

Australian police, Facebook crack child porn ring

The Associated Press

ADELAIDE, Australia (AP) -- An international child pornography ring that operated on Facebook has been brought down with the social networking site's support, Australian police said Friday.

Eleven people have been charged in Australia, Britain and Canada in connection with the syndicate, which involved people using Facebook to distribute and view graphic sexual images, police said.

The Sydney Morning Herald newspaper reported Friday that Facebook management knew about the pornography on its website and had deactivated accounts of people involved, but had not informed police.

Facebook and Australian Federal Police issued a joint statement in response to the report saying the networking site had immediately taken action once a police investigation began, and its assistance was "integral to bringing down this international child pornography syndicate."

The statement acknowledged the difficulty Facebook had in stopping the syndicate, as users would set up false new accounts after their accounts were deactivated.

"Policing in this social networking environment is a challenge, but the cooperation during this operation demonstrates that international law enforcement is united in a global fight against online child exploitation material," the statement said. "It is important that content service providers including Facebook constantly scan for child exploitation material, and then inform law enforcement of their findings."

Australian police said they began investigating the case in March after a covert agent established an online identity on Facebook and was approached by a member of the child pornography ring.

By June, the investigation included police in the United States, Canada, Britain, Germany, South Africa and Switzerland, police said. The investigation is continuing, they said.

Facebook has no staff in Australia. Joe Sullivan, Facebook's chief security officer, said a member of his team would visit Australia in September for meetings with police and child safety advocates.

He said Facebook and the Australian police were working on protocols to ensure that illegal activity would be reported more rapidly to police.

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