

## The web: there's less porn than imagined

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You may remember that, at the start of the year, Google was in a legal tussle with US government lawyers over its search data. The Bush administration wanted to see the requests entered into the search engine to give it the information it said it needed to protect children from online pornography. Citing privacy concerns, Google said no.

But courtroom battles continue. In the latest, which sees the American Civil Liberties Union take on the US attorney general, Alberto Gonzalez, over the Children Online Protection Act, some data has emerged (via the **San Jose Mercury News**) on the amount of porn on the web. And - judging by the surprise of colleagues I read it out to - it is less than most people thought.

According to a confidential analysis seen by the paper, **around 1% of all webpages contain sexually explicit material** (based on random samples taken from the Yahoo, MSN and Google search index, and Yahoo and AOL search requests).

What the analysis cannot reveal is whether this is a declining or increasing amount or whether, for example, the weight of the estimated 55m blogs is drowning out the porn.

Seth Finkelstein, a civil-liberties activist quoted in the piece, has another theory.

"What we are learning about the internet is that it reflects life and that the internet is not - contrary to what some people might think - more sexual than people are in general."