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Chair

Mr. Paul Szabo

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• (1545)

[English]

The Chair (Mr. Paul Szabo (Mississauga South, Lib.)): Order.

This is the 29th meeting of the Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics. Our order today, pursuant to Standing Order 108(2), is a study of the privacy implications of camera surveillance.

Our witnesses today are from Google Inc. and from Canpages. From Google Inc., we have with us Mr. Jonathan Lister, managing director and head of Google Canada. From Canpages Inc., we have with us Mr. Olivier Vincent, president and chief executive officer.

Good afternoon, gentlemen. We welcome you to the committee's consideration.

The committee passed a motion to the effect that the committee study the privacy implications of camera surveillance, such as Google Street View and Canpages, and other issues related to video surveillance and that the committee ask Google and its representative and Canpages and its representative to testify before the committee on this subject.

We thank you for appearing. We understand you both have some brief opening remarks or demos for the committee. We'd like to proceed. Who is going to go first?

Mr. Lister, please proceed.

Mr. Jonathan Lister (Managing Director and Head of Google Canada, Google Inc.): Thank you.

Thanks for having me, and thanks for having Google here.

Members of the House of Commons Standing Committee on Access to Information, Privacy and Ethics, my name is Jonathan Lister, and I am the managing director and head of Google Canada. It is my pleasure to be here today to provide you with more information about Street View, the innovative way to view street-level geographic imagery in Google Maps.

I believe I can say without hubris that most of you will be familiar with Google. Google is best known for its highly popular search engine. Millions of Canadians use Google every day to search the Internet.

Innovation, vision, and commitment to our corporate mission—taking the world's information and making it universally accessible and useful—power the Google search engine. These are the same attributes that have led to the development of Street View, which we are here to discuss today.

Google is committed to innovation in Canada and around the world. On a global basis, Google invests billions of dollars in research and development. In 2008 we spent over \$2.5 billion on R and D. We are committed to growing our capacity for innovation by creating highly skilled, knowledge-based jobs right here in Canada. We've established offices in Toronto, Waterloo, Ottawa, and Montreal. Google has world-leading engineers working in Canada helping to create the next breakthrough technologies, not just for Canada but with global impact.

I'm pleased to tell you that the Great Place to Work Institute named Google Canada the best place to work in Canada, beating out other well-known corporate icons. We also just won the 2009 annual Marketing/Leger corporate reputation survey, which we are deeply proud of.

Google is actively engaged in the Canadian business community and within the broader society as a whole. We've partnered with a company in Halifax called Eco-Nova to help create the technology for Google Earth's ocean feature in order to look at shipwrecks. We have worked with the David Suzuki Foundation to develop ways Google can be used to improve education on environmental issues. Our Canadian staff participate in regular community service projects such as whole-day staff retreats to work on a farm to help provide food for those less fortunate.

We are proud of the work we do in Canada, and we take our corporate responsibilities very seriously.

Street View's success and popularity should not come as a surprise. Many of us find it difficult to read maps and follow directions. Many of us understand geographical information visually. With Street View, which is a feature in Google Maps, users get the best of both worlds: they get a traditional map, plus they get street-level pictures to help them identify key landmarks. It's this innovation that makes the product really useful and popular.

The U.K. launch of Street View on March 19, 2009, was so successful that visits, according to Hitwise, to Google Maps U.K. increased by 41%. I'm confident Street View will have an equally positive response from Canadians. In fact, we know that Canadians are eager for this product. In the last six months alone, Canadians have viewed over 100 million panoramas of other countries. Once images of their own country are available, we are sure their enthusiasm for this product will only grow.

I agree with Mr. Poilievre's assessment in his *National Post* op-ed piece when he wrote:

...the presence of Google's Street View in Canadian cities is great news. It will showcase our urban life and attract tourists. It will allow parents to preview potential living conditions, as their kids leave the nest and go off to university. It will bring us in line with American, European and Asian cities that have hosted this service.

We are confident that individual Canadians and businesses, especially the tourism and real estate sectors, will see the benefits of this highly popular product. Individuals will also be able to use Street View to explore their city.

In early 2008 we linked Street View images with driving directions, giving users the ability to virtually see and familiarize themselves with their route before setting off. They can print out their driving directions with photos. For example, in Calgary, Macleod Trail is a major traffic artery at the heart of the city, albeit with too few stoplights and turnoffs. With Street View, people who aren't familiar with the highway can map out their exit and help avoid the fender benders that are all too common.

Street View also has enormous tourism and place-based marketing potential. For example, in 2008 we partnered with the organizers of the Tour de France to provide fans with a rider's eye view of the course. We could do the same with tourist events in Canada, such as marathons in Toronto, Ottawa, and Montreal. Imagine showcasing Vancouver 2010 to people around the world.

- (1550)

In these difficult and challenging economic times, Canadian tourism and hospitality industries are struggling to cope with changing travel and tourism behaviours. An innovative service like Street View has the potential to change the way these industries market themselves and attract new visitors.

This is just the tip of the iceberg in terms of the possible economic benefits to come from a product like Street View. Another use, which we can discuss further if there's interest, is in the hard-hit real estate sector.

Clearly, Street View is a product that is changing the way people think about maps. In many facets of our daily lives the Internet is changing how we perform tasks, from banking, to planning vacations, to researching programs for our children. While changes can create initial unease, we believe they will over the long term benefit millions. The changes in digital cartography are no different. Millions will benefit from the addition of street-level photography to the maps found on the Internet.

Mapping helps us better understand and navigate the world around us. Mapping data is an integral part of the world's information that Google is innovating around to make universally accessible and useful. Furthermore, since the earliest days of

photography, cartographers have taken and published street-level imagery to help map our urban landscapes. The great innovation of Google Street View is the ability to marry street-level images with digital maps in order to provide a superior product for Internet users.

I recognize this committee has questions about the privacy implications of this product. Let me assure you that the Google innovation that has driven the development of this product is the same innovation we put into building Street View's world-leading privacy protections.

First and foremost, Google is respectful of the laws of each country in which Street View operates. The imagery we make available shows no more than what any of you would see while travelling down a public street. The images in Street View are a snapshot in time, often several months to a year old. They aren't real time. While we only collect images from public places, we've always recognized that some passers-by may be inadvertently included in our pictures. As such, Google has invested significant resources into the development of a world-leading process for identifying and blurring certain features in an image, namely, identifiable faces and licence plates. We've invested a huge amount of engineering talent into the development of this automated identification and blurring technology, which is applied before images are published. Make no mistake about it, facial and licence plate identification and blurring—especially at the scale Google operates—is a significant feat of engineering innovation.

Another key component to the privacy protections built into Street View is the easy-to-use, take-down request system. Every published Street View image includes a "report a problem" link, which takes users to a simple removals page. Any individual can ask to have an image entirely removed from the publication if it features themselves, their family, their car, or their home. This removal applies even if aspects of the image have already been blurred. We process removal requests every day in multiple languages and offer a fast and efficient turnaround time for each request.

Another important aspect of our efforts to ensure privacy protection is our commitment to work with key stakeholders in every country in order to identify and contact relevant local organizations prior to launch. Our team will work to reach out to Canadian stakeholders and provide them with all the relevant details of Street View, including how to have their organization's image removed or blurred from the site.

We're also putting in place a system that will ensure that on launch day for Street View in Canada, we will have additional staff on hand to handle take-down requests.

Let me close by saying that as with many cutting-edge technologies, the challenge we face with Street View is striking the right balance between building a sophisticated and highly useful tool and ensuring that the data we collect to provide these services is used appropriately.

The many people across the U.S., Europe, and elsewhere who already use Street View to explore their communities, tourist attractions, or cities on the other side of the world tell us that we've created a great, useful product, one that builds privacy protections into the very design of the product.

