

## TECHNOLOGY AND CHILD PORNOGRAPHY

Since the birth, in 1969, of the Internet at the Department of Defence's Advanced Research Projects Agency, with the director of computer research, Bob Taylor as the mid-wife, the "Net" has grown exponentially to reach almost the entire planet, and now even extends to outer-space. Welcome to the Information Age. The pervasive influence of the "Net" was soon to be given an even bigger boost when, in 1990, physicist Tim Berners-Lee developed what he called a "hypertext transfer protocol" (the familiar "http") a "hypertext markup language or "html" and the Uniform Resource Locator or URL which were to become the building blocks of today's World Wide Web or WWW, which allows access to, literally, billions of web pages in millions of websites. [On the evening of 3 September 2006, I typed in "pornography" in Google and was directed, in less than half a second, to 23 600 000 sites. Typing in "sex" resulted in 660 000 000 sites in just a little over half a second!] The number of host computers in January 1998 was estimated at 29.6 million. That figure went up to 43.2 million in January 1999, 72.4 million in 2000 and 109.6 million in 2001. Today, there are over a billion.

The increase in the availability of child abuse images is directly linked not just to the concomitant expansion of the Internet but also to advancing technology which increases its ease-of-use. Before the advent of the Internet and the World Wide Web, computer access to child abuse images was based mostly in the dial-up bulletin board market – or BBS for Bulletin Board Services. These bulletin boards required users to know the telephone number of the service's dial-in modem and often involved both long-distance charges plus a service fee, usually paid for by credit card, thus virtually eliminating access by most minors. In addition, configuring one's computer and modem to dial up these services required a high level

of computer expertise by the user. Also, once connected, bulletin board services required to user to know the desired file name and to issue special commands to transfer that file from the remote computer to the user's computer. Once the file arrived, it often needed to be decompressed and then retrieved using a software programme that could read that file type. And to read files containing pornographic images, one also needed a picture-viewing and knowledge of how to use such a programme to view a graphic image. But then came the very user-friendly WWW – by just clicking on a hypertext link, icon or a photograph on the Web, one can be automatically whisked to a remote computer's site and the desired image appears on the user's computer screen without any additional effort on the part of the user. Accessing pornography is now a simple "point-and-click" pleasure. And ISPs have made everything simple, efficient and user-friendly. Computers now come pre-installed with software for electronic or e-mail, for accessing chat rooms and for accessing web sites.

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