

\*\*E-Filed 3/16/2007\*\*

NOT FOR CITATION  
IN THE UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT  
FOR THE NORTHERN DISTRICT OF CALIFORNIA  
SAN JOSE DIVISION

KINDERSTART.COM, LLC, a California limited liability company, on behalf of itself and all others similarly situated,

Plaintiffs,

v.

GOOGLE, INC., a Delaware corporation,

Defendant.

Case Number C 06-2057 JF (RS)

ORDER<sup>1</sup> GRANTING MOTION TO DISMISS WITHOUT LEAVE TO AMEND, DENYING SPECIAL MOTION PURSUANT TO CAL. CIV. CODE § 425.16, AND DENYING MOTION TO STRIKE AS MOOT

[re: docket nos. 16, 49, 51, 52, 54, 59]

Defendant Google, Inc. (“Google”) moves to dismiss the Second Amended Complaint (“SAC”) of Plaintiff KinderStart.com, LLC (“KinderStart”), pursuant to Rules 12(b)(1) and 12(b)(6) of the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.<sup>2</sup> Google also moves specially to strike the fourth claim of the SAC pursuant to California’s “anti-SLAPP” statute, Cal. Code Civ. Pro. § 425.16. Finally, Google moves to strike the entire SAC for perceived structural insufficiencies

<sup>1</sup> This disposition is not designated for publication and may not be cited.

<sup>2</sup> Unless otherwise indicated, references to Rules hereinafter will refer to the Federal Rules of Civil Procedure.

1 or, alternatively, to strike KinderStart's third claim as improperly filed.<sup>3</sup> KinderStart opposes the  
2 motions. The Court heard oral argument on October 27, 2006.

3 For the reasons set forth below, the Court will grant the motion to dismiss without leave  
4 to amend and will deny the "anti-SLAPP" motion. The motion to strike will be denied as moot.

## 5 I. BACKGROUND

### 6 1. Procedural Background

7 On March 17, 2006, KinderStart filed the instant action on behalf of itself and others  
8 similarly situated. On April 12, 2006, KinderStart filed a First Amended Complaint ("FAC"),  
9 alleging nine claims for relief: (1) violation of the right to free speech under the United States  
10 and California Constitutions; (2) attempted monopolization in violation of the Sherman Act; (3)  
11 monopolization in violation of the Sherman Act; (4) violations of the Communications Act, 47  
12 U.S.C. §§ 201, *et seq.*; (5) unfair competition under California Business and Professions Code §§  
13 17200, *et seq.*; (6) unfair practices under California Business and Professions Code § 17045; (7)  
14 breach of the implied covenant of good faith and fair dealing; (8) defamation and libel; and (9)  
15 negligent interference with prospective economic advantage. The Court dismissed the FAC with  
16 leave to amend in an order dated July 13, 2006 ("July 13th Order"). KinderStart filed the  
17 operative SAC on September 1, 2006, asserting six claims for relief: (1) attempted  
18 monopolization in violation of the Sherman Act; (2) monopolization in violation of the Sherman  
19 Act; (3) false representations in violation of the Lanham Act; (4) violation of free speech rights  
20 under the United States and California Constitutions; (5) unfair competition in violation of  
21 California Business and Professions Code §§ 17200 *et seq.*; and (6) defamation and libel.

### 22 2. Factual Allegations of the Second Amended Complaint

23 KinderStart alleges the following facts, which are presumed to be true for the purpose of  
24

---

25 <sup>3</sup> The Court will refer to the three motions respectively as: "motion to dismiss;" "anti-  
26 SLAPP" motion;" and "motion to strike."

27 KinderStart has moved for administrative relief relating to a minor delay in the  
28 submission of its opposition to the "anti-SLAPP" motion and motion to strike. The Court will  
grant this relief to the extent that it is not already moot.

1 the motion to dismiss. KinderStart operates a website, www.KinderStart.com, which is a  
2 directory and search engine for links to information and resources on subjects related to young  
3 children. At one point, KinderStart was “one of the choicest Internet destinations for thousands  
4 of parents, caregivers, educators, nonprofit and advocacy representatives, and federal, state and  
5 local organizations and officials in the United States and worldwide to access health, education  
6 and other vital information about infants and toddlers.” SAC ¶ 28. It launched in May 2000 and  
7 monthly page views by visitors “reached approximately 10,000,000 by 2005.” *Id.* ¶ 31.