With the addition of Canadian cities in the near future, we look forward to expanding these benefits to many more Google Maps users in the months to come.

Street View is a highly innovative advancement in digital cartography. It has won over fans in every country where it has been launched. We have incorporated world-leading privacy protections into Street View, and we continue to work with all relevant stakeholders to improve these protections.

Innovation drives everything we do at Google, both around the world and here in Canada. We are very excited to be able to one day soon share Street View, the latest wellspring of Google innovation, with all Canadians.

Thank you.

•(1555)

The Chair: Thank you very much, Mr. Lister.

Mr. Vincent.

Mr. Olivier Vincent (President and Chief Executive Officer, Canpages Inc.): Good afternoon.

My name is Olivier Vincent and I'm the president and CEO of Canpages Inc.

Canpages is a local search and directory publisher that operates mostly in Canada. We provide a multimedia platform that focuses on relevant local results. We offer these platforms to users in print, online, and mobile platforms. We have in excess of 3.5 million unique visitors in Canada, who come to our website every month with their own local search requests.

In 2008 we were very proud to be recognized as the fastest-growing online company in Canada. Rich and relevant local content, such as photos, videos, and other immersive media, sets Canpages.ca apart from other directories and local search firms. Our robust online directory combines comprehensive data and a unique user

experience with maps and satellite images provided by several partners, including Google.

With more than 80 print publications across Ontario, B.C., Quebec, Alberta, the Yukon, and the Northwest Territories, and 80,000 customers a year, we reach more than eight million households and businesses across Canada. We have tripled our employee base from 200 to more than 650 employees in the last two years.

We also offer advanced mobile search technologies and multiple search possibilities, with free text messages to mobile phones, mobile maps, direct SMS search and advanced WAP, and BlackBerry and iPhone mobile application experiences.

In March 2009, as part of our ongoing commitment to innovation and to delivering the best search experience possible to customers, Canpages launched Street Scene, its own version of panoramic street photos, initially focusing on the Vancouver 2010 Olympic cities of Vancouver, Squamish, and Whistler.

Fully integrated with Canpages' local search functionality, Street Scene provides panoramic street-level views of the city, so users can not only pinpoint their search results on a map, but also see high-resolution visuals of their search results in the context of the local environment. For example, users can take a virtual walk down the city streets to a local restaurant or hotel. They can see how it looks from the outside before they make a reservation, or they can assess whether there is street parking or some other parking lot nearby.

We are focusing on commercial areas. You will not see a focus on residential areas with Canpages.

The Street Scene service has been very well received by consumers and tourists alike. We have received millions of visits since the launch of Street Scene in March of this year, and we have not received a single complaint to date. As a matter of fact, we have received overwhelming feedback from visitors, advertisers, and businesses alike.

At the same time, Canpages considers respect of privacy as a key priority and is sensitive to the privacy concerns that might be raised by individuals who are photographed during the preparation of the data required by the Street Scene service. Canpages is committed to bringing every individual the assurance that it will respect their privacy, and has publicly stated its privacy policy regarding its Street Scene service.

We will notify the public before we start shooting. Individual faces and other recognizable features like licence plates are blurred on the captured image prior to being posted online. The blurring process uses a proprietary technology that is irreversible by the users. All original non-blurred files are destroyed after blurring and before being posted online. There is no way to get back these original files later on.

Users can report any concern at any time using the “report a concern” feedback located on every image. Upon a specific request, Canpages will provide extra blurring for an entire person, a vehicle, a window, a building, a pet—you name it. While privacy laws are not necessarily reflective of the rapidly growing field of technology, we at Canpages want to take a proactive approach to all concerns that may be raised.

Street Scene is an extremely innovative product and a testament to great progress for online local searches. We believe it will benefit consumers and businesses and encourage tourism in Canada.

Canpages has engaged with the public, the privacy commissioners of Canada, and Mr. Pierre Poilievre, the MP who filed a motion before this committee to review privacy matters.

In conclusion, Canpages is committed to working both immediately and as part of an ongoing process to address potential privacy issues that might arise as a result of its continuous innovation in the field of local search.

• (1600)

Also, if you don't mind, I'd like to give you a two-minute run-through of the system so you can actually see it working live, with Canadian data. If you can direct yourself to the screen, you will see that I've made a search for restaurants in Vancouver. While I'm finding a lot of results, I've pre-selected some of the ones that I'm interested in and that will appear.

The first one is an Indian restaurant. I'm going to click on Street Scene and I'm going to see it. Canpages takes me directly to a visual of that restaurant. I can even move around and have a look at the surroundings. I can go to full screen to have a better view of it. As you can see, I can even walk around, and all these little dots on the ground represent the location of a panoramic view. At every position, you can have a detailed look at the surroundings.

Next I'm looking at an interesting furniture store in Vancouver. You can see that people's faces are blurred. There's no way to recognize them.

This way, I can tour all around the Vancouver, Whistler, and Squamish area. Not only that, but we can also open the doors of these restaurants and all these businesses. Now I'm opening a virtual door into a business and I'm walking in. I'm now able to have a look at and visit that restaurant. We're doing this for every business out there, such as beauty salons, retail stores, etc., to give you a chance to have a total immersive experience, with that whole chain and experience of Street Scene as a particularly important component of it.

We'll now go to Whistler. These images were taken right before winter so there is no snow on the mountain, but I'm even in the walking area of Whistler here. I can go up and down the whole city

of Whistler. We have the Sea to Sky Highway available, as well as all the nice and appealing areas of Canada.

These beautiful areas are on Street Scene. I hope that gives you an idea of how this can work and how powerful that is in the context of a local search.

Thank you very much.

• (1605)

The Chair: Thanks to both of you for a very interesting presentation. I think the commercial side is well understood. The privacy issues are probably the area of most interest.

Just as an example, we understand that in Greece, Japan, Germany, the U.K., the U.S., and Australia, and now in Canada, privacy concerns have been raised with the jurisdictional authorities. It is an interesting question about whether or not services such as Street View or Canpages make the connection with the privacy jurisdictions, whether it is, in Canada, the federal Privacy Commissioner or the three provinces that have their own personal privacy acts, and whether those privacy concerns were dealt with in advance of commencing the taking of images across the country.

As a starting point, I wonder if both of you could address the way that you conduct your business vis-à-vis privacy concerns.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Google takes privacy concerns extremely seriously. Our commitment is to work with the Privacy Commissioner and to meet all local, federal, and provincial laws around privacy prior to launching a product. We're working with the Privacy Commissioner and have been for some time. We are participating in this venue to answer questions.

We've put world-leading privacy protections into the product. I think some of these protections are not readily available on other like products. Like many organizations, we try to balance out our innovation and deriving economic benefit with concern for privacy and creating privacy protections. Google feels it has struck a strong balance and is doing everything it can to meet its privacy obligations.

The Chair: Mr. Vincent.

Mr. Olivier Vincent: Very similarly to our friends at Google, for Canpages privacy is priority number one in these surveys. For a month now, I've been communicating actively with all the privacy commissioners of Canada, on both the federal and provincial levels. We've had quite a lot of exchange of communication with them, and answered all the questions they've had so far.

Actually I was presenting this morning at the GIAC leaders forum here in Ottawa, and the assistant privacy commissioner, Elizabeth Denham, was presenting with me at the time. We had a very good debate in front of a number of industry people around our particular rules.

On top of that, we've studied the law very carefully to make sure that we would not do anything wrong, and I must say that at this stage we find the law pretty efficient and pretty good in describing what can be done and can't be done. And we have really found our interaction with the privacy commissioners very efficient. We find everybody reasonable and willing to understand that yes, indeed, new technologies are opening new fields and may create concern, but at the same time you don't want to hamper technology with excessive requirements.

I think we struck a balance, and the feedback we've had so far from all the privacy commissioners is that we're doing the right thing.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Simson, please.

