



**Apple has earned an estimated
\$150 Million or more**
from customers who store
Child Sexual Abuse Material on iCloud

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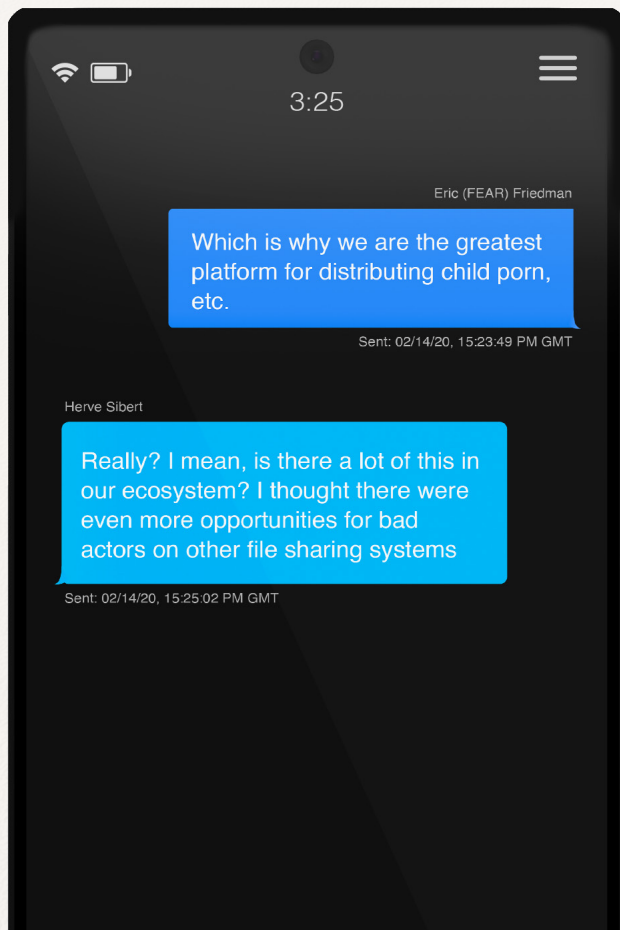
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Introduction

Apple is one of the most widely used tech companies in the world. Unlike their peers, however, they lack a robust policy of identifying, reporting, and removing images of child sexual abuse. **In 2025, Google, Meta, Amazon, and TikTok each made more than 1 million reports of child sexual abuse to the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC). Apple made fewer than 300.** That's less CSAM detection and reporting than eBay, Spotify, and even 4Chan, from a company that controls more than half of the U.S. smartphone market.



Heat Initiative wanted to better understand why Apple reports a fraction of the illegal images their peers report. We conducted an analysis of Apple's financial incentive to allow customers to host child sex abuse material (CSAM) on iCloud without threat of detection or removal and estimated the direct economic benefit of this policy for Apple.

BASED ON PUBLICLY AVAILABLE DATA, HEAT INITIATIVE ESTIMATES THAT APPLE HAS EARNED APPROXIMATELY \$150 MILLION IN REVENUE FROM CUSTOMERS WHO STORE CSAM ON ICLOUD IN THE US, UK, AND AUSTRALIA ALONE OVER THE PAST 5 YEARS.

← A 2020 message from Apple executive Eric Friedman to his colleague, stating he believes Apple is the "greatest" platform for the distribution of CSAM.

Background

In 2021, following years of pressure from child safety groups, Apple announced that they would scan user photos stored in iCloud for known CSAM.

Apple stated that it designed this scanning system to protect user privacy through a special kind of digital fingerprinting. Instead of a computer actually looking at your photos, each image is converted into a short code, called a hash, that represents that image. Apple's version of this, called NeuralHash, creates the same fingerprint even if an image has been resized, cropped, or slightly edited, so it can still catch a modified copy of a known photo.

When a CSAM image is given a hash, tools can scan for the presence of that hash in a system without actually viewing that image, or any of the other images, on that system. Child protection organizations like NCMEC partner with tech companies to share hashes for known CSAM images as a tool to stop the spread of CSAM. In August 2021, Apple announced they would implement NeuralHash to scan user images on iCloud for

hashes of known CSAM images. They would then report matching hashes to NCMEC and ultimately to law enforcement for further investigation.