8 Google is the world’s most widely used search engine. *Id.* ¶ 2. It is “the dominant actor  
9 in the world of searching all forms of text, Web and image content on the Internet.” *Id.* ¶ 33. It  
10 “invites anyone with an Internet connection worldwide to perform searches for Websites and  
11 Webpages” and presents results of its searches on a results page. *Id.* ¶ 3. It “induces an entire  
12 generation of users, the public, and the cyberspace community at large to expect and believe that  
13 Search Results generated from a search every single time will be (a) objective and neutral, (b)  
14 untrammelled by human intervention or preference and (d) [sic] accompanied by a disclosure of  
15 every incidence of removal of Websites from appearing in Search Results.” *Id.* ¶ 129. Google  
16 states on its “Technology Overview” page: “There is no human involvement or manipulation of  
17 results, which is why users have come to trust Google as a source of objective information  
18 untainted by paid placement.” *Id.* ¶ 116. Google represents on its website “that removal of  
19 Websites and Web Content from Google’s index is not done except (a) upon request of the  
20 webmaster of the website, (b) in the case of ‘spamming the index,’ or (c) as required by law.” *Id.*  
21 ¶ 87.

22 Google offers a system for rating the usefulness of websites known as PageRank.  
23 According to the SAC, “[a]t one time, PageRank in its nascent form was an automated, computer  
24 algorithm to calculate and measure the extent and nature of hyperlinking within the Internet to a  
25 particular Website and its web pages. After PageRank was licensed from Stanford University,  
26 Defendant developed a system of converting the actual mathematical result into a whole number  
27 score from ‘1’ up to ‘10’.” *Id.* ¶ 142. PageRank now appears on the Google Toolbar that web  
28

1 users may download for free. *Id.* ¶ 78, 140. Google explains: “Wondering whether a new  
2 website is worth your time? Use the Toolbar’s format PageRank™ display to tell you how  
3 Google’s algorithms assess the importance of the page you’re viewing.” *Id.* ¶ 140. KinderStart  
4 alleges that “PageRank is not a mere statement of opinion of the innate value or human appeal of  
5 a given Website,” but instead is “a mathematically-generated product of measuring and assessing  
6 the quantity and depth of all the hyperlinks on the Web that tie into a PageRanked Website,  
7 under programmatic determination by Defendant Google.” *Id.* ¶ 141. “PageRank as  
8 promulgated and propagated by Defendant Google throughout the Internet, is now the *de facto*  
9 and prevailing standard for rating Websites throughout the United States.” *Id.* ¶ 46.

10 Google also has commenced programs to make digital copies and archives of university  
11 libraries and “with the Library of Congress as financial partner, is creating a digital, searchable  
12 archive of published books, larger than nearly any library of written and published materials in  
13 the world.” *Id.* ¶ 111. “The incremental flow of revenues from Defendant Google shared and  
14 split with its library partners as state institutions, allow them to overcome their otherwise adverse  
15 shortfalls in funding and revenues.” *Id.* ¶ 113. “These financial inflows from the Google  
16 partnerships make such institutions financially entwined and dependent upon Defendant.” *Id.*

17 KinderStart enrolled in Google’s AdSense Program in 2003, and paid for a series of  
18 sponsored links from Google. *Id.* ¶ 32. In or about August 2003, KinderStart began placing  
19 advertisements from the Google Network onto its site and receiving payments from Google for  
20 these placements. *Id.* On March 19, 2005, KinderStart’s website “suffered a cataclysmic fall of  
21 70% or more in its monthly page views and traffic.” *Id.* ¶ 174. KinderStart eventually “realized  
22 that common key word searches on Defendant Google’s search engine no longer listed KSC.com  
23 as a result with any of its past visibility.” *Id.* With this drop in search engine referrals,  
24 KinderStart’s “monthly AdSense revenue suffered an equally precipitous fall by over 80%.” *Id.* ¶  
25 175. KinderStart’s website “was officially, practically and illegally Blocked by Defendant  
26 Google.” *Id.* ¶ 176. KinderStart was not notified in advance that this would occur and has not  
27 been instructed how it can cause Google to cease the “Blockage.” *Id.* ¶ 178. To the best of its  
28

1 knowledge, KinderStart has never violated Google’s Web Recommendations and Google has not  
2 notified KinderStart of any such violation. *Id.* ¶ 184. KinderStart’s website was given a  
3 PageRank of “0” until April 7, 2006, after which time it was raised to “7,” before being dropped  
4 to “0” again on or about July 13, 2006. *Id.* ¶ 186.