Mrs. Michelle Simson (Scarborough Southwest, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Lister and Mr. Vincent, for appearing before the committee, because there are several concerns I have after speaking with my constituents and other colleagues.

Mr. Vincent, to your credit, Canpages gave me a little bit of assurance in your presentation. So I'm going to address this question to Mr. Lister.

Google identifies and blurs the faces and the licence plates in Street View. But the concern was always the secure storage of the unblurred version of the pictures. So notwithstanding any assurances that we get about the safe storage, I guess my question is why is there a need to retain the unblurred version in any event? This was the concern raised by our Privacy Commissioner, Jennifer Stoddart, and I think it's a valid question.

I do like the Canpages presentation where the unblurred version is destroyed prior to it even being posted. So why wouldn't Google be doing the same thing?

• (1610)

Mr. Jonathan Lister: The best way for me to answer is just to step back for a moment and maybe set the context that Google is a company that is driven by innovation; we're constantly innovating and constantly creating new product. We think that has great economic benefit and great benefit to consumers, and we think this has been proven on a number of occasions.

That being said, the reason that Google retains non-blurred images at all is for product enhancement. So in order to make the product better, Google software engineers keep the photos around for a period of time during which they do improvements on the product

and for a number of other reasons. I can describe one product improvement or product enhancement. The product operates at immense scale. So Google is taking, as you can imagine, millions of photos, and there are people who are inadvertently and incidentally captured. Google blurs these images at an incredible scale, and although our software is very good, it is not always perfect, and it occasionally generates a false positive. So occasionally the software will mistake a round sign for somebody's face. For the purposes of trying to improve the software, we keep the images around.

However, Google recently has made a revision to its data retention policy and has decided that it needs to keep the images around for an adequate but non-excessive period of time, after which those non-blurred images will be permanently blurred and therefore rendered anonymous.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: There must be other uses, though. I understand what you're saying about technology, but why would it be necessary to retain all of this? Surely there must be other reasons you're retaining it. If you can elaborate on that, I'd really appreciate it.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Sure. I think the important issue is that we have revised the retention policy, such that we will be blurring these non-blurred images. So we will not be retaining any non-blurred images.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: You're destroying them. Is that what you're saying?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: We will be blurring them.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: How do you permanently blur them? Why not just do what Canpages does and blur and destroy the original image? You certainly don't have to keep every image just to upgrade the technology. So destroy it before you upload it for the public to see.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: The scale at which Google operates makes it very difficult for anybody, particularly me or someone else who is not a leader of technology in the organization, to describe the moment in time or the right amount to keep. So rather than make a commitment it can't keep, Google has made a decision to blur those non-blurred images after this adequate but not excessive period of time.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: That could be why, and that brings me to my next question.

Both Mr. Vincent and you have stated that you respect the privacy laws in the individual countries. As a Canadian, my concern is that our privacy law is over 25 years old, is virtually untouched, and has not kept pace with technology—not even close. I think that's where the fear is coming from. Obviously, those fears are shared around the world. To the chair's point, Greece, Japan, and Germany weren't all ecstatic about this. That's especially so when you hear about people who don't want this surrounding a town or street. It could be based on the fact that there is inadequate protection under the individual countries' laws.

I'd like to know how you think that could be best addressed to allay their fears.

• (1615)

Mr. Jonathan Lister: If I could take a part of that question for one moment to put everyone's mind at ease so that we don't paint pictures that aren't entirely accurate, I think there are also plenty of stories where towns have welcomed the arrival of products like Street View. There are towns that have indicated they'd be very willing—certainly for commercial reasons—to have the arrival of Street View. So there are lots of great stories, as well.

The Chair: Thank you very much.

[Translation]

Ms. Thi Lac, please.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac (Saint-Hyacinthe—Bagot, BQ): Good afternoon, Mr. Lister and Mr. Vincent.

First of all, you shoot mainly in industrial and business areas. Do you also shoot in residential areas?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: If you don't mind, I will answer first. Canpages Inc. really concentrates on commercial streets, because we want to bring together users and businesses. We are not interested in residential areas.

However, it does happen sometimes that people also live on commercial streets. So, it is possible that some images will be collected that include private components. I do not mean to say that this can never happen but, as a general rule, we stay in business areas.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: You also say that Canpages is committed to informing the public before it starts shooting. How do you make contact with the public?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: That is a good question. In fact, it is not easy. Ideally, we should be advertising everywhere, on a daily basis, for months on end. However, that is not reasonable, nor is it physically feasible. Our plan provides for advertising in local print media and on the Internet to a great extent, where a lot of people are surfing. We think that is adequate, not only to be absolutely certain that we are abiding by the legislation, but also—and this is even more important—to be in a position to inform people and tell them that a Canpages vehicle may be driving down their street to take pictures.

I would like to digress for one moment just to reinforce what Jonathan said a moment ago. I myself have been in one of those vehicles a number of times. You cannot imagine the expressions of enthusiasm from people in the street for this type of service. People

follow us and gesture to us. They are prepared to do absolutely anything to be photographed. When we stop at a red light, the windows come down and people ask us if we are from Google. We explain that we are not. However, the vast majority of people are delighted and try to find a way to be photographed. In actual fact, that causes problems for us because, once again, we are not interested in people; we are only interested in businesses.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: You talked about blurring pictures of licence plates and faces, but you did not say anything about civic numbers that might appear that are not associated with businesses. Is there a process whereby you can also blur the civic numbers of private homes or residences that might end up in your videos?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: What does “civic number” mean?

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: It is the number that appears in front of a house—the address street number.

Mr. Olivier Vincent: In our opinion, that number is not confidential or private information. On the contrary, it is public information that allows someone to find a house.

Most of the street numbers of buildings that can be seen relate to businesses located on commercial streets, but it is possible that a dentist, doctor or other people may live or be located at a specific address. The building number is important in order for people to locate a specific place.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: My last question has to do with the images that you blur. I would like to know if you systematically remove images of young children—for example, a young child on a bike living in the area in question. In order to not make that area vulnerable to criminals or criminalized groups, do you take any particular action to blur children's images in your systems?

• (1620)

Mr. Olivier Vincent: That is a good question. My answer is that our blurring system is so effective that there is no possibility of recognizing a child. I believe all of that is completely covered by the general blurring principle. I don't think there is any such thing as a half-blurred or fully-blurred picture. Blurring is full and complete. So, whether it is a child, an individual or a specific region, there is no need to do anything further because, after blurring, there is no possibility of recognizing someone.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: I would also ask Mr. Lister to answer that question.

[English]

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Absolutely.

If I may, I just want to remark on the first part of your question. You used the word “film”, and I just want to make sure the committee understands that we're not filming anything; we're taking still photographs. These are static images, not dynamic images: they're not film. I just want to make sure the committee understands these are photographs.

On the last question, I concur with Mr. Vincent. We are blurring all images of identifiable individuals, so we're not making a distinction between adults and children. We're blurring all images. Additionally, people have the ability to easily take down an image. So if there's an image that they're still troubled or concerned by for whatever reason, they have the ability to take it down very simply and very easily. On every Street View image, we have this "report a problem" link that takes you to a very simple page, and we often respond and take those images down within 24 hours. So we take this very, very seriously.

[Translation]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: Mr. Vincent, you referred to ads in the newspapers or on the Internet. If you are photographed on a commercial street, how can you ensure that information flyers are distributed so that people understand that shooting will be occurring on their street?

You talk about removing images, but do you explain to people that is possible to have images removed and tell them how to make such a request?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: That is a good question that I would like to answer in two parts.

First of all, the process has to have a reasonable dimension. Even though we do not operate at a global scale, our operations are not confined to the national level either. It would be very difficult to imagine having another vehicle drive in front of the one doing the shooting to distribute information flyers to everybody. I do not think that is necessary, considering that people's images will all be blurred. There is a limit beyond which that kind of thing becomes unreasonable. It is important that you know—and I think you can well imagine—that the cost is quite considerable for that kind of operation.

