

Pornography dilemma for on-line services

By Simson Garfinkel
SPECIAL TO THE GLOBE

On-line services throughout the United States have been storing child pornography on their computers and making the files available to customers as the result of an uncontrolled and largely unpoliced Internet service called "Usenet."

As recently as last week, graphic depictions of children under the age of 16 and engaged in a variety of sexual acts, were available through Usenet over America Online, Netcom Online Communications Services Inc., as well as through local Internet providers including, TerraNet, Software Tool and Die, and The Internet Access Company.

When brought to their attention, some of the companies, including America Online, said they would remove the illegal child pornography. Others contend it is impossible to check every entry posted to the thousands of bulletin boards on the Internet and suggested customers themselves might have to act as gatekeepers to restrict illegal material.

Despite the fact that the files are widely available, posting, downloading and possessing the material is a crime punishable by between five and 15 years in prison.

However, companies might become more diligent about policing their services following a ruling last week by a state judge in New York that said Prodigy Services Inc. was responsible for the content published on its on-line service and could be sued for libel for material posted by one of its customers.

At any rate, the child pornography issue strikes at the heart of a dilemma faced by commercial on-line services that see a competitive advantage in providing low-cost, unrestricted gate-

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Subjects

- More MALE teens - contact sheet
- More MALE teens - 1 - a teen 1.
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- More MALE teens - 3 - a teen 3.
- More MALE teens - 4 - a teen 4.
- Teen and younger graphic files
- Teen and younger graphic files
- Teen and younger graphic files
- Teen and younger graphic files
- Teen and younger graphic files

GLOBE PHOTO

Files purporting to contain photos of teenagers engaged in sex were available over America Online last week. The company now says the material is no longer accessible.



Report doubts megaplex feasible

By Richard Kindleberger
GLOBE STAFF

Two days after a special state commission voted last week to build a full megaplex in South

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ways to the Internet, the vast worldwide computer network. At the same time, though, the companies are becoming vulnerable to lawsuits and even criminal charges for the content suddenly available through their systems.

In the last few years all the major commercial on-line services — Compuserve, America Online, Prodigy, Delphi, E-World and others, have been rushing to provide customers with total access to the Internet.

Usenet is a global electronic bulletin board system available with an Internet connection that links tens of thousands of computers and millions of people. The system is divided into more than 10,000 special interest "groups." Each group has its own self-descriptive name. For example, Usenet has a group devoted to people who own Saturn automobiles called "rec.autos.makers.saturn," or the Republican National Party at "alt.politics.usa.republican."

Usenet is also the source of some of the most sexually explicit stories, images and movies on the Internet. It has more than 30 groups devoted to sex and erotica, including groups for the transmission of pornographic images.

Unlike other Internet services, in which the data is only transferred when a subscriber makes a request, the Usenet carries hundreds of millions of bytes between subscribing computers, whether the information is requested or not. A spot check of on-line services in the Boston area found a group called "alt.binaries.erotica.teen," which implied that it was a repository for child pornography,

that was present on systems operated by TerraNet, Software Tool and Die, and The Internet Access Company. The group is also available on national on-line systems, including America Online and Netcom On-Line Communication Services Inc.

The Usenet group was also present on computers at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology. In one case, a computer at MIT further had subgroups called "teen.male" and "teen.female," and contained titles with graphic descriptions of the pictures and photos available. Some of the messages are posted anonymously, while others appear to be posted from accounts on America Online, Netcom, and even Boston University.

Title 18 of US Law, says it is a felony to distribute child pornography "by any means, including computers or mail," says Lance Rose, an attorney in Montclair, N.J., who is the author of the book *NetLaw* and specializes in computer law. Rose said that although US law does not require service operators to police their systems for child pornography, it certainly does require them to remove the child pornography from their systems when it is discovered.

The people posting the messages "may be doing themselves a disservice," said Rose. "At any time, the Justice Department may be gathering information about these people."

Despite the fact that the files are widely available, posting, downloading and possessing the material is a crime punishable by between five and 15 years in prison.

Most on-line services don't rigorously monitor the content of Usenet database that is on their own computers. Few even monitor the names of the groups that they carry. And

nearly all organizations that carry the Usenet have installed software that automatically subscribes to new groups when they are created elsewhere on the network.

"Basically, we allow the news group messages that come in from Usenet administrators to be actioned," or create the new group, says JR Oldroyd, president of Teranet Inc., an Internet provider based in Boston. Oldroyd said that his Usenet service was supplied to

him by Sprint Link, Sprint Communications' Internet service.

Barry Shein, president of SoftwareTool & Die, which operates the on-line service known as "The World" said his service routinely checks for obscene material.

"We have removed child porn in the past — the things that we believed were just fundamentally illegal when they were brought to attention — and we will continue to comply with the law."

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Trouble brewing on the dock

■ ODOR

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the Boston Harbor Hotel is located, "has become the most photographed location in the city. This would turn the area into another Port Elizabeth, N.J. It's not the kind of thing we are trying to promote."

Boston Harbor Hotel managing director Francois Nivaud, who has been asked to host a meeting of abutters with Artery/Tunnel officials this week, said that while he wants answers, he is not worried, yet. "We

words in my mouth."

Bavaro said the material being dug from under the channel will be barged to Spectacle Island. Two groups of up to six barges each will be used, floated in and out at low tide so they will fit under bridges. While one set is in the channel, the other will be tied up at Fan Pier until needed. Fan Pier was chosen, she said, because it is close to the work area.

But, she said, the abutters' worries already have sent state High-