5 Google “artificially manipulates and deflates PageRanks downward of Websites . . .  
6 based on events, factors, impression and opinions having no correlation, relation or connection to  
7 the parameters, variables and factors that are naturally and normally utilized for the PageRank  
8 algorithm as managed and executed solely within the control and management of Defendant.”  
9 *Id.* ¶ 272. Google engages in the practice of “Blockage” of websites by “delisting, de-indexing  
10 and censoring” websites, including the unacknowledged practice of isolating a website from  
11 search queries, either permanently or for an unspecified probationary period. *Id.* ¶¶ 11, 154.  
12 “Blockage and/or PageRank Deflation [] occur in Search Results or Webpage views based on  
13 discriminatory political or religious content or vague and/or overbroad content guidelines.” *Id.* ¶  
14 100.<sup>4</sup> “It has been and continues to be, difficult if not impossible . . . to move [a] Website out of  
15 the probationary or permanent Blockage by calling, e-mailing or otherwise notifying Defendant  
16 Google, and there is no process to get a report of whether or why a Website might have been  
17 penalized and thereby Blocked.” *Id.* ¶ 156. Although Google initially denied engaging in  
18 “Blockage,” it has admitted engaging in the “euphemistically” named practices of “‘search  
19 quality improvement’ or anti-Webspamming.” *Id.* ¶ 157. The practice of “Blockage” has been  
20 positively correlated with “the failure and/or the reduction in AdWords advertising” on multiple  
21 occasions. *Id.* ¶ 170.

22 KinderStart believes that “over 1000 other sites of California and nationwide Websites  
23 that participated in AdSense suffered a loss of traffic and referrals as a result of Blockage by  
24

---

25 <sup>4</sup> Google denies most, if not all, the allegations made against it by KinderStart, but denies  
26 with particular vehemence the allegation of its possession of discriminatory political or religious  
27 views. These allegations are one subject of a motion for Rule 11 sanctions against KinderStart  
28 and its counsel, *see* Motion for Sanctions 5, which motion is addressed in a separate order filed  
concurrently herewith.

1 Defendant Google.” *Id.* ¶ 177. KinderStart also claims that Google has interfered with  
2 KinderStart’s First Amendment rights, *see e.g. id.* ¶ 257, and “has engaged in predatory conduct  
3 and anticompetitive conduct directed toward achieving the objective of controlling prices and/or  
4 destroying competition.” *Id.* ¶ 209. KinderStart asserts that the Google search engine is “an  
5 essential facility for the marketing and financial viability of effective competition in creating,  
6 offering and delivering services for search over the Internet.” *Id.* ¶ 219. Although MSN and  
7 Yahoo! also operate in the search engine market, they are losing market share. *Id.* ¶ 48.

## 8 II. LEGAL STANDARD

9 For purposes of a motion to dismiss, the plaintiff’s allegations are taken as true, and the  
10 Court must construe the complaint in the light most favorable to the plaintiff. *Jenkins v.*  
11 *McKeithen*, 395 U.S. 411, 421 (1969). Leave to amend must be granted unless it is clear that the  
12 complaint’s deficiencies cannot be cured by amendment. *Lucas v. Department of Corrections*,  
13 66 F.3d 245, 248 (9th Cir. 1995). When amendment would be futile, dismissal may be ordered  
14 with prejudice. *Dumas v. Kipp*, 90 F.3d 386, 393 (9th Cir. 1996).

15 On a motion to dismiss, the Court’s review is limited to the face of the complaint and  
16 matters judicially noticeable. *North Star International v. Arizona Corporation Commission*, 720  
17 F.2d 578, 581 (9th Cir. 1983); *MGIC Indemnity Corp. v. Weisman*, 803 F.2d 500, 504 (9th Cir.  
18 1986); *Beliveau v. Caras*, 873 F.Supp. 1393, 1395 (C.D. Cal. 1995). However, under the  
19 “incorporation by reference” doctrine, the Court also may consider documents that are referenced  
20 extensively in the complaint and accepted by all parties as authentic, even if they are not  
21 physically attached to the complaint. *In re Silicon Graphics, Inc. Securities Litigation*, 183 F.3d  
22 970 (9th Cir. 1999). “Under the ‘incorporation by reference’ rule of this Circuit, a court may  
23 look beyond the pleadings without converting the Rule 12(b)(6) motion into one for summary  
24 judgment.” *Van Buskirk v. Cable News Network, Inc.*, 284 F.3d 977, 980 (9th Cir. 2002).

## 25 III. DISCUSSION

### 26 1. Motion to Dismiss

#### 27 a. Claim I: Attempted Monopolization in Violation of the Sherman Act

1 KinderStart's first claim alleges attempted monopolization in two markets under Section  
2 2 of the Sherman Act, 15 U.S.C. § 2. SAC ¶¶ 207-08. KinderStart identifies these two markets  
3 as: (1) the "Search Market," which consists of search engine design, implementation, and usage  
4 within the United States; SAC ¶ 34; and (2) the "Search Ad Market," which consists of a  
5 "universe of advertisers who seek and pay for online advertising [and who] target and reach  
6 Internet browsers and users of search engines." SAC ¶ 38. Google allegedly participates in the  
7 Search Ad Market through the AdWords and AdSense programs, *id.*, and derives at least ninety-  
8 eight percent of its total company revenue from search-related advertising. SAC ¶ 43.

