee's staff, we recently revisited the issue of how we treat ads referencing teen pornography. We want to ensure that advertisers, even if they may offer completely lawful material, are prohibited from making allusions to illegal content in advertisements to attract customers. To this end, we've enhanced our policies to prohibit the promotion of underage teen pornography.

As we stated earlier, advertisements promoting child pornography are strictly prohibited. When we discover an applicant we suspect is engaged in child pornography, we immediately report the case to the appropriate authorities, such as NCMEC. In our experience, child pornographers very rarely attempt to

advertise online as it requires the submission of verifiable personal information, including a credit card. We estimate that we identify and report to the authorities approximately one to two advertisers every six months whom we suspect are engaged in child pornography.

b. Reporting & Removal

Google immediately removes images of child pornography as soon as we become aware of the existence of child pornography on any Google website. We also immediately report it to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (“NCMEC”), along with identifying information for the individual who posted the material.

In addition, when we become aware of child pornography on any Internet website that appears in our search results, we immediately remove the link to such a website from our search results and report the site to the appropriate authorities.

Google has developed a variety of methods of detecting child pornography that may appear in our services.

First, we train our employees to recognize child pornography and to report it to our legal department. Specifically, the customer support representatives who work on products that involve user-submitted material receive such training. Members of our web search quality team are also trained to recognize child pornography when they find it in our index. Employees are trained to regularly report any child pornography that they detect to our legal department.

Second, we receive information about websites containing child pornography through our membership in international industry associations, such as the Internet Watch Foundation (IWF) in the United Kingdom and The Association for the Voluntary Self-Monitoring of Multimedia Service Providers (abbreviated FSM) in Germany. In addition to supporting these groups’ advocacy work, we routinely access their databases that list websites suspected of containing child abuse images and remove any illegal URLs from our search results.

Third, we encourage our users to tell us about inappropriate content they may encounter in our products and services through the Google Help Center.

When our employees find or receive information about images of child pornography through any of these sources, they immediately report it to the legal department. Our legal department has a team of people trained to submit reports to authorities such as NCMEC and they make daily reports using the organization’s web-based reporting tool.

c. Industry Coalitions

In addition to its own initiatives for detecting and reporting child pornography, Google is increasingly involved in private-sector initiatives devoted to combating child pornography. For example, Google recently joined the Financial Coalition Against Child Pornography, a group of financial institutions and Internet companies working together to stop the online purchase and exchange of child pornography. The goal is to eradicate commercial child pornography by 2008.

We look forward to engaging with others in the industry and with NCMEC through the Financial Coalition and other initiatives. We are hopeful that these collaborative industry efforts will result in the development of new methods of eradicating the use of the Internet for the crime of child pornography.

3. Promoting Child Safety on the Internet

Google recognizes that parents and children around the world use Google.com as an educational tool to explore the Internet and discover the world's information. We are proud of that use of our service.

Google also recognizes the risk that children who use the Internet may come across material that may be inappropriate because of the content of the material, their age, their family's values, or a combination of these factors. Google believes that technological tools and user awareness are among the most effective means of promoting child safety on the Internet.

a. *Tools for Safe Searching*

Google believes that technological tools are an important method of protecting children from inappropriate content on the Internet in a way that reflects the needs of individual families. As such, Google has developed its Safe Search tool, which is available to any user of Google.com who wishes to filter adult content from search results.

Google's SafeSearch is an automated tool that screens for websites containing explicit sexual content and removes those websites from search results based on the SafeSearch setting chosen by a user. The SafeSearch filter uses advanced technology to check keywords, phrases, URLs and Open Directory categories, to block pornographic and other explicit sexual content from search results. No filter is 100% accurate, but we believe that SafeSearch effectively eliminates most inappropriate sexual material. Users can customize their SafeSearch settings by clicking on the "Preferences" link to the right of the search box on Google.com, and selecting one of the following:

- **Strict filtering**, which applies SafeSearch filtering to both image search and ordinary web search results;
- **Moderate filtering**, which excludes most explicit images from Google Image Search results, but does not filter ordinary web search results. This is the default SafeSearch setting for users of Google.com, who may change the setting as desired; and
- **No Filtering**, which turns off SafeSearch filtering.