The announcement was quickly met with vocal criticism from privacy and digital rights groups, who feared that the technology could negatively impact privacy and security for iCloud users. A month later in September, Apple announced that they would pause the planned rollout to "collect input and make improvements before releasing these critically important child safety features." In December 2022, Apple announced that they would not move forward with CSAM detection on iCloud.

In 2024, Apple was sued by CSAM victims who claimed that images of the abuse perpetrated against them continued to be stored on iCloud. In response, Apple didn't deny that CSAM was being stored on iCloud, but rather that Section 230 of the Communications Decency Act protected them from lawsuits related to customer content. In 2026, the Attorney General for West Virginia also sued Apple for storing CSAM on iCloud. The Attorney General argued that because Apple maintains end-to-end control over its full cloud infrastructure, they cannot reasonably claim to be passive when it comes to CSAM. The complaint alleges that Apple designed, built, and is profiting from a system that Apple allows to be used to abuse children.

Impact on Survivors and Potential Victims

Images of child sexual abuse negatively impact survivors long after the physical abuse ends.

RAINN reports survivors experience chronic anxiety, depression, or PTSD, trust and relationship issues, body image struggles and disordered eating as a result of knowing their content continues to circulate. They also experience ongoing retraumatization when new versions of the material surface. According to a survey of CSAM survivors conducted by the Canadian Center for Child Protection, 70% worry about being recognized from child sexual abuse imagery and 85% anticipate needing ongoing therapy to address the abuse perpetrated against them.

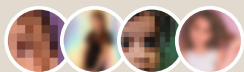
CSAM viewing may also normalize or increase sexual offenses against children. An anonymous survey of CSAM viewers on the dark web found 42% of the respondents reported that they had sought direct contact with children through online platforms after

viewing CSAM. Additionally, 58% of CSAM viewers reported feeling afraid that viewing CSAM might lead to sexual acts with a child. A Thorn study recently found 1 in 5 teens have been sextortion targets, and perpetrators are increasingly using CSAM to lure, trick, or coerce sextortion victims.

Given CSAM's lasting impacts on survivors and potential to create new child victims of sexual exploitation, the ongoing, protected storage of these illegal images presents a serious risk to children.

“**My child sexual abuse imagery is out there for anyone to see, I will forever be taken advantage of. It's not something that will ever go away... There is no way I can finally be done with this abuse.**

CSAM SURVIVOR'S RESPONSE TO
THE CANADIAN CENTRE FOR CHILD
PROTECTION'S SURVIVORS SURVEY, 2017.



42%

of an anonymous survey of CSAM viewers reported that they had sought direct contact with children through online platforms after viewing CSAM



70%

of CSAM survivors worry about being recognized from child sexual abuse imagery.

Estimating CSAM on iCloud

In 2025, Heat Initiative partnered with the University of Massachusetts to conduct a review of news articles and press releases of CSAM possession arrests.

They reviewed more than 300 articles that explicitly named Apple products, including iCloud, as tools and platforms used in the storage, creation, and dissemination of CSAM. In several cases, users had stored thousands of illegal sexual images of children on their iCloud accounts, including content featuring infants and toddlers and violent and sadistic abuse.

With strong anecdotal evidence that some amount of CSAM exists, undetected and unreported, on iCloud, Heat Initiative wanted to understand Apple's profit incentive for allowing this type of material to remain

undetected on its platforms. Apple's public revenue information is limited, so we have used several other sources of publicly available data to reach an estimate. Because some of this data was limited to the US, UK, and Australia, this estimate doesn't include any revenue Apple makes from CSAM storage in iCloud in other countries.



EXAMPLE OF ARREST RELATED
TO CSAM STORED ON ICLOUD FROM
UNIVERSITY OF MASSACHUSETTS
RECORD REVIEW.