Furthermore, when we do communicate with the public, we focus on the fact that people can go on line and make whatever comment they wish with respect to withdrawing their own images or even another image that they deem to be inappropriate. Our communication with the public does include the fact that changes can be made subsequently.

[English]

The Chair: Merci.

Mr. Siksay, please.

Mr. Bill Siksay (Burnaby—Douglas, NDP): Thank you, Chair.

Thank you, Mr. Lister and Mr. Vincent, for being here.

It's good to have a representative of the business community from Burnaby—my constituency—especially an innovative and growing business from Burnaby. It's good to have you here.

I wanted to come back to the issue of dealing with complaints and the speed of removal.

Mr. Lister, I think the phrase you used was "often within 24 hours" in terms of removing images when you have a complaint. Is there any consistency about that? How many complaints do you get? How long does it take to remove these?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: It's a very quick process to lodge a complaint, to put a complaint in, and we respond as quickly as we're able. It depends on the volume.

One of the ways we are trying to further protect privacy and further demonstrate our commitment to privacy protections is that on the day of launch, we will have more people working. We obviously expect an increased volume of requests or queries on that day.

We're doing things like that to further demonstrate our commitment to the privacy protections.

• (1625)

Mr. Bill Siksay: I think for both services there's a place on the screen where you can actually click to be linked to the complaint process.

Mr. Vincent, can you demonstrate for us where that is on your particular version of this?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: Definitely.

As I'm doing that, let me add that we also have a process to be able to remove that within 24 hours, or even faster than that. We don't want to go beyond 24 hours.

We also give the possibility for people to blur an entire building, if they want, or something else that is not necessarily their face. At that time, we want to be able to make a verification. We would be concerned that businesses would want to blur, for instance, their competitor's window; it's a competitive world out there. We need to have a process to make sure that nothing is done before we have a chance to verify it.

On every screen—you can see it's on the bottom right—you have a chance to report a concern. You'll be able to attach the photo that you're concerned about. If it's a privacy concern, or inappropriate content concern, or another concern, you will be able to describe what it is and put in your e-mail address. There is a little security feature here to make sure it's not a computer doing that. Then you submit your request. It's sent to you right away.

Let me conclude by saying that despite millions of page views, we haven't had a single concern to date.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay.

Now, you said that you were going to do a bit of a verification process around that. Does the verification process only apply to commercial complaints? It doesn't apply to personal ones, so there'd be no attempt to verify if it was a legitimate concern being raised?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: If it's a complaint about a person, we'll do extra blurring right away. We don't care about it: we are not interested in people.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay.

Mr. Lister, is the same true of Google? Is there any attempt to verify the concerns that are raised?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: In the case of removing images, again, to demonstrate our commitment to privacy protections, we are going to err on the side of an individual's privacy. We're going to take down those images.

I think the only circumstances under which we wouldn't take an image down are where we are confident that they're fraudulent. We do have customer service representatives who look at these claims. Unless they are confident that the claims are fraudulent—for instance, if someone tries to take down the CN Tower, we're probably not going to let them do it—we will take them down. For legitimate concerns that come in, whether it's their home, themselves, their family, their car, we'll honour those and take them down.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Lister, where does Google currently hold its unblurred images? Are they held in Canada or are they held offshore someplace?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: In all likelihood, they are held in the U.S., but these are all held on Google servers in Google server farms, which are arguably some of the safest places anywhere to hold data.

Google doesn't take just privacy seriously, it also takes security seriously. The protocols and innovation that we apply to securing our physical presence and our digital data are, as you might imagine, world-leading. Right down to the access that is permitted to that data, the hardware that the data sits on, and how we process the flow or the traffic of data, it is all highly structured, highly regulated, and industry-leading.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Google server farms is an image that's new to me as a techno peasant, but it's an interesting one.

Mr. Vincent, I think you work with MapJack, is that correct? You said that the images are destroyed. Does MapJack have copies of the images, or are all images destroyed before they're posted on the Internet?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: Absolutely, all images are destroyed afterwards.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Is that an electronic blurring process, or does the disc go to...? That's probably not the language...

Mr. Olivier Vincent: That's a very precise and technical process that consists of erasing the files and making sure they can't be recovered. It's clearly described by contract with our partner on that.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Mr. Lister, when you say "adequate but not excessive time", can you give us a definition of that? It's a pretty broad statement.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: We're working on what that timeframe might be, and rather than give you an arbitrary number I'd rather give you a precise answer. But it's in Google's best interest to make it as short as possible.

We're committed to meeting privacy concerns. We need the data for its intended purpose—to make the product better. As soon as we don't need it any more, our intention is to permanently blur it.

•(1630)

Mr. Bill Siksay: Has a timeline been imposed by any other jurisdiction, to your knowledge, where Google is offering this service?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Not to my knowledge.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I understand that it's not just Street View and Street Scene that use this process, that most cartography now involves a similar kind of process in which images are taken and used in a map-making process. Are you aware of that, that there are other folks using similar technology, and how common is that?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: What we're talking about here is an innovation in digital cartography. Goggle's view is that we're making maps better, we're making it easier to find things. But there are many organizations that take street-level images. There are many mapping infrastructure companies that take similar photos. Companies like Maptech and Tele Atlas do very similar things from a data collection and capture point of view. I can't speak to their blurring technology or their take-down technology, but the great innovation that Google brings is marrying these images with topographical maps to make direction-finding easier.

The Chair: Thank you kindly.

Mr. Polievre, please.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre (Nepean—Carleton, CPC): Thank you for coming.

I continue to believe that the potential for this technology is enormous as long as it is applied in a way that respects four key conditions. One is the blurring of faces and licence plates. Second is the protection of sensitive locations, like clinics and women's shelters. Third is that there is adequate public notification before the pictures are taken. And fourth is that the storage of the images does not violate our commercial privacy laws with respect to keeping information about people for which those people have not given consent.

I'm going to start with the first issue, which is blurring, and I'm going to share with you a story a constituent offered me. He told me this story the same day I witnessed the Google street camera driving through a neighbouring community called Riverside South, which is a suburban community here in Ottawa, in my riding. He said, and I quote:

I'm selling my father's old home, my father's and my mother's old house, and I have got the front rooms completely stripped and the curtains off the windows, but no one can see. None of my neighbours can see into my house at that level, and I didn't think someone would see me. Anyway, this morning I got up and had a shower, and I walked out of my washroom naked. And just as I looked over, the Google cam was coming by our second floor like a snorkel peering into the second floor of my house.

He went on to say, "I don't know if it can actually see through windows, I'm sure it can, but I'm on Google naked now for my street. This is bad."

This fellow has given me authorization to share his name. His name is Robert White, and the residence in question was 835 Stansted Road.

What assurances can you give Mr. White that he will not become an international sex symbol?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: The best way to address that is to simply say that the cameras we employ aren't designed to look inside buildings. The photography and the photographic ability isn't that good. Google is not seeing inside buildings.

The broader picture, to remind the committee, is that the intended use is to improve mapping and capture the facades of publicly accessible, available buildings and landmarks. There is no need to see inside; it's not in the product definition to do that, and Google doesn't do it.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Okay. The photo in question was taken on April 30, so perhaps we can work with you to make sure there are no mistakes and nothing like this ends up online.

I have looked online, and there's a website dedicated to pulling images from Google Street View and showing the detail that those images can portray. It's called weburbanist.com. They have discovered numerous Google shots from Street View where the faces and images are clear enough to be discerned. I will share them with you at the end of the meeting.

How foolproof is your blurring technology?

