



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Monday, March 10, 2014

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Digital Citizens Alliance Calls On Google to Stop Profiting from Illegal Activities; Investigation Finds Bad Actors are Back In Business With Youtube

Popular Teen and Pre-Teen Site YouTube Still Infested With Videos for Illegal Prescription Drugs and Steroids, Stolen Credit Card Numbers, Fake Passports and Content Theft

New Poll: Nearly Nine out of 10 Americans Agree – Google has “responsibility to help make the Internet safe”

Washington, DC – The Digital Citizens Alliance today called on Google to stop profiting from a myriad of illegal and dangerous activities that take place on YouTube. Those activities include the marketing of illegal prescription drugs and steroids, fake passports, stolen credit cards, and content theft.

Digital Citizens made public its investigative report, “Digital Weeds: How Google Continues to Allow Bad Actors to Flourish On YouTube,” that shows how YouTube is still infested with hundreds of videos promoting dangerous and illegal

activities – nine months after Digital Citizens first showed ads running next to some of YouTube’s most dangerous videos. And just as troubling, both Google and the bad actors profit from advertising running along on the same YouTube page as these videos.

In many of the latest examples Digital Citizens discovered, ads from some of America’s best-known companies were running next to videos pushing access to dangerous products.

“Google has to start acting like the great company they claim to be and make Internet safety a priority,” said Tom Galvin, Executive Director of Digital Citizens. “When confronted with this issue last summer, Google scrubbed YouTube of thousands of incriminating videos to stop the criticism. Not surprisingly, the videos are back. I’ll say what I said nine months ago – the company that claims “don’t be evil” is its credo has to stop treating this as a PR problem and end its relationship with the bad actors who peddle dangerous drugs, stolen credit cards and Fake IDs.”

[Click here to see the report, a short video on how Google makes its money, as well as new polling results showing Americans’ growing concerns about how Google does business.](#)

In June 2013, Digital Citizens demonstrated countless examples of videos on YouTube that promoted the sale of prescription drugs such as Oxycontin, Percocet and Tramadol. [In addition, the report, entitled, “Google, YouTube and Evil Doers: Too Close for Comfort,”](#) demonstrated how bad actors promoted the sale of forged passports and drivers licenses, escort services and prostitution, counterfeits and content theft. Google responded to the public criticism by immediately removing the videos while claiming their systems worked.

New Poll Shows Americans Concern with Google is Growing

A Digital Citizens Alliance national survey released today reinforces how the public is looking to Google to do more to protect Internet users:

- The majority of Americans (57 percent) said Google should not post ads or accept ad revenue from sites that are providing illegal or illegitimate products or services.
- By a 26-point margin (53 percent-27 percent) Americans don’t believe that Google is doing enough to make the Internet a safer place.
- 88 percent of Americans agreed with the statement “As a nearly \$40 billion business, Google has a responsibility to help make the Internet safe.”

- Americans don't feel very safe online. Less than one in five (18 percent) said they feel "very safe" online, compared to 65 percent who feel "very safe" in their neighborhood, shopping at stores or walking to local parks.

Digital Citizens commissioned Axis Research to conduct the poll. Axis Research surveyed 1,006 voters by phone across the United States from February 19-23, 2014; 32% of all interviews were conducted via cell phones. The margin of error is ± 3.1 percentage points.

Details from "Digital Weeds" Report

In its "Digital Weeds" investigation, Digital Citizens researchers search YouTube again for some of the same videos promoting illegal or dangerous activities found during research in 2013.

These subject areas include:

Prescription Narcotics: Digital Citizens found hundreds of videos promoting the sale of illegally acquired prescription drugs. One video promoting where to buy Oxycontin and Roxicodone without a prescription had an ad promoting the 2014 Winter Olympics right next to it. In another case an ad for the Discover Card is flanked next to a video offering the stimulant Adderall and other drugs.

Stolen Credit Card Numbers: Financial fraud and ID theft are a scourge and growing threat to Internet commerce. Yet on YouTube there are videos on how to get stolen credit card numbers. In some of the videos there are ads from premium brands – in one case a Honda ad – that not only give credibility to criminals selling stolen credit card numbers, but enriches them too.

Fake Passports, Goods Currency: Digital Citizens found ads embedded in videos promoting the sale of fake passports, ID cards, fake money as well as fake goods. In one video promoting knock-off Michael Kors handbags an ad ran for the University of North Carolina's Business School.

Appearance and Performance Enhancing Drugs (APEDs): [Digital Citizens looked at APEDs in a separate report in October of 2013.](#) Steroids, human growth hormone and other performance-enhancing drugs remain popular on YouTube, which is especially troubling given their allure by teens who make up a large part of YouTube's audience. One HGH video, on YouTube since March 2013, has over 41,000 views. It has an ad embedded promoting flights to Los Angeles, one for hair loss and another for drug rehabilitation. Google analytics enable it to connect

ads that are relevant to the video, but apparently those analytics won't flag illegal activity.

Digital Citizens found that these videos were once again flourishing on YouTube - and Google continues to profit from them. Google profits by running ads tied to videos, and then splits the revenue with these bad actors.

“Just like after our first investigative report, we expect YouTube to take these videos down and the ads to go away almost instantly, but that is actually evidence of the problem, not the solution,” Galvin said.

About Digital Citizens Alliance

Digital Citizens is a consumer-oriented coalition focused on educating the public and policy makers on the threats that consumers face on the Internet and the importance for Internet stakeholders – individuals, government and industry - to make the Web a safer place. Based in Washington, DC, the Digital Citizens Alliance counts among its supporters: private citizens, the health, pharmaceutical and creative industries as well as online safety experts and other communities focused on Internet safety. For more information, please visit digitalcitizensalliance.org.