A 50-year-old former police officer was arrested on July 6, 2023 and charged with 50 counts of promoting a sexual performance by a child and 69 counts of possessing a sexual performance by a child. After receiving a tip that the man had uploaded CSAM to his iCloud account, law enforcement executed a search warrant and discovered images and videos of CSAM of children between the ages of 4 and 12 in his iCloud account and on his mobile phone.

On June 23, 2023, a 28-year-old **former volleyball coach** was arrested after law enforcement found that he communicated with and solicited **nude images from middle school and high-school boys** by pretending to be a teenaged girl. According to law enforcement officers, a forensic review of **the man's iCloud account uncovered more than 100 images and videos** of child sexual abuse material.



EXAMPLE OF ARREST RELATED TO CSAM
STORED ON ICLOUD FROM UNIVERSITY OF
MASSACHUSETTS RECORD REVIEW.

First, we recognize that most people don't view or store CSAM. According to the [Global Child Safety Institute](#), the following proportions of men say they have knowingly and deliberately viewed pornography of a person under 18:

5% of adult US men
 3% of adult UK men
 2.5% of adult Australian men

There is little evidence on the proportion of women who create, view, or distribute CSAM, though reports from survivors indicate women do produce or enable the production of illegal abuse content. Given the lack of data, this estimate assumes that no women store CSAM on iCloud, even though it's likely that at least some do.

According to the US Census Bureau at the time of publication, there are approximately 269,763,000 adults in the US, 132,454,000 or 49.1% of whom are adult men. Using the Global Child Safety Institute estimate of 5%, about 6,622,000 American men knowingly and deliberately view CSAM. Similarly, there are about 22.1 million adult men in the UK, 3% or 663,000 of whom knowingly view CSAM. About 13.9 million adult men live in Australia, 2.5% or about 348,000 of whom knowingly view CSAM.

According to the [2026 Protect Children CSAM Perpetrator Report](#), 16% of CSAM viewers globally report storing CSAM via personal cloud storage such as iCloud or other sites. That means that about 1,221,000 men in the US, UK, and Australia store CSAM via personal cloud storage.



AN ESTIMATED

7.6M

US, UK, and Australian men knowingly and deliberately view child sexual abuse images.

There are several personal cloud storage companies and ecosystems, so how many of those men are using iCloud specifically to store CSAM?

In the US, 58% of adults have an iPhone, and of those, 64% pay for iCloud storage. In the UK, about 51% of adults use iPhones and legal filings indicate the vast majority of them also pay for iCloud storage. In Australia, 23% of consumers report using iCloud storage.

If we assume that CSAM viewers who both store CSAM on personal cloud storage and pay for iCloud are using iCloud to store CSAM, we estimate that about 460,000 men in the three target countries store CSAM on iCloud.

ESTIMATE OF US, UK, AND AUSTRALIAN MEN WHO STORE CSAM ON ICLOUD

	... who knowingly view CSAM	... and store it on personal cloud storage	... and have a paid iCloud account
US Men ...	6,622,000	1,060,000	393,000
UK Men ...	663,000	106,000	54,000
AUS Men ...	348,000	56,000	13,000

An estimated 460,000 men across the US, UK, and Australia store CSAM on iCloud. So how much money does that translate to for Apple?

Apple doesn't release data about how many consumers pay for specific iCloud tiers, so we must use existing pricing data alongside relevant data about the average digital footprint of CSAM collections.

We mapped the cases identified by the review of news articles in partnership with University of Massachusetts to determine the average quantity of CSAM stored on iCloud in each case. In total, the case study sample included more than 5,000 CSAM images, with cases ranging from those involving just one image to those with more than 1,000 images.

In most cases, the news reports did not detail the number of still images vs. videos found as part of the underlying investigations. However, according to a NCMEC report on data from 2025, still images and videos of CSAM were reported at roughly even rates. Therefore, we estimate that each iCloud CSAM library on average contained an equal number of video and still images.