9 In order to make out a claim for attempted monopolization, a plaintiff must define the  
10 relevant market. *Forsyth v. Humana, Inc.*, 114 F.3d 1467, 1476 (9th Cir. 1997). The relevant  
11 market is "the field in which meaningful competition is said to exist." *Image Technical Services,*  
12 *Inc. v. Eastman Kodak Co.*, 125 F.3d 1195, 1202 (9th Cir. 1997). To prevail on such a claim, a  
13 plaintiff must demonstrate four elements: (1) specific intent to control prices or destroy  
14 competition, (2) predatory or anticompetitive conduct directed toward accomplishing that  
15 purpose, (3) a dangerous probability of success and (4) causal antitrust injury. *Forsyth*, 114 F.3d  
16 at 1477.

17 The Court concluded in its July 13th Order that KinderStart had failed to allege facts  
18 sufficient to support each of the four elements of an attempted monopolization claim. The Court  
19 also noted that KinderStart had not sufficiently described the markets relevant to its claim. The  
20 SAC suffers from essentially the same defects. To the extent that the Search Ad Market is  
21 severable from the Search Market, KinderStart does not have standing to bring a claim for  
22 attempted monopolization of the Search Ad market.

23 i. Relevant Market

24 Failure to allege adequately the relevant market is an appropriate ground for dismissal of  
25 a Sherman Act claim. *Tanaka v. University of Southern California*, 252 F.3d 1059, 1063 (9th  
26 Cir. 2001). "A 'market' is any grouping of sales whose sellers, if unified by a monopolist or a  
27 hypothetical cartel, would have market power in dealing with any group of buyers." *Rebel Oil*  
28

1 *Co. v. Atlantic Richfield Co.*, 51 F.3d 1421, 1434 (9th Cir. 1995). The Supreme Court has  
2 explained that the relevant market for antitrust purposes is determined by the choices available to  
3 consumers. *Eastman Kodak Co. v. Image Technical Services, Inc.*, 504 U.S. 451, 481-82 (1992).  
4 In some instances, one brand of a product can constitute a separate market. *Id.* “The product  
5 market includes the pool of goods or services that enjoy reasonable interchangeability of use and  
6 cross-elasticity of demand.” *Tanaka*, 252 F.3d at 1063. The allegations of the SAC are  
7 insufficient to meet this standard.

8 KinderStart has failed to allege that the Search Market is a “grouping of sales.” It does  
9 not claim that Google sells its search services, or that any other search provider does so. Rather,  
10 it states conclusorily that “[a]ny search engine must be free to the user because of past user  
11 experience and expectations with search engines and due to the preexisting governmental and  
12 technological policy of Internet freedom and Internet neutrality.” SAC ¶ 54. KinderStart cites no  
13 authority indicating that antitrust law concerns itself with competition in the provision of free  
14 services. Providing search functionality may lead to revenue from other sources, but KinderStart  
15 has not alleged that anyone pays Google to search. Thus, the Search Market is not a “market” for  
16 purposes of antitrust law.

17 Nor has KinderStart alleged adequately that the Search Ad Market is a relevant market.  
18 KinderStart argues that the Search Ad Market is distinct from other forms of advertising on the  
19 Internet and that it should be considered as such for purposes of antitrust analysis. However,  
20 there is no logical basis for distinguishing the Search Ad Market from the larger market for  
21 Internet advertising. Because a website may choose to advertise via search-based advertising or  
22 by posting advertisements independently of any search, search-based advertising is reasonably  
23 interchangeable with other forms of Internet advertising. The Search Ad Market thus is too  
24 narrow to constitute a relevant market.

25 KinderStart might have argued that the Search Market and the Search Ad Market  
26 combine to form one market for antitrust purposes. However, such a combined market, even if  
27 alleged, would suffer from the same lack of breadth that renders the Search Ad Market  
28

1 inadequate.

2 ii. Elements of Attempted Monopolization of the Search Market and the  
3 Search Ad Market

4 Because KinderStart has failed to plead a relevant market, its attempted monopolization  
5 claim is subject to dismissal. Its repeated failure to plead a relevant market, *see* July 13th Order  
6 12, n.2, suggests strongly that further leave to amend the complaint would be futile. However, in  
7 order to inform the exercise of its discretion, the Court also has assessed the elements of  
8 attempted monopolization as currently pled. Based on this assessment, the Court concludes that  
9 further leave to amend is not warranted.

