



Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on May 16, 2011

Pro-Family Campaign Persuades Sears to Drop Online Porn Video Sales

Sears Holdings Corp., parent company for national retailers Sears and Kmart, has apologized to customers after the conservative American Family Association revealed that pornographic videos were being sold through the Sears.com website. Following a nine-month campaign during which AFA officials tried to persuade Sears to pull scores of a “X-rated products” from its website, Sears executives finally relented and removed the videos, but only after thousands of individuals had e-mailed to express their anger and dismay that the retailer, which has long cultivated a family-oriented reputation, would carry such merchandise.



“We sincerely apologize to any customers who were offended,” Sears said in a statement to the AFA. “Our agreements with our vendors prohibit content that is pornographic or sexually explicit in nature. We are removing these items that do not meet our guidelines. We regularly review our processes to ensure compliance by our vendors, and we encourage our customers and community to help us flag any items that they believe might violate our guidelines.”

In explaining what Sears claimed was an oversight, the *Wall Street Journal* reported that the retailer “lets other companies sell products through its website in exchange for a slice of the proceeds.” According to the paper, Amazon.com earns a third of its revenue by farming out its website to other vendors, and, like Sears, such stores as Wal-Mart and Best Buy are trying to beef up their profits in the same way. “Sears attributed the sale of the sexually explicit DVDs to a mistake by a vendor partner whom it declined to name,” reported the *Journal*.

“We have a very clear policy that states the types of products we are not willing to sell,” Sears’ online president Imran Jooma was quoted by the *Journal* as saying. “It includes pornography in every form,” The retailer said that it does not monitor every item offered on its website, “but instead employs computer scans and manual keyword searches to ferret out violations of its guidelines,” reported the paper.

While Sears appeared to spin the story as a big misunderstanding, the AFA’s [Bryan Fischer](#) said it’s not quite that simple. Fischer, who heads up issues analysis for the pro-family group, recalled that once the AFA was alerted to the porn being sold on the Sears site, AFA officials “initiated private correspondence with Sears executives” to give them the opportunity to quietly remove the offending merchandise from their online inventory.

The company’s Response? “Sears blew us off at every turn,” recalled Fischer. For the next nine months “Sears stonewalled, denied, and refused to respond.”



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The folks at AFA decided that the best thing to do would be to provide irrefutable evidence of just what Sears was selling, so they actually ordered a particularly offensive DVD off the site, one entitled *Hot Mamas Love Young Chicks 3*. Wrote Fischer, "I have not screened this video, but rest assured it is not a documentary about attractive Midwestern farmers' wives running egg hatcheries."

When the video arrived at the AFA offices a few days later, it came "in a Sears envelope, with a [Sears shipping label](#), from a Sears distribution center," noted an AFA alert, adding, "Not only does Sears' website allow children to view its pornographic offerings online, it will sell them to children. During our online check-out process, we were never asked to verify our age."

It was only when AFA sent out its viral [action alert](#) on May 5, urging its 2.3 million recipients to contact Sears' CEO to complain about the porn, that the retailer's executives scrambled to respond. The response came in the form of a phone call from an agitated Chris Braithwaite, Sears' vice-president for corporate communications, "who vehemently denied that Sears was selling porn or any such thing," recalled Fischer.

The AFA's Randy Sharp led Braithwaite — with one quick click of a link on Sears' home page — to the retailer's online porn video department, where Braithwaite's screen "was filled with come-ons for explicit videos, being sold by a third-party vendor to whom Sears had rented web space."

Braithwaite quickly hung up from the conversation, and, wrote Fischer, "Sharp watched as one by one links to hardcore porn were stripped from the Sears site. Sears subsequently issued an abject apology with promises never to do it again, and later on Friday Sharp received a phone call from a humble and contrite Braithwaite, full of assurances that Sears will work with AFA in the future to prevent a re-occurrence."

AFA president Tim Wildmon pointed out that the campaign was successful because of the number of people who called in to complain. "Because you and thousands of others chose to get involved, Sears could no longer defend selling pornography, nor could they continue to deny it," Wildmon said in a follow-up e-mail to AFA supporters. "Thank you for taking action and convincing Sears to get out of the pornography business."

In reality, Sears has not totally pulled the plug on porn. While the AFA alerted its e-mail activists back in August 2010 that the retailer was selling [pornographic posters](#) on its website, according to the [Christian Post](#), thus far the company has refused to stop, with a company spokesman explaining that Sears officials had "have reviewed the products in question and found that they do not fall outside our marketplace guidelines."

"Sears is playing with fire," Fischer said last August as the AFA launched a similar campaign to persuade the online retailer to drop the sexualized posters from its online store. "Sears is the place that American families are used to going ... and I just cannot imagine that the vast majority of their customer base wants to shop at a place that's marketing pornography. There are a lot of other places that American families can shop for the same goods they get at Sears."



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