

# Google cracks down on 'revenge porn' under new nudity policy

June 19 2015, by Michael Liedtke

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This Thursday, April 12, 2012 file photo shows a Google logo at the company's headquarters in Mountain View, Calif. According to new rules announced on Friday, June 19, 2015, Google plans to censor unauthorized nude photos from its Internet search engine in a policy change aimed at cracking down on a practice known as "revenge porn." (AP Photo/Paul Sakuma, File)

Google plans to censor unauthorized nude photos from its influential Internet search engine in a policy change aimed at cracking down on a malicious practice known as "revenge porn."

The new rules announced Friday will allow people whose naked pictures have been posted on a website without their permission to ask Google to prevent links to the image from appearing in its search results. A form for submitting the censorship requests to Google should be available within the next few weeks.

Google traditionally has resisted efforts to erase online content from its Internet search engine, maintaining that its judgments about information and images should be limited to how relevant the material is to each person's query. That libertarian approach helped establish Google as the world's most dominant search engine, processing roughly two-thirds of all online requests for information.

The Mountain View, California, company decided to make an exception with the unauthorized sharing of nude photos because those images are often posted by ex-spouses, partners in a broken romance or extortionists demanding ransoms to take down the pictures.

"Revenge porn images are intensely personal and emotionally damaging, and serve only to degrade the victims—predominantly women," Amit Singhal, Google's senior vice president of search, wrote in a Friday blog post.

Laws against revenge porn already have been passed in at least 17 states and a federal ban is expected to be introduced in Congress this year.

Google's stand against revenge porn won't necessarily purge it because not even the Internet's most powerful company has the authority to order other sites to remove offensive or even illegal content. But Google is hoping revenge porn will prove less mortifying to its intended victims by making it more difficult to find.

Other heavily trafficked sites, including Twitter and the social forum

Reddit, have embraced policies banning nude photos from being posted without the subject's permission. Earlier this year, Google tried to prohibit sexually explicit material from the publicly accessible sites in its Blogger service only to reverse itself within a few days amid cries of unwarranted censorship among Blogger's users.

This isn't the first time Google has excised sensitive content from its search index. In most instances, the company has been forced to do so under laws imposed in various countries where it operates. While its search engine operated in mainland China from 2006 through 2010, Google blocked information that the country's Communist government deemed to be inappropriate and the company has been scrubbing humiliating information from people's pasts in Europe for the past year.

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