• (1635)

Mr. Jonathan Lister: I can't speak to the site in question; I haven't seen it. I can't speak to the accuracy or quality of those photos either. I will say that we are highly confident, having rolled out this product in nine countries to date, that we have high quality and really strong technology. So in almost all cases the product does exactly what it's intended to do, and in the very rare cases where it doesn't do what it's intended to do we have our quick and easy take-down policy.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I congratulate you for doing that. The challenge, though, is that some people might not know they are in these images, and would not be able to have them removed.

What do you have to say about that, given that Canada's commercial privacy laws indicate that no enterprise can have information on any person without that person's consent?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Again I would step back and paint the picture of the notification and the announcement we made on March 24, 2009, that we would be driving through cities in Canada to gather the photographs for Street View. That announcement was picked up broadly across the country. I think it's safe to say this is probably the most broadcast collection of cartographic images in Canadian history.

Through that announcement we notified the public at large. I think we have an industry-leading take-down policy. If I'm inadvertently captured on the front page of a newspaper, the same way I might be inadvertently captured on Street View, I don't have the recourse that

Google offers if I'm captured in a pan shot on broadcast news. I don't have my image blurred, and I don't have the ability to have that image taken down. So I think Google is really trying to lead by example and set the industry standard on privacy protection practice.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: You mentioned journalist images. They are expressly exempt under Canada's commercial privacy laws, as are images for artistic and literary purposes. Do you think your mapping program should be expressly exempt from Canada's commercial privacy laws?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: I'm not a legal expert, so I can't make a legal judgment call and I shouldn't speculate. It's reasonable to assume that, given the history of mapping as an artistic enterprise. Precedent has been set that maps are considered to be a form of artistic expression, so I think there's an argument to be made for that.

The Chair: Thank you.

On public disclosure, I think quite a number of members of this committee were unaware that Street View even existed until that newspaper article appeared. So what public notice were you required to give, subsequent to having discussions with the Privacy Commissioner?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: We gave notice through the March 24, 2009 announcement. Subsequently, through a website we have recently posted, we have announced the locations where we're driving. So in our minds the requirement to notify has been satisfied. I think we've done a good job trying to balance the notification period and the product development.

• (1640)

The Chair: When did you start taking pictures?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: I think we started taking pictures in 2007. However, it's probably more important for the committee to know and understand that we will not be using images taken prior to March 24 in the product. So any images we captured prior to March 24 when we made the national large-scale public announcement won't be used in the product.

The Chair: Thank you.

Madame Zarac, please.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac (LaSalle—Émard, Lib.): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

You talk about innovation in mapping, Mr. Lister, but can this really be called mapping? We are talking about images of places that appear. How can you define that as mapping, even in the context of innovation?

[English]

Mr. Jonathan Lister: This is an incredibly important innovation in digital cartography. What Google has done extremely well is marry the street-level images with the topographical maps. This provides an entirely new way for people to navigate.

[Translation]

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You are able to marry images with maps. However, in terms of mapping innovation, I am not sure that could be called a map.

You both said that you comply with privacy legislation that is currently in place. Do you ask for permission from the municipalities where you shoot, in order to ensure that you are complying with laws currently in effect?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: Perhaps I could answer that question first.

If you don't mind, I would like to come back to your previous question. I think you are right: the term "mapping" is really quite passé. Now we talk about a total immersive experience, which is much more powerful than simply showing maps.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: My question is about legislation. If you don't mind, Mr. Vincent, I would prefer that we talk about legislation.

Mr. Olivier Vincent: Yes, of course. In terms of legislation, we have looked at it at a number of different levels, starting with legal support from major Canadian firms, to be sure that we were complying with the law.

Earlier, we talked about our active communication with all privacy commissioners. At this time, they are telling us with certainty that we have done nothing illegal, and it seems to me that they are also supportive of our proactive approach.

As regards the municipalities, we have not specifically requested their permission, but we do inform them of the availability of this information.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: So, you do not have the approval of the municipalities.

Mr. Olivier Vincent: In fact, I now clearly have their approval, because we know they are using that information for their own purposes as well.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: But you have not received their permission.

Have you acquainted yourselves with municipal legislation?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: I believe so.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Yes, but no permission has been given.

Mr. Olivier Vincent: I am no legal expert, but I believe it has.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Is it easy to comply with the current legislation, which was drafted before all of this innovation and the advent of this new technology? Is it easy to comply with laws currently in effect where new technology is concerned?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: There is no doubt that technology changes quickly and that legislation does not always keep pace. Right now,

we are talking about laws that were passed long before streeting and the Internet.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Perhaps we should take another look at them.

Mr. Olivier Vincent: As a result, there are a few imitations. At the same time, I think these laws were drafted based on common sense, for the most part, and we try to apply that common sense in our everyday activities. I think that is quite a reasonable approach.

My sense is that what Google and Canpages are doing now guarantees a very high level of privacy.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Do you not think it would be wise to review those laws, because of new technology?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: That is something you may want to consider, but I know that in our case, it has not slowed us down.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You said something earlier that concerns me greatly. You said that with your product alone, there are some 3.5 million searches done on a monthly basis.

Mr. Olivier Vincent: It is more than that.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: More than that?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: That is the number of visitors.

Mrs. Lise Zarac: You were proud to be able to say that because, as you say, there have been no complaints. However, this is a major concern for me, because the Internet is not always used for positive or appropriate purposes. There is a great deal of exploitation over the Internet.

You said you do not go into residential areas. However, we know that in municipalities, businesses are often mixed in with residences. If people are conducting 3.5 million searches per month, they may find images on your sites that depict a lot of children. Although it may not be able to distinguish the face of one child in particular, you can see that there are a lot of children in a given area.

Does that not concern you? You talked about the municipalities. If you talk to people, they tell us that the most important thing for them is the safety of their children.

● (1645)

[English]

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Google takes safety extremely seriously. I think in this case the best answer I can give is that the images in question were taken in public places. They're nothing that any of you or anybody else couldn't see while walking down the street at a moment in time. They're static images, often months or maybe years old—

Mrs. Lise Zarac: Yes, but at a click of a finger—

Mr. Jonathan Lister: —that anybody, any individual, has access to. I think the important thing to note is that we provide the ability to take those images down. But we take privacy and security extremely seriously.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Block, please.

Mrs. Kelly Block (Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, CPC): Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Welcome to both of you today.

Mr. Poilievre has established that Canadians should not have to worry about being captured in compromising situations, and what I want to talk about are the vulnerable in our society. The vulnerable need to be safeguarded. Google and Canpages need to assure Canadians that predators are not able to use this technology to take advantage of the vulnerable in our society.

You have said that the images of individuals and licence plates will be blurred. I have many shelters in my riding of Saskatoon—Rosetown—Biggar, and I note that Saskatoon is one of the cities listed to be photographed by Google Street View. I would like to understand this. Will this blurring extend to sensitive locations such as these shelters? Many of these shelters are in public places or in business sections of my riding. How can you ensure that the privacy of these vulnerable individuals will be protected?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: In addition to working with the Privacy Commissioner, the committee, and local law enforcement officials, we plan on reaching out to umbrella organizations in advance of launch to notify them of both the blurring technology and the takedown process, such that any organization that feels, for whatever reason, an image of their location might be sensitive has the ability to take that down.

We'll be as proactive as possible and work with the stakeholder organizations. Again, I remind the committee, though, that these are images that anybody could see through a number of different sources, be they books, maps, or local-level imagery.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

Mr. Olivier Vincent: I totally concur with Mr. Lister's statement. I would just add that in the case of shelters, which is a very sensitive case, we thought a lot about what we could do to go even further. We realized that, first of all, we have complete blurring, so privacy is guaranteed, but that it would be dangerous, actually, to provide extra services around shelters. It would certainly attract attention, because people would ask why that building was blurred. Therefore, the best thing about shelters is that nobody knows where they are, and it's going to remain like that.

Mrs. Kelly Block: Thank you.

