

# Combating Child Exploitation Online



## Key Points

- The Internet serves many beneficial and constructive purposes, but it has also created new avenues for criminals to exploit young people, such as through child pornography.
- Microsoft devotes extensive resources in advancing technology, techniques, and processes to combat the use of the Internet to exploit children. These include filtering tools and an advanced technology, PhotoDNA, that helps refine and automate the search for child pornography among the billions of photos on the Internet.
- Microsoft is working with experts around the world to advance innovations that will combat the sexual exploitation of children, including child pornography and sex trafficking.

## BACKGROUND

Every day, millions of people connect and share content on the Internet in beneficial and constructive ways. But the Internet has also created new avenues for criminals to exploit young people, such as through the distribution of child pornography (also known as child abuse images), the trafficking of children for sex, and the grooming of children for sexual exploitation.

The production and distribution of child pornography represents a significant law enforcement problem. Since 2002, the National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC) has reviewed and analyzed more than 65 million photos and videos of child pornography. These images are often found after pedophiles share and trade them among themselves and with others who reinforce their shared sexual interest in children.

As of 2011, most of the victims of child pornography that NCMEC identified were prepubescent, with infants and toddlers the fastest-growing age category. Internet companies have an important role to play in helping fight this horrific trade by acting quickly to find, report, and eliminate these illegal images.

Another form of child exploitation is the use of the Internet by child predators to find victims. These predators take advantage of the Internet's anonymity to build online relationships with young people or to communicate with those who traffic children for sex. As in the fight against child pornography, Internet companies have an important function in stopping predators and child sex traffickers. They can enforce codes of conduct, provide mechanisms for customers to report predators, and invest in innovation for improved detection.

Globally, law enforcement is doing admirable work to combat the online exploitation of children, but the scale of this problem requires broader cooperation across law enforcement, government, industry, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), and academia.

## MICROSOFT APPROACH

- The Microsoft Digital Crimes Unit (DCU) is a worldwide team of attorneys, investigators, technical analysts, and other specialists. The team works to transform the fight against digital crime through partnerships and legal and technical breakthroughs that destroy the way cyber criminals operate. DCU is a unique team in the tech industry, focused on disrupting some of the most difficult cyber crime threats facing society today—including the sexual exploitation of children facilitated by technology.
- Microsoft devotes extensive resources to developing technology that battles online child exploitation and that supports the efforts of governments and NGOs devoted to the cause. Microsoft applies filtering tools and employs more than 100 trained experts to help detect and classify images of child abuse using Bing, SkyDrive, and other services. The company reports these images of apparent child pornography to NCMEC, removes them, and bans from the services the individuals or entities responsible for publishing them.
- Among the latest tools Microsoft uses in the fight against these illegal images is an advanced technology called PhotoDNA, developed by Microsoft Research in collaboration with Dartmouth College. It helps to refine and automate the search for child pornography among the billions of photos on the Internet. In 2009, DCU donated the license for PhotoDNA to NCMEC to help it work with online services such as Facebook to uncover images of child abuse.
- Microsoft works with law enforcement agencies around the world to develop tools to support their important work in fighting the exploitation of children. In 2012, Microsoft worked with NetClean

to make PhotoDNA image-matching technology available to law enforcement at no cost to aid in investigations of the sexual exploitation of children.

- Microsoft is also working with others to advance innovation in fighting child sex trafficking. The company collaborates with the Thorn Foundation's technology task force (whose members also include Facebook, Twitter, Google, and others), to explore new ways technology can address the problem. In 2012, DCU and Microsoft Research provided grants to six research teams to advance a deeper understanding of the advertising and selling of children and the use of technology in the child sex trade. The release of research results is expected later in 2013.

## POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

- Microsoft strongly supports enacting and enforcing laws against the possession, production, and distribution of child pornography worldwide. In 2010, the International Centre for Missing & Exploited Children (ICMEC) reported that only 45 countries have legislation sufficient to fight child pornography—and 89 countries have no laws at all that specifically address it.
- Internet companies should continue to work with governments and law enforcement to help address the problem of online predators by establishing industry best practices and guidance. More emphasis should be placed on how to enable companies to voluntarily find and report child pornography in order to eliminate it from the Internet. Policymakers can help change the focus of law enforcement to a victim-centric model that measures law enforcement on activities that stop crime and prevents victimization.



## Helpful Resources

Microsoft Security & Safety Center with age-based guidelines for Internet use  
[www.microsoft.com/security](http://www.microsoft.com/security)

Microsoft's PhotoDNA  
[www.microsoftphotodna.com](http://www.microsoftphotodna.com)

The Microsoft Digital Crimes Unit  
[www.microsoft.com/DCU](http://www.microsoft.com/DCU)

Microsoft's human rights statement  
[aka.ms/Human-Rights-Statement](http://aka.ms/Human-Rights-Statement)

The National Center for Missing & Exploited Children (NCMEC)  
[www.ncmec.org](http://www.ncmec.org)

Microsoft's research initiative on the role of technology in the sexual exploitation of children  
[aka.ms/human-trafficking-rfp](http://aka.ms/human-trafficking-rfp)