To understand how much data these CSAM collections would use, we then calculated their digital footprints. To do this, we assigned an average digital footprint of 5 MB per still image and 3GB per video, based on an

average video length of 4 minutes as extrapolated from a data set of 91,000 CSAM videos with a total running time of 6,288 hours. This data set was collected by Europol after seizing an online CSAM distribution platform Kidflix which was shut down following an investigation by Europol, State Criminal Police of Bavaria (Bayerisches Landeskriminalamt) and the Bavarian Central Office for the Prosecution of Cybercrime (ZCB).



Next, we calculated the data footprint of each individual CSAM collection (number of images and videos) within the 300 individual cases in our CSAM on iCloud case research. We used the collection size and the estimated image and video size to calculate the digital footprint distribution. Below are those digital footprints, sorted into the same data tiers iCloud uses.

DISTRIBUTION OF CSAM DATA FOOTPRINTS IN COURT CASES

51%

of individuals arrested for storing CSAM on iCloud had a CSAM data footprint **less than 50GB**

19%

of individuals arrested for storing CSAM on iCloud had a CSAM data footprint between **50GB and 200GB**

24%

of individuals arrested for storing CSAM on iCloud had a CSAM data footprint between **200GB and 2TB**

6%

of individuals arrested for storing CSAM on iCloud had a CSAM data footprint between **2TB and 6TB**

IF THOSE SAME PROPORTIONS ARE APPLIED TO THE POPULATION OF MEN WHO KNOWINGLY VIEW CSAM, STORE IT VIA PERSONAL CLOUD STORAGE, AND PAY FOR ICLOUD HOLD CONSISTENTLY, THE BREAKDOWN OF CSAM STORING MEN IS AS FOLLOWS.

	... who pay for 50GB	... who pay for 200GB	... who pay for 2TB	... who pay for 6TB
US Men ...	200,430	74,670	94,320	23,580
UK Men ...	27,540	10,260	12,960	3,240
AUS Men ...	6,630	2,470	3,120	780

In the US, the corresponding paid iCloud tiers in US dollars are:

- \$0.99/month 50GB
- \$2.99/month 200GB
- \$9.99/month 2TB
- \$29.99/month 6TB

In the UK, the corresponding paid iCloud tiers in pounds sterling are:

- £ 0.99/month 50GB
- £ 2.99/month 200GB
- £ 8.99/month 2TB
- £ 26.99/month 6TB

In Australia, the corresponding paid iCloud tiers in Australian dollars are:

- \$1.49/month 50GB
- \$4.49/month 200GB
- \$14.99/month 2TB
- \$44.99/month 6TB

To simplify analysis, we converted all the above amounts into USD. Based on our estimates of the number of men who store CSAM on iCloud, the proportion of those men who pay for different tiers of iCloud, and Apple's pricing, the following is Apple's estimated monthly revenue from CSAM stored on iCloud.

	Estimated Monthly Revenue from 50GB Plans including CSAM	Estimated Monthly Revenue from 200GB Plans including CSAM	Estimated Monthly Revenue from 2TB Plans including CSAM	Estimated Monthly Revenue from 6TB Plans including CSAM
US Men	\$198,425.70	\$223,263.30	\$942,256.80	\$707,164.20
UK Men	\$36,628.20	\$41,347.80	\$155,520.00	\$129,535.20
AUS Men	\$6,961.50	\$8,076.90	\$32,760.00	\$24,757.20
Apple's Estimated Monthly Revenue from Users Who Store CSAM on iCloud				\$2,506,696.80

This may not initially seem like a significant number for a major corporation like Apple, but it adds up over time. Over the course of 5 years, this means Apple would have made an estimated \$150 million from CSAM on iCloud in the US, UK, and Australia.

\$150 M

Over the past five years, we estimate **Apple** has made more than **\$150 million** from customers storing **CSAM on iCloud** in the US, UK, and Australia alone.



On September 30, 2021, a 40-year-old man was arrested and charged with **100 counts of sexual exploitation after police found “hundreds” of images of suspected child pornography involving girls between the ages of 8 and 15 in his iCloud account.** A search warrant covering the man’s iCloud account later uncovered more than 1,000 images of suspected child pornography, according to investigators. The man ultimately pleaded guilty to a second-degree felony charge of sexual exploitation of a minor and 2 counts of voyeurism, admitting to possessing pictures of nude minor females and to secretly taking photographs and videos of a minor without consent.