I'd like to turn the rest of my time over to Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I understand that privacy officials in Greece have raised some concerns about Google Street View and have asked that images no longer be taken until certain understandings can be reached. Is that correct?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: I can't speak to the precise issue in Greece.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: That is what has been reported here. The *Ottawa Citizen* reported that on May 12.

I understand one of the concerns relates to the preservation of unblurred images in Google's possession. As I mentioned earlier, Canada's commercial privacy legislation—that's the Personal Information Protection and Electronic Documents Act—indicates that no enterprise can possess the personal information of a citizen without that citizen's knowledge and consent.

Knowledge, I believe, can be given through public notification. Consent is much more difficult. You can't stop along the street and ask everybody whose images you're taking, but you are, in Google's case, keeping them in your possession without their permission. This

does raise some important privacy concerns. How are you prepared to allay those concerns? Are you prepared to give commitments of a timeframe by which any captured unblurred image will be deleted?

● (1650)

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Working with the Privacy Commissioner's office and committing to not launch this product—and I remind you that it hasn't been launched yet—until we've met our privacy and legal obligations is the first way that I can assure the committee of our commitment to privacy.

Regarding a timeline, however, I've said that we at Google have decided that Google will not hold those non-blurred images beyond an adequate and non-excessive time, which is in Google's best interest to be as short as possible. So the best way I can answer this question is to tell you that over time we will determine, based on both the need and what is deemed non-excessive, what that timeframe is and report that timeframe.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I appreciate that you've been very good corporate citizens working with the Privacy Commissioner, but there are some concerns about having that data. That's a lot of data to have on millions of people: their whereabouts, the company they keep. That gives a lot of power to your enterprise, and I'm sure you can understand that we would want to have a clear definition of "adequate time" before giving our unbridled support to the practice. Can you appreciate that?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: I think the best way to answer that question is to again just remind the committee that the pictures are of publicly accessible places. These are images and individuals and places that are readily accessible. The fact that Google is going beyond a lot of other organizations that capture data speaks volumes to our commitment to privacy, and the fact that we commit to blurring those images permanently and not retaining those non-blurred images also speaks to our commitment to privacy and our commitment to individuals' privacy protection.

The Chair: Of course yours are for commercial use. Ordinary other access is not for commercial use. There is a difference. That's why we have PIPEDA, the act.

Mr. Nadeau, please.

[Translation]

Mr. Richard Nadeau (Gatineau, BQ): Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

Good afternoon, Mr. Vincent and Mr. Lister.

Right off the top, I want to say that I realize that you cannot stop progress. Computer technology and distributing images or information via search engines are part of a major technological revolution.

I will tell you what image comes to my mind, hoping you will not be upset. I keep thinking of the expression “Big Brother is watching you” from the book written by George Orwell. The images that can be accessed via your search engines can be used by other people. In an article that appeared in March in *The Independent*, a British newspaper, they said that this was a real boon to criminals.

I am not saying that you do not abide by the legislation but, based on your approach and your perspective, is there any way of ensuring that individuals, businesses or places that you photograph will not become bait for people with the wrong intentions? It is privacy and safety that are at stake here.

•(1655)

Mr. Olivier Vincent: Perhaps I could give part of the answer.

[English]

I'm going to switch to English, if you don't mind, so I don't mix up my vocabulary.

When you innovate, you always enter new territories, which creates questions and sometimes fears. After years of Google's Street View around the planet, I am not aware of a single incident where something really bad happened to somebody, or even slightly bad. There have been a few urban myths, but nothing has really come out.

When I hear journalists say it's like giving an instrument to criminals, I think that's equivalent to saying that cars allow bank robbers to run away from the scene of a crime and therefore we should forfeit cars. To me that's too overreaching.

I see so many thousands of opportunities to use these maps and street views to enhance everybody's life, to connect people together, to help them to know each other better, which is what communities are about. I think that's what we're doing. That's the real story here.

On the potential privacy risks, yes, we know those concerns are here, but I really have the sense at the moment that with the blurring of the images, the elimination of the files, and the “report a concern” mechanisms, I don't see any way in which privacy is in danger.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: I largely concur with Monsieur Vincent. I think we're in a period of dramatic change right now, much of which has incredible benefit to society. I think Google tries to be a hallmark and to innovate as well as or better than any company. One of the things Google does really well is that it considers itself to be a participant in this digital ecosystem and a facilitator of innovation. By that I mean there are small businesses and organizations in and around Canada, and in all the constituencies or ridings, who use Google products—mapping being one of them—and integrate them into their own products and drive or push their economic benefit forward. I think we've already talked about Canpages being one of

those organizations who use the Google platform to further their economic benefits. These are just some of the positive benefits.

And again, Monsieur Vincent is right. We have received fantastic feedback, and largely positive feedback, in every country we've gone into. We've received many good new stories, everything from the mayor of London being on the record talking about what a great product Street View is, to.... We have received many accolades about Street View once it's been launched.

So while change may be daunting, I think we are in the middle of this and we are pushing forward and trying to drive great economic benefit.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Hiebert, please.

Mr. Russ Hiebert (South Surrey—White Rock—Cloverdale, CPC): Thanks to both of you for being here. It's a delight to discuss this issue with you. I have a number of questions, so I'll ask for your comments to be brief.

I want to start with a bit of a brief preamble. Mr. Lister, you made a comment on the “intended” use—you've used that phrase more than once—of this technology and you listed the benefits associated with it. I think what you're hearing around this table is more a concern about the unintended consequences of the use of this technology, something that may not have been anticipated when it was first released.

My first question has to do with the advance notification. You've mentioned that you made an announcement on March 24 about this technology rolling out into Canada, without naming which cities, which dates, or even which weeks. I'm wondering what Google's expectation is for the saturation of this information. Are you planning to do more than just the announcement on March 24?

How are you going to communicate to the communities being affected, or perhaps even the neighbourhoods, that they can expect the car to be coming around to take pictures on such-and-such a day or in such-and-such a week at such-and-such a time of day? So people who don't want their car to be visible, even with the licence plate blurred.... Perhaps it's a very nice car and they don't want the world to know they have that kind of car. Perhaps they want to hide the kids' toys. Perhaps they want to mow the lawn or close the curtains because their home will be on display for the world. To what degree will you be notifying these neighbourhoods about when this is going to be happening and when they can take steps to address these issues?

•(1700)

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Through Google's March 24 notification and the website I talked about, where we have published the locations of cities where we are currently driving, and through the continued and ongoing press that Google is generating.... We've done press interviews today. We continue to do press interviews. The presence of Street View drivers will continue to become more and more well known, I think, among the general public. We feel that is a really efficient, credible, and effective way to get the word out that we're driving.

On the matter of people who want their images to look a certain way, having done this in nine other countries and having had the cars drive around all the other countries, Google feels as a practical matter that there isn't a way to be very precise about when those cars are driving and where they're driving, for everything from weather and traffic conditions right through to the fact that we don't want to encourage exhibitionism.

We have a number of different reasons why we can't be exactly precise, but I feel that we've met both our obligation and consumer need by publishing the driving locations on the site.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: My next question deals with the removal of the images. You mentioned that this is an option. This is related to the last question, in that I am wondering to what degree you are notifying people about this option that they can actually have their images removed. Is there any justification required? Or can anybody simply say that their image is there and, although they have no reason, they don't want it there?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Privacy is incredibly important. We are going to err on the side of privacy protection, so Google would take down those images. As I said, the only occasion on which we won't take down an image is if we're highly confident that it's fraudulent. Other than that, we want to err on the side of an individual's right to privacy and take that image down at their request.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Okay.

