

# Web Filtering System - Freedom to Explore, Create, Share and Learn in a Safe and Secure Environment

## **Protex and Google Images**

We regularly have requests from schools regarding Google Image searches. In most cases these are comments about particular images that have shown up on a student's computer which are considered to be unsuitable. These notes explain how Protex handles the results from Google Image searches and the limits to what it can do.

Firstly, it is important to note that E2BN does not recommend using Google Images for younger pupils. The main audience for Google is the general public and it is not specifically designed for school use. Certainly for Primary age pupils we would recommend that pupils are not encouraged to use Google Images as a matter of course. E2BN does have an extensive image gallery of its own - http://gallery.e2bn.org containing high resolution, copyright free and moderated images. In addition http://picsearch.co.uk declares itself to be child friendly and does target the "family" audience. While we cannot guarantee the suitability of all its images the tests we have done do indicate that its results are more generally acceptable than Google Images.

#### Google's Tools

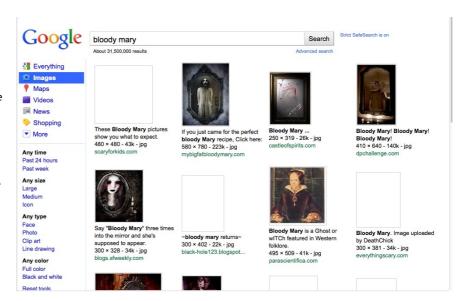
Google does offer some tools ("Safe Search" and "Very Safe Search"). For all student profiles Protex enforces a Safe Search option on all queries. On the Primary and Middle profiles we enforce Google's undocumented "Very Safe Search" option while the standard "Safe Search" is enforced in the Secondary and Sixth form profiles. These settings tell Google to return filtered results to the user. They are generally effective at blocking very adult content are are probably acceptable for the casual home user. Schools, however, are much more sensitive to what is acceptable at different ages: Google's tools are too generic to be acceptable on their own.

### **Protex Thumbnail Filtering**

The first point at which an image becomes visible to the user is when the results page appears with a "thumbnail" of each image. Before this page is displayed to the user Protex looks at where each image has come from and checks whether the URL is in our block list.

For example, suppose agamessite.com is listed under Kidstimewasting. In this case the thumbnail of any image from agamessite.com returned by Google will be replaced with a white one. You can clearly see in the example page to the right that some images have been blanked out.

The replacement of the thumbnails is dependent upon the host site's URL being listed as a blocked site: images on pages which are blocked because of Protex's Content Checking will not have their thumbnails replaced.



If a blocked site hosts its images on another server which is not itself blocked by Protex then the image thumbnails will not be replaced. Suppose, for example, that a banned Blog links to an image which is not appropriate for Primary pupils on the Guardian website. In this case even though what appears to be the host site is banned the image thumbnail will not be replaced as it comes from site which is not blocked. But clicking on the image to go to the Blog will result in it being blocked.

Protex also blocks some specific search requests and schools with ProtexLocal can block specific searches themselves.

#### Google Images and the Staff profile

The Staff profile does not have either of the Safe Search options enforced. We do, however, recommend that all staff set their browsers to use "Safe Search" by default and only turn it off is they need to widen their search for a specific reason. There will be a marked difference between the images returned as the result of the same search on a student profile and the Staff one. The staff profile is still filtered and any images from sites normally blocked to staff will be replaced as above. The different results can lead to the apparently paradoxical situation where the same search is blocked to staff but allowed to students! This happens because the unfiltered results from Google take the page over the weighted phrase limit for the Staff profile whereas the pre-filtered results for the Student profile do not.

Further documentation can be found on the Protex website.

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