10 (1) Specific Intent to Monopolize

11 KinderStart argues that Google's conduct alone demonstrates the requisite intent to  
12 monopolize, pointing to the Supreme Court's dictum that "evidence that the conduct was not  
13 related to any apparent efficiency" can satisfy the requirement that an antitrust Plaintiff show  
14 predatory intent. Opposition to Motion to Dismiss 13 (citing *Aspen Skiing Co. v. Aspen*  
15 *Highlands Skiing Corp.*, 472 U.S. 585, 608 n.39 (1985)).<sup>5</sup> KinderStart makes three basic  
16 allegations regarding decisions allegedly made by Google that are not related to any apparent  
17 efficiency.

18 First, KinderStart alleges that Google removed from its index sites that it "unfairly and  
19 arbitrarily deemed [] in its sole discretion to be spam or marginal viewer content, . . . in order to  
20 redirect users and valuable search traffic to sites competing against such Websites." SAC ¶  
21 63(a). However, it does not allege that Google engaged in this activity with an intent to gain a  
22 monopoly. It does not claim that such arbitrary conduct was part of an effort to drive  
23 KinderStart, an alleged competitor, out of the Search Market. Instead, KinderStart alleges that  
24 such arbitrary conduct pertained to an effort to direct traffic to *third-party* sites that competed  
25 with KinderStart. Nothing in the allegation refers to KinderStart's competition with Google.

---

26  
27 <sup>5</sup> This footnote references an antitrust textbook in which the author discusses situations  
28 in which the alleged antitrust violator has "overwhelming market [share], perhaps 80 or 90  
percent."

1 Second, KinderStart alleges that Google terminated “the AdSense contracts of  
2 competitors as Class members relying upon internal and/or disclosed reasons on pretense and not  
3 related to economic sense or business justification.” SAC ¶ 62(c). It does not allege, however,  
4 that Google terminated its AdSense contract. Any injury thus was suffered by unnamed class  
5 members, not by KinderStart. Article III requires that a plaintiff identify a concrete injury-in-  
6 fact. *Whitmore v. Arkansas*, 495 U.S. 149, 155 (1991). If KinderStart can allege no injury to  
7 itself, it cannot achieve standing by alleging the injury of unnamed class-members. *Lierboe v.*  
8 *State Farm Mut. Auto. Ins. Co.*, 350 F.3d 1018, 1022-23 (9th Cir. 2003). Because KinderStart  
9 does not have standing to bring a claim for termination of an AdSense contract, the Court may  
10 not consider such alleged contract terminations in determining whether KinderStart has alleged  
11 the requisite intent for an attempted monopolization claim.

12 Third, KinderStart alleges that:

13 Google foregoes short-term profits by completely or effectively Blocking traffic  
14 out of Blocked sites of members of the Class which host AdSense ads, which  
15 thereby reduce Google’s revenue from AdSense advertisers which would  
16 otherwise pay Google which in turn shares such revenues with AdSense hosting  
17 sites. On information and belief, Google is unable to produce any legitimate  
18 economic or business justification to unilaterally terminate the course of dealing  
19 with members of the Classes which used to be listed in the Google index but was  
20 [sic] completely or effectively Blocked. It is contrary to business or economic  
21 sense because the inclusion of Websites of such aggrieved Class members would  
22 otherwise yield greater search results and user traffic using the Engine, which  
23 thereby generates more AdSense revenue for both Websites and for Google.

19 SAC ¶ 172. This allegation does not establish predatory intent because, as the Court explained in  
20 its July 13th Order, “KinderStart’s allegations that Google removed KinderStart from search  
21 results and lowered its PageRank do not suffice to allege predatory conduct as opposed to  
22 legitimate competitive actions.” July 13th Order 12.

23 Even assuming that KinderStart has alleged arbitrary actions that are unrelated to business  
24 efficiency, the alleged actions do not demonstrate Google’s intent to monopolize the Search  
25 Market or the Search Ad Market. This pleading deficiency has persisted despite the specific  
26 direction given by the Court in its July 13th Order.