I get the sense that the technology has been around for a number of years. Has this technology ever been cited in any kind of civil or criminal case where a plaintiff made the claim that, as a result of this technology, they were more vulnerable to either a property crime or personal injury? Has Google ever been cited, not as a plaintiff, per se, but simply cited in a lawsuit where somebody has made the claim that this technology made them more vulnerable?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Not to my knowledge, and I think that when individuals use the product, you'll realize where its limitations and abilities are. If I may, I can give you a quick example of where it's been used to great benefit.

There was a case a couple of weeks ago—I'm not sure of the exact time, but we can get that for you—in which the police in Massachusetts used Street View for its intended purpose to recover or find a little girl who had been kidnapped in Massachusetts. They found her in rural Virginia. After locating the general area through GPS on the cellphone, they used Street View to find out what types of buildings were in that area. They found that one of the buildings was a motel and they felt that was the most likely place for the girl to be. They were able to recover the girl through what I think was a creative use of the tool.

That's what we see. When the product is launched, individuals and commercial interests find more and more beneficial uses for the product. This is why it's been widely received.

The Chair: Thank you.

Mr. Siksay, please.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

Mr. Lister, does Google depend on the media to do the notification? Is that where the bulk of the information gets out about how and where Google will be photographing?

•(1705)

Mr. Jonathan Lister: We meet our obligation, I think, under the Privacy Act and we certainly use the media and we certainly have been covered in the media quite broadly over the last number of months on the product.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Has Google taken any advertising, post-it notices on the search engine home page, that kind of thing, where folks might encounter this information in ways other than reading about it or seeing it on the television?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: The March 24, 2009 coverage was frankly so significant and the subsequent coverage that we're getting the media has been so significant that this has proven to be, we think, a very compelling and effective strategy for letting people know that the product is out there, or rather that we're driving cars and intending to launch the product.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Okay. I guess this goes to both Mr. Vincent and Mr. Lister.

You have a commercial purpose in mind when you're using this information. I guess you're trying to get people to visit your website so that you're making money somehow by offering this service. Would you agree with that statement, that there's a commercial purpose?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Absolutely. However, I would just remind the committee that Google, through its intentions to innovate and through its innovations, provides an incredible amount of free service to both consumers and businesses, whether it's our search engine, our maps, or g-mail. We're providing an enormous amount of free service. At the end of the day, this product will be part of our mapping portfolio, part of our maps product, and we advertise on maps, or we sell advertising on maps, so we will be absolutely commercializing the product. It's part of a broader strategy to have Google as a platform that can be built upon, and a part of that is giving away a tremendous amount of free service to consumers.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I'm sorry, Mr. Vincent, just let me expand it a bit.

The privacy commissioners—Canadian, Alberta, British Columbia, and Quebec—did raise the issue of key protections in their fact sheet about this, and I'll just quote from their document: "...one of your key protections under Canadian privacy law is that you should know when your picture is being taken for commercial reasons, and what your image will be used for."

Is that an interpretation of the law that Google and Canpages would agree with? Does it affect how you see the issue of notification?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: I'll try to answer that.

Indeed, we are a business, so there has to be an ultimate commercial purpose. People's silhouette appearing on our blurred images is an accident. We are not taking people's photos for commercial reasons. Actually, we don't want them in the photo. That is why we take them away and blur them. So in that sense I don't think we are exploiting these images for commercial purposes at all.

At the end of the day, we do connect buyers and sellers, but many people use the service for free to have a general tour of the area, and there will be absolutely no commerce conducted. They find it beautiful; they find it useful. We help families find new neighbourhoods; we help entrepreneurs find new real estate. Although it may sound amusing, there is a feel-good purpose behind it. It is a beautiful product. We were the first ones to bring it to the country and we know it's thoroughly enjoyed by the people using it, and that feels good.

Mr. Bill Siksay: And I have to admit that I'm a happy user of the service, many times actually, so I'm going to be clear about that.

Mr. Lister, in Japan I understand there was a particular cultural issue around a different sensibility around privacy and that Google recently made a change to lower the camera so that it didn't see over the fences that people commonly have in front of their homes. Has Google seen those different kinds of cultural differences in other places? Do you expect to find that in Canada, where we're a multicultural society and may not have a uniform understanding or expectation around privacy?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Part of the beauty of what I get to do for a living and part of the beauty of the work that Google does in the industry is that it changes all the time. Part of the reason I'm here today and Google's here today is to listen and learn, and we're more than open to finding out the unique and important local and relevant concerns. That's part of what this process is all about. Part of the reason we'll work with stakeholder groups is to uncover some of these local issues that we can't possibly be aware of in advance. As you will see evidence of in the Japan example, we take measures to meet the privacy concerns and obligations.

• (1710)

The Chair: Thank you.

Mrs. Simson, please.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you, Chair.

Just to pick up on what Mr. Siksay's line of questioning was, not only were there concerns, but I understand that all of Japan's imagery was being reshot. There's obviously a huge price to Google for doing

that, and I'd really like you to elaborate on that concern. That's my first question.

My second question to both of you—I didn't get a definitive answer—is whether you have any definitive numbers in terms of complaints you've received from individuals. Obviously we know about Japan, but I mean personal complaints that you've received on the toggle on your sites.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Sorry, I missed the first question. Would you mind repeating it? You were following on Mr. Siksay's question, but I didn't catch what you wanted.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: I'm wondering what the exact nature of the Japanese concern was, because the information we received is that all of Japan's imagery was being reshot, and that's obviously at a significant cost to Google. So there must have been some merit to it. Specifically I'd like to know what the nature of their complaint collectively would have been.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: I don't know the nature of the complaint, but what it speaks to is our willingness and Google's willingness to re-drive an entire nation if we feel the complaints are founded or if we're in agreement that they are justifiable complaints. And I might add that we're re-driving all of Canada as well—well, maybe not all of Canada. We started to drive Canada, and we decided not to use that imagery, so as you say, at great expense we are re-driving the nation.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Mr. Lister, a whole country is being reshot, and your testimony is that you can't tell us what the exact nature of the complaint was with respect to the Japanese concerns?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: In Japan, no, I don't know. We can get it for you. I don't know the nature of the complaint in Japan.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: I'd really appreciate that, because that's a whole country being reshot. That's significant.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: As much as I can, I'll try to find out and get you the nature of that complaint.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: And for both of you, this is just an idea. Could you give us the number of complaints you receive online, where people have requested that their images, images of their house, or whatever...?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: We've had zero complaints, none, not a single one. We've had a few people use the mechanism to give us suggestions, which I found pretty amusing, and many of them were good suggestions actually. So that was nice. But as for complaints, we've had none to date.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Mr. Lister.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: We're a significant, large organization. We get complaints regularly about any number of different things. I'm sure we've had complaints on our site and to our organization about Street View. However, I'm not familiar. There have certainly not been a significant number of them, but we have had a significant amount of positive feedback and positive responses.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: No. When I say "complaints", maybe I used the wrong expression. I'm talking about people who have specifically gone on, clicked on and said "I want off". Is that something you're tracking?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Right. I'm just trying to clarify.

We haven't launched the product here, so there aren't images for anybody to take down.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: What about elsewhere?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Are you talking about in other countries?

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Yes, I mean elsewhere, overall.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Again, I don't know. We can try to get you numbers. I don't have the numbers. All I know is that overwhelmingly the feedback has been extremely positive.

Mrs. Michelle Simson: Thank you.

The Chair: Mr. Poilievre.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Thanks again.

As stated earlier, on this side we're very excited about this technology, and I think you both acquitted yourselves very well.

There are four concerns that I sought to have addressed today. The one I want to focus on in my last questions is this issue of storage. Mr. Lister, your company is taking millions of images in Canada of Canadians and storing those images out of the reach of Canadian commercial privacy laws. You're also keeping those images in your possession for an unspecified period of time, and I would suggest to you that this gives your company a degree of power that was not provided for in our commercial privacy laws.

