

RESTRICTED TO ADULTS
The RTA Labeling Initiative

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I. ADULT IS FOR ADULTS

Accessibility is, arguably, the whole point of the Internet. We have come to expect nothing less from our online experience than unmediated free expression on a global scale. Indeed, the World Wide Web is defined by the incredible volume and variety of information, services, commerce and channels of communication which it places at users' fingertips – including adult entertainment.

Even though adult entertainment is (by definition) intended for adults only, plenty of minors are still able to access it. This is unsurprising, since kids today are often even more conversant with and reliant upon the Internet and wireless technology than their parents. Sometimes, children view adult material accidentally. Other times they seek it out. Either way, short of denying them access to indispensable tools that have become integral to much of daily life, how can children be prevented from viewing age-restricted content online?

II. TAKING RESPONSIBILITY

Attentive parents make rules about what movies, TV shows and video games their children are permitted to watch and play. Obviously, the same should hold true for the Internet. But parents can't always be there to look over their kids' shoulders, especially since children may even access such content using mobile devices. That's why there are numerous products and services designed to help them monitor and chaperone their children's online activity.

"Parental controls" are now offered by web browsers, internet service providers (ISPs), firewall proxy servers, search engines, and even computer operating systems. Meanwhile, special plug-ins, toolbars and filtering software are widely available – in many cases for free. These options are also commonly used to moderate kids' internet use in schools, libraries and other public places.

However, even conscientious parents equipped with these tools can't do it alone. Content providers have a responsibility as well. In the case of adult entertainment, websites offering adult videos, pictures, stories, shopping, dating and gambling need to make sure their sites are unambiguously recognizable by parental control systems as being inappropriate for minors.

III. THE RTA LABEL

That's why, in 2006, the Association of Sites Advocating Child Protection (ASACP) launched the RTA ("Restricted To Adults") website label. By providing a single, consistent, universally recognizable tag for adult material, RTA better

enables parental filtering – and demonstrates the online adult industry’s commitment to helping parents prevent children from viewing age-restricted content.

The RTA label was developed by ASACP with input from technical consultants, attorneys, and adult companies. RTA is a simple meta tag that can be pasted into the header of any web page, site or server:

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<meta name="RATING" content="RTA-5042-1996-1400-1577-RTA"/>
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Embedding this code in page header metadata tags enables filtering via all of the various parental control mechanisms listed above. The RTA label is already recognized by various filtering products and services, and ASACP continues to pursue partnerships with many more to ensure that RTA is recognized as widely as possible. Significantly, RTA is recognized by the parental controls in both Microsoft and Apple browsers, including browser use on mobile devices. The RTA label can even be used to tag individual social networking site user pages, blogs, and mobile apps that feature adult material.

Though trademarked in the United States, Europe (community mark) and Australia (use mark), the RTA label is completely free to use, voluntary, and universally available to any website that wishes to label itself clearly and effectively as being inappropriate for viewing by minors. Using RTA requires no online form to fill out, no registration, and no fee. RTA does not differentiate between “hardcore” and “softcore” material; all content considered unsuitable for minors is simply labeled “Restricted to Adults.” For large websites with numerous pages, various shortcuts (many of which can be found on the *RTAlabel.org* website) are available to help speed up the process of site labeling.

IV. BACKGROUND & HISTORY

Website labeling isn’t new. In 1998 the World Wide Web consortium designed PICS (Platform for Internet Content Selection) to help parents and teachers control what children access on the net. PICS formed the basis for the labeling system later developed by the Internet Content Rating Association (ICRA), which had itself evolved from the Recreational Software Advisory Council Internet rating system [RSACi]. ICRA has since become part of the Family Online Safety Institute (FOSI). The ICRA system enables sites of all kinds (not just adult sites) to label themselves according to their content, so that parents and other users can choose what sort of material will or will not be viewable online.

By 2006, more than 200,000 websites had registered with ICRA, including about 40,000 adult entertainment sites. However, that number represented only a small percentage of the millions of adult sites on the web – too small to yet demonstrate effective self-regulation on the part of the online adult entertainment

industry. That year, Attorney General Gonzales proposed the “Child Pornography and Obscenity Prevention Amendments of 2006” which included a “requirement to place warning labels on commercial websites containing sexually explicit material.” The proposal meant that specific metadata tags, specs to be determined by the Federal Trade Commission, would have to be embedded in the headers of every page on every adult site. The penalty for failing to do so would be up to five years in prison. Several bills were subsequently introduced that incorporated this language.

Previous attempts to impose solutions such as age verification had proved unenforceable due to legal challenges (and impractical due to technical limitations) – and as with any other industry, adult entertainment companies tend to prefer self-regulation to mandatory requirements. However, the idea of voluntary site labeling was beginning to gain traction within the industry itself. Therefore, when Microsoft asked ASACP to develop an “adults only” label which would be recognizable by the parental controls in its new Vista operating system, ASACP took the concept a step further. ASACP began talking to its sponsors and members, other adult companies, industry attorneys and its board members about how to devise a simple, standardized website label for the entire adult entertainment industry. ASACP held online “Town Hall” forums to get more input, as well as workshop sessions on self-labeling at industry trade shows.

