

## **FACEBOOK APOLOGIZES AFTER REHTAEH PARSONS PHOTO APPEARS IN DATING AD**

**Complaints say the ad was a gross violation of company policies.**

*By Melissa Goertzen, Staff Writer*

Facebook has banned the dating company ionechat.com from advertising on its website. The announcement came after site users discovered an ad featuring a photo of [Rehtaeh Parsons](#), a Halifax teen who died this spring following a suicide attempt.

In a statement issued to The Star, a [Facebook spokesperson](#) said, “this is an extremely unfortunate example of an advertiser scraping an image from the Internet and using it in their ad campaign.”

In April, Parsons made headlines across Canada after she was taken off life support following an attempt to take her own life. Her family described it as an act of desperation following an alleged sexual assault and multiple instances of cyberbullying.

Yesterday, Facebook users were shocked to find a photo of the teen in an [ad](#) featuring the caption, “find love in Canada! Meet Canadian girls and women for friendship, dating, or relationships.” Anh Dung, an administrator at ionechat.com, removed the ad and took down the dating website’s Facebook account after receiving numerous emails from reporters. He said that the images were randomly collected from Google using an image scraper and the inclusion of Parsons’ photo was unintentional.

In an interview with CBC News, [Carmi Levy](#), an independent technology analyst, said that it is surprisingly easy for companies to harvest images for promotional purposes. In many cases they do not stop to examine whether images are appropriate.

“It’s relatively easy to scrape that picture off the Internet, paste it into an advertisement and off you go,” he said. “It shows that there’s no due diligence, no one is minding the store to make sure the pictures that are being included here are in fact appropriate for use.”

The aftermath of this situation brings to light the privacy concerns Facebook users felt when the social network went public in May 2012. Many questioned how online profiles would be used and whether content would be harvested by companies for marketing and promotional purposes. The advertisement from ionechat.com serves as a harsh reminder that content uploaded to Facebook is out of users’ control.

“The takeaway message is you’re going to want to control what goes online because once it gets online, there’s no pulling it back. Anyone, anywhere, can grab it off of the screen and use it as they wish and your ability to find it after the fact, it depends on someone bumping into it, happenstance online. Losing control is way too easy,” said Levy.