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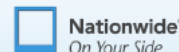
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Technology makes porn easier to access at work

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By Stephanie Armour, USA TODAY



Enlarge By Michael A. Schwarz, USA TODAY

Michael Leahy, here in a posed portrait, says employers didn't know he spent a lot of time looking at pornography on his laptop during work hours.

More than a decade after employers began cracking down on those who view online pornography at work, porn is continuing to create tension in offices across the nation — in part because laptop computers, cellphones and other portable devices have made it easier for risk-takers to visit such websites undetected.

Devices providing wireless access to the Internet appear to be giving the porn-at-work phenomenon a boost even as employers are getting more aggressive about using software to block workers' access to inappropriate websites. About 65% of U.S. companies used such software in 2005, according to a survey by the American Management Association and the ePolicy Institute, up from 40% in 2001.

Many employers say that because it's so easy to access porn on portable devices — even those that are company-owned and outfitted to block access to adult-oriented websites — they are increasingly concerned about being sued by employees who are offended when co-workers view naughty images.

With wireless devices, close monitoring of workers is "impossible. There's nothing you can do," says Richard Laermer, CEO of the public relations firm RLM. "Liability is the thing that keeps me up at night, because we are liable for things people do on your premises. It's serious. I'll see somebody doing it, and I'll peek over their shoulder, and they'll say, 'I don't know how that happened.' It's like 10-year-olds. And it's always on company time."

Through the years, surveys have indicated that many workers run across adult websites or images while at work, but few say they have done so intentionally.

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About 16% of men who have access to the Internet at work acknowledged having seen porn while on the job, according to a survey for Websense by Harris Interactive in 2006. Eight percent of women said they had. But of those who acknowledged viewing porn sites at work, only 6% of men and 5% of women acknowledged that they had done so intentionally.

When it comes to portable devices, employers can use blocking software if they have provided the equipment to workers, says Richard Chaifetz, CEO of ComPsych, a Chicago-based employee-assistance provider. However, there is little they can do if employees have their own BlackBerrys (RIMM) or other devices. In such cases, he says, some employers have begun restricting the use of employee-owned laptops or cellphones during work time or meetings.

"This issue is huge," Chaifetz says. "It's becoming a bigger and bigger problem."

A string of lawsuits

Meanwhile, porn continues to create conflicts in the workplace.

There has been a string of lawsuits filed recently by workers who say they've felt harassed by others' viewing of porn on the job. And in a twist, a few lawsuits have been filed by workers who believe they were disciplined unfairly for visiting porn sites

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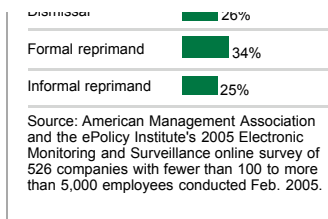
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EMPLOYERS ARE WATCHING	
How companies responded when surveyed about monitoring employee website habits:	
Does your company monitor and review website connections?	
All employees	62%
Not practiced	24%
Selected job categories	14%
How is monitoring categorized?	
Ongoing	41%
Routine	29%
Occasional	20%
Specified	10%
All employees informed of Web Monitoring?	
Yes	89%
No	11%
Is blocking software used to prevent Internet connections to unauthorized/inappropriate websites?	
Yes	65%
No	26%
Are employees disciplined for misuse of Internet?	
Yes	61%
No	23%
What form of discipline?	
Dismissal	20%

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WHO'S LOOKING

Men look at pornography at work more often than women do:

Visited a porn site while at work

Admitted that visit was intentional

Men

Visited a porn site while at work: 16%

Admitted that visit was intentional: 6%

Women

Visited a porn site while at work: 8%

Admitted that visit was intentional: 5%

Source: Websense telephone survey of 500 adult employees, conducted March 16-April 4, 2006.

on company time.

The federal Equal Employment Opportunity Commission has brought several lawsuits against companies based on complaints by people who claimed they saw co-workers viewing or distributing adult-oriented material at work.

In one case, the EEOC alleged that First Mutual, a mortgage company in Cherry Hill, N.J., subjected a male employee to a sexually hostile work environment, sexual harassment by a female co-worker and retaliatory firing when he complained. According to the lawsuit, the alleged harasser e-mailed nude photos of herself and of another woman to the man's company computer.

A First Mutual spokesman, saying the case has been settled, declined to comment.

In a case settled this year, the EEOC alleged that Sierra Aluminum fired a six-year employee after she reported that an assistant manager had viewed pornography on his company computer. The company will pay \$200,000 to settle the matter, according to an announcement released in August.

Sometimes, employees who were punished or fired for viewing adult-oriented websites at work have struck back.

IBM (IBM) is being sued by James Pacenza, who in 2003 was fired from his job at the company's research park in East Fishkill, N.Y., after he visited an adult chat site while at work and neglected to log off when he left the computer. Another worker discovered the site and told a manager.

Pacenza, a Vietnam War veteran, took IBM to federal court, claiming that his firing was wrong and discriminatory. In court papers, he says he relied on visiting the website to help ease post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD).

Pacenza, who had worked for IBM for more than 19 years, argues that employees with more severe psychological problems, or drug and alcohol addictions, were allowed to get

treatment without being fired.