Subsequent feedback suggested that many website owners found the ICRA labeling system to be confusing and sometimes ineffective, and that adult companies would be more comfortable with a label originating with ASACP, an organization supported by and friendly to the adult industry. Some adult companies also expressed concern over how a government-devised labeling system might work, and potentially affect their business. ASACP and its partners posited that a voluntary, self-regulatory labeling system would help dispel misconceptions by the mainstream media and the U.S. government that the adult industry was doing nothing to protect children from accidentally viewing adult content.

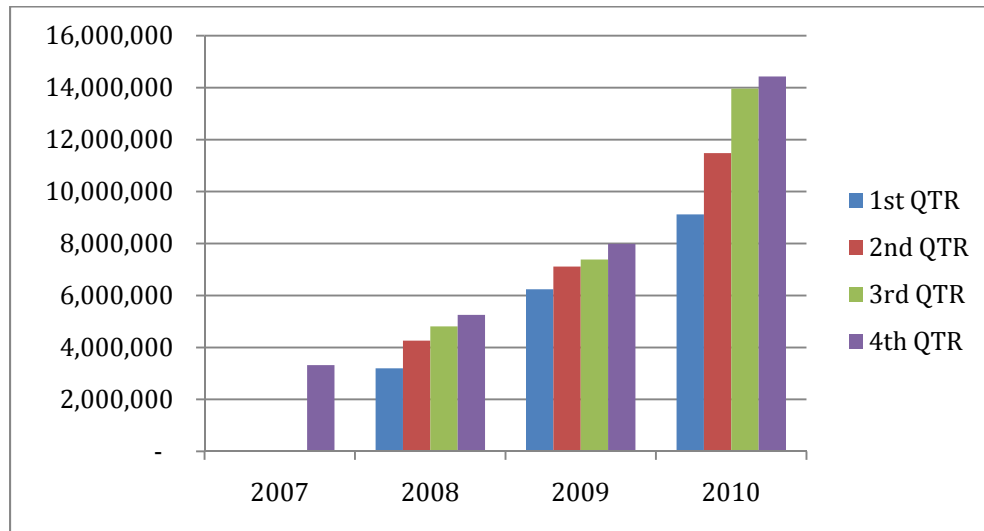
In November 2006, the website *RTAlabel.org* was launched, offering information and news about the RTA label, instructions for its application and use, and endorsements from prominent adult companies. ASACP also continued to promote the label elsewhere online and at industry events. ASACP members and other adult companies began adopting the tag, as well as encouraging their affiliates and clients to use the RTA label by sending out information in their newsletters and placing banners on resource sites.

V. GROWTH & EFFECTIVENESS

Within a year of its release, more than 3 million web pages had been labeled using the RTA tag. After two years, more than 5 million web pages bore the RTA

label, and after three years the number had increased to almost 8 million. Now at the four year mark, the RTA label is in use on some 14 million adult web pages, which by ASACP's estimate corresponds to approximately 4.5 million distinct websites. (ASACP tracks RTA's online presence using Yahoo! Site Explorer, its own independent "spidering" of the Internet, and by directly polling adult sites.)

RTA Label prevalence, 2006-2010



Number of RTA Labeled Pages by Year

*4th Quarter 2010 as of October 18th

Even more significant than those numbers is RTA's ubiquitous presence on top adult websites. While it is impossible to determine how many adult websites exist online, a relatively small number of sites account for the vast majority of all adult web traffic. Polling indicates that the majority of the most popular sites have self-labeled with the RTA tag, accounting for some 6.5 billion unique visitors per month to pages labeled with RTA. Polled sites rank in the Global top 1000 of Alexa.com. That means that as much as 90% of adult web traffic involves sites labeled with RTA. This is perhaps the most important indicator of RTA's overall effectiveness, since it means that RTA has essentially achieved near-total market penetration.

Another important factor is the use of RTA by companies outside the United States. One of the stumbling blocks for past efforts to make website labeling mandatory was the fact that U.S. law does not apply overseas; thus, websites operated by foreign companies can not be required to label. However, numerous international companies *have* adopted the voluntary RTA label, since RTA has become both the national and international industry standard for self-labeling by adult entertainment websites. With RTA now being used by adult entertainment companies based in the United States, Canada, Mexico, the United Kingdom,

France, Spain, Italy, Germany, the Netherlands, Finland, Romania, Czech Republic, Australia, Japan, the Philippines, Portugal, Panama and Brazil, it is apparent that industry self-regulation has finally accomplished what government intervention could not.