Respected journalist Greg Weston listed some of his concerns. He talked about, for example, biometrics. Right now we have technology that can identify people by their fingerprints, by their eye retinas. It's not unreasonable to expect that one day they could be identified technologically by the unique shape of their face. If you have millions of images of people, you have the time and place in which those images were shot, and you have the company in which people find themselves when those images are shot, you are going to have an enormous amount of personal information about millions of people, without their expressed consent. How do you see this complying with Canada's commercial privacy laws?

• (1715)

Mr. Jonathan Lister: I just want to remind the committee, I'm not a lawyer. I can't speak specifically to the laws in question. I can talk more about how we plan on using the product and Google's view on our consumer relationship.

Google believes very strongly in transparency and user choice, and I think it's fair to say that we believe in that more than many other organizations out there. So we offer many ways for consumers

to find out how their data is being used, change their data, and take their data down if they're uncomfortable with how Google has used that data.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: I'm not focusing on that concern. I'm more concerned about the data that you have about people that they don't know you have, that you store at server farms outside of Canada, that is unblurred and is in your possession for an unspecified period of time. We want to find a way to make this work with you.

Would Google entertain the idea of putting a time limit on the unblurred images it keeps at its server farms?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: I think that's exactly what I said we were going to do. We will share this timeframe with the committee when we can appropriately articulate what it is, based on our technical needs balanced out with privacy interests. We'll share that with the committee as soon as we have a reasonable and accurate answer.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Can you guarantee to Canadians that you will not sell these unblurred images for commercial reasons to other enterprises?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Google doesn't sell personal information.

Mr. Pierre Poilievre: Thank you.

How much time do we have?

The Chair: Mr. Hiebert is up.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: Thank you, Mr. Chair.

I have a few questions, following up on my colleague. He talked about the data being stored outside of Canada. Does the U.S. Patriot Act apply to the Canadian photo data as a result of the fact that it's not being stored in Canada but is being stored in the United States, and could it be seized by the U.S. government without justification at any time?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Yes, but if the data were stored in Canada, it could also be seized. I think it's under the mutual legal assistance treaty with the U.S. So there's no difference.

I think it's immaterial where the data is stored. It's a fact of the digital economy that as the economy grows and the global economy grows, putting up protectionist barriers around the flow of data is going to prove troublesome to countries like Canada. And in our opinion, in my opinion, we're far better off finding ways to help facilitate and ensure the safety of cross-border traffic in data, rather than trying to stop it and protect it. But as the Privacy Commissioner herself has indicated, I believe on a number of occasions, some cross-border data flow is not in and of itself a privacy concern.

Mr. Russ Hiebert: You also mentioned that there were photos taken prior to March 24 of this year. You said those photos would not be used. Can you confirm that those photos will be destroyed?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: Clearly, I haven't done a very good job of answering this question. There are non-blurred images that have been taken. When the photographs are originally taken they are non-blurred. There is a blurring process that Google does to blur those photos. Any images that are non-blurred...

Actually, let me step back. There are actually two copies—and I think this is important. There is a blurred copy and a non-blurred copy. And after this adequate but not excessive time, the non-blurred copy becomes blurred; therefore, all images are blurred.

• (1720)

Mr. Russ Hiebert: I understand that, and I did hear your answer earlier. But you've said you won't be using the photos taken prior to March 24, and it dawned on me that perhaps the appropriate thing to do would be to make Canadians rest assured that those photos will never be used. You could just simply state that they'll be destroyed. But I heard your additional answer.

The federal and provincial privacy commissioners have put out a statement. In that statement they indicated that they believe that companies that engage in this activity have to let citizens know, among other things, when these photos will be taken. That includes notification using a variety of media, local media outlets, outlining the dates and the locations for filming, and the purpose for the filming and so on.

Earlier I asked you about what steps you'd be taking to notify Canadians. Clearly, the privacy commissioners have raised an expectation that local media outlets should be informed of the dates and the locations when these pictures are going to be taken. Does Google have any intention of fulfilling that request from these privacy commissioners?

Mr. Jonathan Lister: We intend to meet our obligations and all the legal requirements before we launch the project. We're here today to gather concerns.

In addition to some of the things I've mentioned already, we have generated an incredible amount of national press. It's probably the most publicized collection of cartographic images, in addition to the website that indicates the cities we are currently driving through. The drivers of the cars have one-pagers, like Mr. Vincent's Canpages example.

People are welcome to come up to the Google cars. They are clearly identified as Google cars. The drivers have these one-pagers, and they have contacts at Google who people are able to talk to. We're trying to make this as transparent as possible while still

balancing out the practical matter of not giving specific dates, for the reasons I mentioned.

The Chair: Thank you.

Colleagues, we are going to end at 5:30. I have a quick question from Mr. Siksay and one from Madame Thi Lac. I've circulated a budget that I would like the committee to consider before we adjourn.

Mr. Siksay.

Mr. Bill Siksay: I would like to ask both of you if you've ever had to do a structured or formal privacy impact assessment process with a government agency or a privacy agency anywhere in the world.

Mr. Jonathan Lister: I'd have to check and get back to you.

Mr. Olivier Vincent: We're a Canadian organization. It's the first for us.

Mr. Bill Siksay: Thank you, Chair.

The Chair: Madame Thi Lac.

[*Translation*]

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: In the past, we have heard about images that were scrambled and put on the Internet by criminals or pedophiles. We also know that the police were able to unscramble those images in order to identify criminals or specific individuals. Perhaps that was the work of amateurs.

Can you give us the assurance that computer whizzes will not succeed in unscrambling the images that you scramble using your own process?

Mr. Olivier Vincent: Yes, absolutely. It is an irreversible process, meaning that there is no going back afterwards. Several years ago, available technology made it possible to swirl the face, but people did find a way to unswirl it and identify the individual. Now, however, we use a technology that completely erases the image and which is totally irreversible.

Mrs. Ève-Mary Thaï Thi Lac: Thank you.

[*English*]

The Chair: Thank you.

There was a question earlier about the Japan experience and reshooting. The researchers advise that the cameras were high enough to see over people's fences into their backyards, so they were asked to reshoot 40 centimetres lower so there was privacy.

There are rules in every jurisdiction, and it shows that if you don't do your homework sometimes it costs a little extra money.

In any event, this matter is probably going to carry over with us.

Mr. Dreeshen, go ahead.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen (Red Deer, CPC): Thank you very much for coming here today.

I know that you have to make money doing this, and one of Mr. Siksay's questions kind of alluded to that. When the public accesses your site online in order to have their concerns addressed for the removal request, does an advertisement pop up that they have to look at?

Second, what happens to all the computer IP addresses when people give you that type of information? You guys are computer geniuses. I'm just wondering if that address is removed from your system after that takes place.

• (1725)

Mr. Jonathan Lister: To the first question, I am reasonably confident there's no advertising on our take-down page. We can confirm that.

To the second question, it comes back to Google's respect for privacy. We have many examples where we have leading-edge privacy, such as in Google Latitude, which is a location-based GPS product. We use that data when people consent to give it to us, and because we believe in transparency and choice they can opt out of that product at any time. We do this consistently across our products.

Mr. Earl Dreeshen: Thank you.

The Chair: In any event, this is a matter of emerging communications. There will be a lot more input as more and more persons and organizations become more familiar with what you're doing or not doing. I anticipate that the committee will want to continue to monitor this and hear from other witnesses when the House returns.

Colleagues, I have circulated a budget that anticipates a total amount of \$15,900 for seven witnesses and for witnesses' expenses. I will entertain a motion for the budget for this study.

Mrs. Block moves approval of the budget.

(Motion agreed to)

The Chair: Gentlemen, I want to thank you very much on behalf of the committee for providing us with samples and representations on this new technology and starting us on the road of considering the privacy implications. I hope we will be able to draw on your experience and expertise again before we come to any conclusions and maybe make a report on this study.

Thank you.

The meeting is adjourned.

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