"I really think he did nothing wrong and was fired for having a vulgar word on his computer," says Michael Diederich, Pacenza's attorney. "It was a pretext for getting rid of an older guy who suffered with psychological effects of Vietnam."

IBM spokesman Fred McNeese says Pacenza was "dismissed for violating IBM's business code of conduct." He says the company's employees are informed that computers are to be used for work purposes only.

IBM is seeking to have the case dismissed.

Employers look for solutions

The recent litigation surrounding porn-at-work complaints has many employers scrambling to come up with better strategies for discouraging workers from viewing such material.

About one in four companies have fired an employee for misusing the Internet, according to a 2005 survey by the American Management Association. Some employers have adopted a zero-tolerance policy; others impose progressively more serious penalties when they catch an employee viewing adult websites.

Lee Miller of the website Your Career Doctors, a career coach for midlevel executives in Morristown, N.J., says that when he was working for another company in 1999, he fired an employee who mistakenly forwarded a pornographic video clip to a female executive instead of to a male co-worker. The employee, he says, was a midlevel executive and very embarrassed.

"We called the guy in and said, 'Here it is, we have solid proof,'" says Miller, who has worked in human resources at several companies. "Often, they're sufficiently embarrassed that they usually resign, and companies don't want to make a big issue of it. Even though companies have the right to monitor (employees' Internet use), it's just not cost-effective" for many. "This tends to come up when somebody sees (adult content) over somebody's shoulder."

Discipline policies regarding adult content are a key issue in today's work environment, where it's not unusual for adult images to be passed around by e-mail.

In a 2004 survey of 15,000 people by *Elle* magazine and MSNBC, 15% of men and 8% of women acknowledged having e-mailed sexual images to co-workers. The online survey is the subject of an analysis on the Internet that will be published in the coming months in the *Journal of Sex Research*.

Julie Albright, a sociologist at the University of Southern California in Los Angeles and author of the upcoming article, says employers are right to be alarmed about adult content in the workplace.

"A lot of companies are very worried about a hostile work environment," she says. "Larger companies are more likely to have codes-of-conduct policies and are more likely to block sex websites, but smaller companies may not."

For some, the risk is a rush

Researchers and psychologists who study Internet users' behavior say those who view online porn at work are doing so because they get a rush out of taking risks, engage in self-delusional beliefs that they won't get caught and, in some cases, suffer from addictive behaviors.

The rising use of mobile devices such as video phones could exacerbate the problem, they say.

"This dilemma is going to get much worse, given the capacity of handheld, electronic devices to download porn," says Carleton Kendrick, a psychotherapist in Millis, Mass. "That will eliminate an employer's opportunity to check

which workers have been going to porn sites on company computers."

Michael Leahy, who used to work in computer sales for employers such as IBM, Unisys and NEC, agrees that mobile devices make it easier for workers who are bent on accessing porn sites to do so without their employers' knowledge.

He says that because of advances in mobile technology, employers' efforts to block or monitor workers' Internet usage can be circumvented easily and that efforts to block access to adult-oriented websites can be futile because so many new sites are popping up.

Leahy, 49, who says he is a recovering sex addict, says his employers never knew that he spent hours viewing pornography on his laptop during work hours.

"I always hid it. I always used laptops, and I'd look at it behind closed doors," says Leahy, who lives in Atlanta and is a speaker and writer on the issue of Internet pornography. "The biggest impact was the risk I brought to businesses in terms of sexual harassment or other claims and the lost productivity. Even with blockers and filters, I could view it."

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martinlarue wrote: 14d ago

There is software called HeatSeek at http://www.heatseek.com which is a private adult content browser. Though it doesn't protect you from some work systems which monitor traffic, it does encrypt all files on your computer and hides your browsing history and cookies. I saw it in MAXIM magazine a month ago...very highly rated.

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Digglerst wrote: 17d ago

this problem is pretty simple to fix. 'said' business could easily setup a router on their intranet and change the gateways on their PCs to go to that router, then set the router up as proxy that way all traffic doesn't come in or leave unless it is through the proxy. then set your filters. not hard

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mbkao wrote: 17d ago

I really don't see the point in viewing porn at work. It's way too risky! I'm on my 2nd job now (and no, I finished my last job on excellent terms) and as a computer technician, it's just way too risky. My first job I worked at a helpdesk where customers and co-workers could see my computer screen at any time. My boss's office was directly across the walkway.

My current job, I'm a field tech. Any computer I work on, I stand a real nice chance of getting caught if I were to look at porn.

Anyway, it just seems like a really lame way to lose one's job. And for people taking the sophisticated step of setting up a proxy at home, why? Why not wait till you get home? I could take knoppix (linux bootcd) and run it on a company machine. Nobody would know unless they saw me. Since it runs all from the disc itself, no evidence of my x-rated habits would hit the hard disk. If I really wanna get slick, I could use Tor (an encrypted proxy network) to run all my web surfing through. Everything coming in/out of my web browser would be encrypted. No company router would know. Anything I cooked to CD/DVD/USB flash drive, I could use TrueCrypt to protect with military grade crypto. That way if I lost the disc at work, nobody would be none the wiser.

And you know guys... If one is to setup a home proxy or use my sophisticated approach, why even go through the hassle and stress?!

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joromajo wrote: 18d ago

There were a lot of comments but the ones that caught my attention were those that asked "what did they do before the internet?" They must be pretty young because before the internet you had to