ASACP received the 2008 Associations Make a Better World Award from the American Society of Association Executives (ASAE) for its work on the RTA labeling initiative. The RTA label's success also led to recognition from Congresswoman Jane Harmon and members of the California State Legislature, as well as from the mayors of Los Angeles, San Francisco, San Diego, West Hollywood and Redondo Beach.

Today, ASACP continues to modify and improve RTA to keep pace with the ever-changing technical landscape. One recent development is an RTA plug-in for WordPress, developed *pro bono* by Saguaro Digital. The plug-in enables bloggers and webmaster to label their content more easily. WordPress is used by more than 200 million websites worldwide.

In November 2010, ASACP is announcing another innovation: RTA labeling for mobile “apps” – software designed to run on hand-held devices. Mobile apps have become popular and widespread, including some that feature adult content. However, as with many new technologies, parental controls were not part of the original equation, and the general consensus at the FOSI European Conference 2010 was that there was currently no technological fix to prevent children from viewing such apps. Enhancing RTA's effectiveness for mobile devices is especially important since mobile adult content represents an ever-increasing share of the overall adult entertainment market. As of 2009, worldwide revenues for mobile adult content had already reached \$1.7 billion, and are expected to grow.¹

However, ASACP had already established a Mobile RTA Apps taskforce to address this gap, and with the participation of the companies responsible for the bulk of adult apps, ASACP developed an RTA Label/Filter solution. These companies agreed to include the RTA label in adult apps they develop. Mobile operating systems with parental controls activated can then detect the RTA label using RTA App Filter software, and prevent children from accessing the age-restricted apps. By working on both the developer/labeling end and the end user/filtering end, ASACP is delivering the only complete solution.

VI. NEXT STEPS

¹ Juniper Research. “Mobile Adult Strategies: Downloads, Video Chat, Apps & Messaging 2010-2015.” October, 2010.

As detailed above, the RTA website labeling initiative has made important strides towards accomplishing its goal of improving parents' ability to prevent their children from viewing age-restricted content online. To continue this progress, three things must happen:

1) Adult websites need to label with RTA

The majority of adult web traffic is now labeled with the RTA tag. However, there are still many adult websites that do not yet use RTA. Therefore, ASACP and its partners continue to promote the RTA label and conduct outreach to make sure its use is as widespread as possible in the online adult entertainment industry. This campaign includes Public Service Announcement videos by industry leaders encouraging all adult businesses to use RTA

2) Filtering mechanisms need to recognize RTA

The RTA tag is recognized not only by the top filtering products, but also by the parental controls in both Microsoft and Apple browsers. Therefore the vast majority of Internet users now have easy access to effective filtering that blocks RTA-labeled sites. ASACP continues to seek partnerships with even more companies and products, to make RTA as effective as possible. ASACP is conducting outreach to manufacturers of hand-held mobile devices (smart phones) running the Android operating system, to incorporate the RTA App Filter software on these devices. ASACP is also continuously researching other ways to make this filter as widely available as possible to the parents of children with hand-held mobile devices, and exploring opportunities to adapt this technology to function on other major hand-held mobile device operating systems.

3) Parents need to use filtering mechanisms

A 2007 report by the Kaiser Family Foundation entitled *Parents, Children & Media* indicated that only 41 percent of parents surveyed used parental controls to block their children's access to certain websites. Likewise, Adam Thierer of the Progress & Freedom Foundation noted in a 2009 article:

“Parental control technologies are now ubiquitously available, increasingly easy to use, and also increasingly free-of-charge. Indeed, there has never been a time in our nation's history when parents have had more tools and methods at their disposal to help them decide what constitutes acceptable media content in their homes and in the lives of their children. However, merely because parents have been empowered, it does not mean they are all taking advantage of those tools.”²

² Thierer, Adam. “Who Needs Parental Controls? Assessing the Relevant Market for Parental Control Technologies” *Progress on Point* Volume 16, Issue 5. February 2009.

The implication is clear. Parents can't do it alone – but without parents' active involvement, no technical fix can ever be fully effective. Therefore ASACP will also continue to urge parents to investigate their many options for assuring that their children have a safe and appropriate online experience.

VII. ABOUT ASACP

Founded in 1996, ASACP is a non-profit organization dedicated to eliminating child pornography from the Internet. ASACP battles child pornography through its CP Reporting Hotline, and by leveraging the adult entertainment industry's financial backing and technical expertise to help eliminate the commercial trade in imagery depicting the sexual abuse of children. Through its Technology Taskforce of industry experts, ASACP provides support to a range of child protection groups in an effort to shut down CP distribution. ASACP also works to help parents prevent children from viewing age-restricted material online, with its Restricted to Adults (RTA™) label.

ASACP is member-supported, and offers a model of effective self-regulation for the online adult industry, including a Code of Ethics and Best Practices. Approved Members include adult entertainment and dating sites, content producers and distributors, support services providers (including web hosting, billing, traffic and software), merchant sites, affiliate programs, industry trade publications and traffic networks.