EXAMPLE OF ARREST RELATED TO CSAM
STORED ON ICLOUD FROM UNIVERSITY OF
MASSACHUSETTS RECORD REVIEW.

We recognize that this estimate includes some limitations, the largest of which is that it doesn't include global data.

By some estimates, 1.5 billion people around the world have active iPhones. iCloud is available as a paid service in 175 countries, including large markets in Europe, Asia, and South America that were not included in this estimate. This estimate was limited in focus to US, UK, and Australian Apple customers because those countries had available data on intentional CSAM consumption prevalence rates. It's likely that this estimate underestimates the total revenue from CSAM storage because of this limitation.

This estimate also makes some assumptions. **The first assumption is that women don't comprise a statistically significant proportion of people who store CSAM in iCloud.** Data on women as CSAM producers and consumers is not widely available, and can vary significantly. For example, one meta analysis found police data indicated only 2.2% of offenses were perpetrated by females, but victimization surveys indicated women were involved in 11.6% of offenses. Without more reliable data, we chose to exclude women from this estimate, which may create a slight underestimation of total revenue.

The second assumption is that men who knowingly consume CSAM, store that CSAM via personal cloud storage, and pay for iCloud storage store at least some of that CSAM on iCloud.

This study was unable to find publicly available

data indicating personal cloud storage platform preferences for CSAM viewers. It's possible that there is a slight overestimation of total revenue because of this limitation.

The third assumption is that publicly available arrest data for people who stored CSAM on iCloud is representative of all people who store CSAM on iCloud. It's possible that this is not a representative distribution of iCloud tiers for CSAM consumers, but it's unclear if a representative distribution would skew toward a larger or smaller data footprint. We did, however, base the data footprint estimate on these individuals only storing CSAM, and no other images, on their iCloud, which may lead to a slight underestimation of revenue.

3

Countries included
in the estimate

vs.

175

Countries where
iCloud is available

A Call to Action for Apple

Apple is one of the wealthiest technology companies in the world, with an estimated market cap of \$4.4 trillion at the time of writing. **Heat Initiative is calling on Apple** to invest their considerable wealth, talent, and resources into **building an effective solution to stopping CSAM on iCloud and across the Apple ecosystem of products.**

→ IN PARTICULAR, HEAT INITIATIVE CALLS ON APPLE TO THE FOLLOWING:

1

WORK WITH AN INDEPENDENT THIRD PARTY TO CONDUCT YOUR OWN INVESTIGATION INTO THIS ISSUE AND TRANSPARENTLY SHARE THE RESULTS.

Apple has access to data and information that isn't publicly available, and that can help quantify the volume of CSAM stored on iCloud. Apple should work with a trusted, independent third party to conduct an internal investigation of CSAM within their ecosystem and transparently share their process and findings, just like we have above.

2

ACKNOWLEDGE THAT ANY AMOUNT OF ILLEGAL CHILD SEXUAL ABUSE IMAGERY STORED ON ICLOUD IS TOO MUCH, AND COMMIT TO FINDING A SOLUTION.

CSAM is widespread across the internet and shows up within the ecosystem of every major tech company. Any good-faith investigation will likely yield evidence that some amount of CSAM exists within Apple's ecosystem. We call on Apple to acknowledge that this is a problem and commit to finding a solution to it—not just allowing CSAM to thrive while they profit from it.

3

WORK DIRECTLY WITH CHILD SAFETY AND PRIVACY ADVOCATES TO CREATE A SOLUTION THAT PROTECTS BOTH CHILDREN'S SAFETY AND USER PRIVACY.

Child safety and user privacy are both critical elements of a safe, accountable technology sector, and one cannot exist at the expense of the other. Apple has positioned themselves as one of the most innovative tech companies in the world. We call on them to work directly with both child safety and privacy advocates to develop solutions that stop the spread of CSAM via iCloud and other Apple ecosystem products and preserve the privacy of users.



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