27 (2) Anti-Competitive Conduct

28

1 KinderStart makes extensive allegations in the SAC that it identifies as relating to  
 2 “anticompetitive and exclusionary practices and conduct.” See SAC ¶¶ 58-64. KinderStart also  
 3 includes a section in the SAC entitled “Defendant as an Unfair Competitor,” in which it makes a  
 4 series of further allegations. SAC ¶¶ 65-82. KinderStart summarizes these allegations as  
 5 follows:

6 Defendant Google has engaged in predatory conduct and anticompetitive conduct  
 7 directed toward achieving the objective of controlling prices and/or destroying  
 8 competition in the relevant markets of the Search Market and the Search Ad  
 9 Market, including the following: (a) PageRank Deflation of competitors’  
 10 Websites; (b) filing misleading statements with the SEC and state securities  
 11 regulatory agencies about Search Results being produced and presented for  
 12 viewing; (c) Blockage of competitors’ Websites; (d) unfair and uncompetitive use  
 13 of the PageRank patent in promoting and practicing it as the *de facto* standard on  
 14 the Internet to degrade competitors’ Websites, and/or failure to practice the  
 15 PageRank patent in the disclosed preferred embodiment in a lawful manner; (e)  
 16 claiming disclosure of PageRank processes and calculations as a trade secret to  
 17 further advance its integrity and reliability when in fact its use and publication  
 18 serves in certain instances as a weapon and pretense for unfair conduct and  
 19 practices; (f) false advertising about the purported objectivity of Search Results  
 20 with the Engine; (g) willful termination and reduction of Search Engine referrals  
 21 and revenues to competitors’ Websites by means of PageRank Deflation or  
 22 termination of AdSense contracts without business justification; and (h) sudden,  
 23 sharp price escalation of AdWords Advertisements with the use of LPQ [Landing  
 24 Page Quality] and price discrimination among AdWords partners with the use of  
 25 LPQ.

26 SAC ¶ 209. The Court concludes that these allegations do not state a claim for actionable  
 27 exclusionary or anti-competitive conduct, either individually or collectively.

28 (a) PageRank Deflation and Blockage of Competitors’  
 Websites

The Court previously has explained that “KinderStart’s allegations that Google removed  
 KinderStart from search results and lowered its PageRank do not suffice to allege predatory  
 conduct as opposed to legitimate competitive actions.” July 13th Order 12. KinderStart has not  
 articulated a reason for the Court to alter this decision.

(b) Filing Misleading Statements with the SEC and False  
 Advertising About the Objectivity of Search Results

KinderStart asserts that allegations of false advertising and false statements to the SEC

1 establish a claim of anticompetitive or exclusionary conduct. However, it cites no authority  
2 indicating that the statements made to the SEC have special relevance to the antitrust inquiry.  
3 Accordingly, the Court assesses Google's alleged misrepresentations to the SEC in conjunction  
4 with KinderStart's allegations of false advertising as to the objectivity of Google's search engine,  
5 search results, and PageRanks.

6 The parties agree that KinderStart must allege facts that would overcome the presumption  
7 that any misrepresentation had a *de minimus* effect on competition. *See American Prof'l Testing*  
8 *Service, Inc. v. Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Legal and Prof'l Publ'n, Inc.*, 108 F.3d 1147, 1152  
9 (9th Cir. 1997). To meet this pleading burden, KinderStart must allege that the representations  
10 were (1) clearly false; (2) clearly material; (3) clearly likely to induce reasonable reliance; (4)  
11 made to buyers without knowledge of the subject matter; (5) continued for prolonged periods;  
12 and (6) not readily susceptible to neutralization or other offset by rivals. *Id.* The SAC fails to  
13 meet at least two of these requirements. Principally, KinderStart fails to allege adequately that  
14 Google's representations are "clearly false." A statement by Google to the effect that its results  
15 are objective almost by definition cannot be "clearly false." Although Google has published  
16 information about manual manipulation of search results, *see* SAC ¶ 153, a reasonable person  
17 could understand that such a statement is not in conflict with the limited, manual removal of  
18 what Google considers bad links, or other such practices. In fact, Google's statements about  
19 objectivity are more reasonably understood to pertain to Google's stated refusal to alter search  
20 results for compensation. *See* SAC ¶ 121 (citing Google's S-1 Form, filed on April 29, 2004).  
21 In addition, KinderStart has not sufficiently alleged that Google deprived it of the ability to  
22 neutralize such statements or that it was otherwise unable to do so.<sup>6</sup>

23 Even viewing KinderStart's allegations in the light most favorable to KinderStart, any  
24 anticompetitive effect of Google's alleged false representations thus was *de minimus*. Moreover,  
25 KinderStart's allegations about false advertising lack the specificity and detail necessary to  
26

---

27 <sup>6</sup> The Court expresses no opinion as to the adequacy of KinderStart's pleading of the  
28 other four requirements for overcoming the *de minimus* presumption.

1 support a claim of anticompetitive or exclusionary conduct.

