



DataTalk's review for the IWF

Since the inception of the Internet Watch Foundation in late 1996 a particular focus for the hotline has been on Usenet newsgroups, of which a very small proportion have been a regular and significant repository for abusive images of children.

Although the work of the IWF in identifying these groups has been pivotal in reducing their availability to UK Internet users, it remains vital that the organisation continues to work effectively with the UK Internet industry and law enforcement to take prompt and action where illegal content is found.

In November 2001 the IWF Board recommended that *"The IWF recommends all ISPs serving UK customers not to host newsgroups which the IWF identifies as regularly containing child pornography, the criteria for 'regular' being defined by the IWF Board".*

At the following IWF Board meeting on February 12th 2002 the meeting agreed a process for monitoring newsgroups and defined the criteria for "regular" as, *"during the close monitoring period finding an average of at least 1% of images viewed as illegal".* Additionally, a further test was agreed by Board as follows, *"in the "close monitoring" phase whereby in each of six consecutive monitoring rounds finding any illegal content would lead to immediate listing of the group, and six "clear" rounds would remove the group from monitoring."*

In order to define the necessary criteria for 'regular' and to improve the sampling process for monitoring groups, IWF has been working with DataTalk Ltd, specialists in statistical analysis. Underlying DataTalk's work has been the importance of identifying methods, which are demonstrably robust while at the same time balancing the need to eradicate illegal activity with the right to legitimate use of the Usenet environment.

DataTalk recommended improvements to the monitoring process in order to ensure that a random basis, independent of content, is used to select files for newsgroup monitoring. DataTalk have developed statistical models to provide a consistent process, which will ensure that the probability of illegal content being present in a specific newsgroup can be accurately and objectively estimated. This in turn ensures that UK Internet Service Providers can be confident that they are acting on a sound and defensible basis in following IWF recommendations on the hosting of particular newsgroups.

The improved monitoring process was implemented in September 2002. It has greatly enhance the role of IWF's small but highly dedicated and skilled hotline team, and has enabled the Internet Watch Foundation to operate even more effectively in carrying out its crucial work of combating abusive images of children on the Internet.