

Google asks Swiss court to lift Street View curbs

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The Google Street View Snow Mobile takes pictures of ski slopes for Google's Street View in front of the Matterhorn mountain in Zermatt, Switzerland, Monday, Feb. 21, 2011. (AP Photo/Keystone, Olivier Maire)

(AP) -- Google Inc. asked a Swiss court Thursday to lift curbs on its Street View service that have prevented the Internet search giant from updating the popular ground-level pictures in Switzerland for more than a year.

The country's strict [privacy laws](#) have proved a headache for the California company as it seeks to provide comprehensive 360-degree panoramas of streets and buildings around the world.

Lawyers for Google told Switzerland's Federal Administrative Court in Bern that [Street View](#) is comparable to services offered by rivals, and

[personal privacy](#) is guaranteed thanks to technology which automatically blurs faces and car plates.

Switzerland's data protection commissioner, Hanspeter Thuer, claimed otherwise.

Using a live version of Street View, he demonstrated examples where the software failed to obscure faces of adults and children in public - including outside the court - and even inside private homes.

"I don't want a ban of Google Street View," Thuer told the court. "But in the present form Google Street View breaches basic principles of privacy."

The company has faced similar concerns in many of the 27 countries where Street View is available, including the United States and Germany. In Israel, officials have expressed worry that the Street View might be used for terrorism and instructed the company to modify the service.

Thuer wants Google to guarantee that all faces and car plates are blurred - if necessary by checking all pictures manually.

He also demanded that private gardens and sensitive locations such as schools, hospitals and women's shelters be obscured.

Google lawyers countered that the company is continually improving its Street View technology and that the images are too banal, and of too poor quality, to be used to identify individuals whose privacy might be breached.

The case has generated enormous interest in Switzerland. Google has one of its biggest offices outside the United States in Zurich, where hundreds

of engineers develop new services for the company.

About one in four Swiss have used Street View, according to [Google](#). The company said last week that it is working to expand the service to cover the ski slopes around Switzerland's iconic Matterhorn mountain.

The court is expected to deliver its verdict at a later date.

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