2 (c) Unfair and Uncompetitive Use of the PageRank Patent

3 KinderStart argues that Google's patent and copyrights cannot shield it from liability.  
4 Opposition to Motion to Dismiss 14. However, it alleges no facts indicating that Google used its  
5 patent in an anticompetitive manner. Instead, it merely restates its prior conclusory assertions  
6 that Google has behaved in an anti-competitive manner. As discussed above, these assertions are  
7 insufficient to state a claim for attempted monopolization.

8 (d) Claiming PageRank Processes and Calculations as a Trade  
9 Secret

10 KinderStart cites no authority holding that a company's claim of trade secret protection  
11 for the processes and calculations of a central aspect of the service it provides may constitute  
12 anticompetitive or exclusionary behavior. KinderStart does not argue this point in its opposition  
13 to the motion to dismiss.

14 (e) Termination of Search Engine Referrals and Revenues

15 KinderStart alleges conclusorily that Google willfully terminated and reduced Search  
16 Engine referrals and revenues to competitors' Websites by means of PageRank Deflation or  
17 termination of AdSense contracts without business justification. SAC ¶ 209(g). It does not  
18 allege, however, that Google breached its AdSense contract *with KinderStart*. For the reasons  
19 discussed in the July 13th Order, PageRank Deflation does not amount to anticompetitive or  
20 exclusionary conduct. *See* July 13th Order 12. Because it does not allege a breach of its own  
21 contract with Google, KinderStart lacks standing to bring the latter claim.

22 (f) Price Manipulation

23 KinderStart claims that Google uses its LPQ website ranking system to charge exorbitant  
24 prices and also to discriminate among purchasers. This assertion is insufficient to support a  
25 claim of anticompetitive or exclusionary conduct for at least four reasons. First, because it does  
26 not allege an injury to itself as a result of the alleged conduct, KinderStart lacks standing to assert  
27 this claim. Second, charging high prices, by itself, does not constitute anticompetitive or

28

1 exclusionary behavior. *See Verizon Communications, Inc. v. Trinko*, 540 U.S. 398, 407 (2004).  
 2 Third, absent predatory pricing, discriminatory pricing does not threaten competition. *See*  
 3 *Atlantic Richfield Co. v. USA Petroleum Co.*, 495 U.S. 328, 340 (1990). Finally, KinderStart  
 4 fails to allege the nature of Google’s anticompetitive conduct with any specificity.<sup>7</sup>

5 For the foregoing reasons, each of KinderStart’s allegations is insufficient to establish  
 6 anticompetitive or exclusionary conduct. The Court noted in order dismissing the FAC that  
 7 KinderStart had failed to “allege facts sufficient to support a claim of anti-competitive conduct,  
 8 such as denial of access to an essential facility or refusal-to-deal.” July 13th Order 12. Despite  
 9 the Court’s clear direction in the July 13th Order, KinderStart still has failed to allege an  
 10 adequate factual basis for its claim.<sup>8</sup>

11 (3) Dangerous Probability of Achievement of Monopoly Power in the  
 12 Relevant Market

13 KinderStart alleges that Google has a dominant market share in both the Search Market  
 14 and the Search Ad Market:

15 [A]s of July 2006, Defendant Google has garnered in excess of 55% market share  
 16 of all closed and open access search engine use on a combined basis within the  
 17 Search Market and in excess of 75% market share of all open access search engine  
 18 use within the Search Market.

19 SAC ¶ 36.

20 Within the Search Ad Market, Defendant Google carries a market share of at least  
 21 75% of the relevant market based on total revenues among advertisers in the U.S.,  
 22 in which Google’s AdWords and AdSense programs dominate.

23 SAC ¶ 39.

24 In each of the Search Market and the Search Ad Market, Defendant Google has  
 25 established and retains no less than 50% market share of the relevant markets.  
 26 Such market shares demonstrate that Google has a dangerous probability of

---

27 <sup>7</sup> The only specific allegation about Google’s pricing policy or conduct relates to its  
 28 creation of an auction system to allow advertisers to bid to place their advertisements. SAC ¶  
 64(a).

<sup>8</sup> KinderStart makes conclusory allegations that Google has denied access to an essential  
 facility, SAC ¶¶ 219-21, and has refused to deal, SAC ¶ 227, but it makes insufficient factual  
 allegations to support such claims.

1 success in monopolization of such markets.

