



1 September 2005

Pornographic Material - Not Just an Internet Problem

Andy Churley from PixAlert, a company that specialises in preventing illegal and pornographic images, comments on proposed new Government legislation

Home Office Minister Paul Goggins yesterday announced that the Government intends to ban the possession of extreme pornographic material. Under the Government's proposals, it would be an offence to possess images depicting scenes of serious sexual violence and other obscene material.

But while the main focus is on cracking down on new material being downloaded from Internet sites, illicit images are already common on desktops and networks and can be introduced via the new generation of digital devices such as USB keys, digital cameras, mobile phones, discs, MP3 Players, portable hard disks and unsecured wireless networks. Standard web filtering methods to prevent images being accessed from the Internet can easily be by-passed through the use of secure Internet proxies, embedded content and file encryption.

Another common assumption is that most of this activity goes on in homes yet, according to the Society of Human Resources Management, 70% of internet porn traffic occurs during working hours. There is clear evidence that many people are spending time at work looking at illegal or pornographic images and that the activity can become addictive. In one publicised case last year, at the UK Department of Works and Pensions, 2 million pornographic images were found on the network and even more worryingly 18,000 illegal images. With the potential new classification of illegal material this figure may well have been even greater.

Under existing UK legislation, companies and their senior managers can already be criminally and civilly liable for illegal and inappropriate images found in the workplace. Yet in a recent survey conducted by PixAlert and The Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development, over 50% of managers were unaware of this.

While this proposed new Government legislation will help further raise awareness and help deter this unacceptable behaviour, the only way to reduce corporate exposure and stop illicit images in the workplace is by monitoring what people are actually looking at on the desktops and auditing corporate IT assets in order to find and remove legacy material.

There is no doubt that the proposed new legislation is a positive step and could be a useful deterrent but this needs to be combined with greater awareness and use of preventative technologies, particularly in the workplace. In particular, it is important to recognise that the important issue is in the nature of the content ... not where it was accessed. This is not an Internet problem, pornographic and illegal images can originate from many sources.

Andy Churley (BEng, CEng, MBA, CITP, MBCS) is marketing director at PixAlert, www.pixalert.com

About PixAlert

PixAlert provides software and services that protect organisations and their staff from the legal ramifications of viewing inappropriate and illegal images on workplace computers. Its flagship PixAlert Enterprise provides a powerful image detection and analysis solution that protects against inappropriate content being introduced to enterprise desktops from any source. Unlike gateway-based offerings, PixAlert is PC/server-based to safeguard against Internet, email, CD/DVD, USB key, WiFi and cell phone-derived images.

The company's products are used by organisations concerned about corporate governance and costly and disruptive legal, compliance and ethical issues in industries such as healthcare, financial services, high-tech and government. Founded in 1999, and based in Dublin, Ireland, PixAlert has US headquarters in Boston and UK headquarters in London.

For further information contact:

Peter Rennison / Allie Andrews
PRPR
Tel: 01442 245030
Email: pr@prpr.co.uk