Experience has shown that filtering controlled by end users tends to be one of the more effective and flexible approaches to limiting exposure to unwanted content. Other methods, such as attempting to block whole search requests, can prevent users from finding useful resources associated with blocked terms. (For example, blocking searches for "child pornography" would prevent a user from finding information about NCMEC and other child protection resources.) Blocking specific searches also tends to be ineffective against sophisticated users who simply revise their search terms to evade blocking. Other methods, such as imposing a single standard for all users, can overblock content for some while providing insufficient protection for others.

We are constantly seeking new and better ways to ensure our users see the best lawful results we can find. We believe filtering technologies, like SafeSearch, are powerful tools for families to manage the information available on the Internet, according to their own values and the needs of their children.

b. *Promoting User Education*

Educating America's families about how to be safe online remains one of the most important initiatives in the area of child safety. Great work is now being done to better equip parents and children, from tips

about where to put computers in the home (for example, where parents can see them) to online safety curricula that teach children how to avoid predators and unsafe content.

Google applauds the many private-sector organizations devoted to child safety issues on the Internet, and supports their causes. For example, earlier this month, Google co-sponsored WiredSafety.org's first annual "Protecting Our WiredKids" Internet Safety Summit in White Plains, New York. The Summit focused on social and community networking websites and best practice models in that emerging Internet space. We are also excited about a new project to help WiredSafety develop Internet safety educational materials to be used by local community policing officers, including lesson plans, activities and student presentation materials.

In addition, Google is pursuing opportunities to provide free public-service advertising to government agencies and non-profit groups in support of public education campaigns about child online safety. Google believes that these and other initiatives in the private sector are essential parts of teaching a new generation of users to be safe online.

4. Law Enforcement Assistance

The first and most important way to stop child pornography is to prosecute those who exploit children. Google takes seriously its responsibility to work closely with law enforcement to combat child exploitation. Google responds to thousands of law enforcement requests for assistance each year, and has a legal team devoted solely to this effort. We believe that we respond to hundreds of subpoenas a year as part of our cooperation in local, federal and international child safety investigations.

Google also regularly preserves data upon receipt from law enforcement officials of a data preservation request that is compliant with the U.S. Electronic Communications Privacy Act. Section 2703(f) of ECPA allows any government entity to require service providers to preserve records for up to 90 days, renewable for another 90 days with a mere request. Google preserves data in response to several hundred such requests a year.

5. Conclusion

Google keenly understands that our business relies on the existence of a healthy and trusted Internet ecosystem. Child pornography, and those who purvey it, should have no place in that system. For that reason, and as described in this testimony, we work on many fronts to combat this sinister activity: by cooperating with law enforcement, by supporting educational and industry efforts to keep kids safe, and by constantly working to improve our own technologies to the same end.

Thank you again for your leadership on this important issue. We look forward to working with you to protect all of our children on the Internet.

Biography of Nicole Wong

Nicole Wong is Associate General Counsel for Products and Intellectual Property at Google. Prior to joining Google, Nicole was a partner at the law firm of Perkins Coie, LLP, where she led a team of attorneys specializing in Internet law, including online content regulation, intellectual property, privacy, security and eCommerce.

In addition to her practice, Nicole is a frequent speaker and author on issues related to law and technology. She previously served as a co-chair of the Practising Law Institute's Internet Law Institute and as an adjunct professor at the University of San Francisco School of Law where she taught media law. Nicole speaks at national and international conferences regarding Internet issues and, in April 2000, testified before the House of Representatives regarding the Fourth Amendment and the Internet. She received her law degree and a Master's degree in Journalism from the University of California at Berkeley.