2 SAC ¶ 211.<sup>9</sup> However, “[a] mere showing of substantial or even dominant market share alone  
3 cannot establish market power sufficient to carry out a predatory scheme. The plaintiff must  
4 show that new rivals are barred from entering the market and show that existing competitors lack  
5 the capacity to expand their output to challenge the predator’s high price.” *American*  
6 *Professional Testing Service*, 108 F.3d at 1154. KinderStart alleges that Google’s two largest  
7 competitors, Yahoo and Microsoft, are losing share of the relevant markets; SAC ¶ 48; that  
8 massive investment requirements and entrenched buyer preferences create significant barriers to  
9 entry to the relevant markets; SAC ¶ 53-54; and that Google’s wealth of user data gives them  
10 great advantages over any new online advertising program or search engine. SAC ¶ 57. Given  
11 these allegations, the Court concludes that, were KinderStart able to identify a relevant market  
12 for antitrust purposes, it might be able to allege a dangerous probability of achievement of  
13 monopoly power. However, because KinderStart is unable to allege other essential elements of  
14 its claim, the Court need not resolve this question.

15 (4) Causal Antitrust Injury

16 Because KinderStart brings suit under Section 4 of the Clayton Act, 15 U.S.C. § 15, it  
17 must allege causal antitrust injury. *Rebel Oil Co.*, 51 F.3d at 1433. The *Rebel Oil* court  
18 explained:

19 Under Section 4, private plaintiffs can be compensated only for injuries that the  
20 antitrust laws were intended to prevent. To show antitrust injury, a plaintiff must  
21 prove that his loss flows from an anticompetitive aspect or effect of the  
22 defendant's behavior, since it is inimical to the antitrust laws to award damages for  
23 losses stemming from acts that do not hurt competition. If the injury flows from  
24 aspects of the defendant’s conduct that are beneficial or neutral to competition,  
25 there is no antitrust injury, even if the defendant's conduct is illegal *per se*.

---

24 <sup>9</sup> See also SAC ¶ 37 (“When AOL's market share based on the Engine in the Search  
25 Market is combined with Google's native market share derived from its own website, the Engine  
26 of Google is used in excess of 60% of all search queries among users within the Search Market in  
27 the U.S.”); SAC ¶ 41 (“Dangerous probability of success in monopolizing the two relevant and  
28 related markets exists because Google' [sic] market shares is steadily rising and is in each market  
upward of 60% or more.”).

1 *Id.* (citations omitted) (citing *Atlantic Richfield Co. v. USA Petroleum, Inc.*, 495 U.S. 328, 334  
2 (1990)). The court added: “Of course, conduct that eliminates rivals reduces competition. But  
3 reduction of competition does not invoke the Sherman Act until it harms consumer welfare.” *Id.*  
4 This Court concludes, as it did in dismissing the FAC, *see* July 13th Order 12, that KinderStart  
5 still has not alleged a sufficient connection between the harms allegedly done to it by Google  
6 through PageRank and Blockage<sup>10</sup> and any harm to competition or consumers.

7 Because KinderStart has failed, despite several opportunities to do so and specific  
8 direction from the Court, to identify a relevant market for antitrust purposes, or to allege specific  
9 intent to monopolize, anticompetitive conduct, or causal antitrust injury, the Court concludes that  
10 further leave to amend the complaint would be futile. Accordingly, the attempted  
11 monopolization claim will be dismissed without leave to amend.

12 b. Claim II: Monopolization in Violation of the Sherman Act

13 KinderStart next asserts a claim for monopolization under Section 2 of the Sherman Act,  
14 15 U.S.C. § 2, the elements of which are: (1) possession of monopoly power in the relevant sub-  
15 market, (2) willful acquisition or maintenance of that power, and (3) causal antitrust injury.  
16 *Forsyth*, 114 F.3d at 1475. As with attempted monopolization, a plaintiff claiming  
17 monopolization first must define the relevant market. *Id.* KinderStart alleges monopolization of  
18 two markets: the Search Market and the Search Ad Market. As discussed above, KinderStart  
19 would not have standing to assert a claim for monopolization of the Search Ad Market, even if it  
20 could distinguish that market from the Search Market.

21 i. Relevant Market

22 KinderStart alleges the same relevant markets as it did in its claim for attempted  
23 monopolization. For the reasons discussed previously, the Court concludes that KinderStart has  
24 failed to allege a relevant market for the purposes of its monopolization claim. As discussed  
25 above, KinderStart’s repeated failure to allege a relevant market supports dismissal without leave  
26

---

27 <sup>10</sup> In contrast, KinderStart does not have standing to complain of harms done to third  
28 parties.

1 to amend. In the interest of completeness, the Court nonetheless will address the adequacy of  
 2 KinderStart’s pleading with respect to the remaining elements of the monopolization claim.

3 ii. Elements of a Monopolization Claim

4 (1) Possession of Monopoly Power

5 KinderStart alleges that Google has monopoly power over the Search Market and the  
 6 Search Ad Market, of which it controls 50% and 65%, respectively. SAC ¶¶ 216-17. The  
 7 Supreme Court has explained that monopoly power exists where a company has the power to  
 8 control prices or exclude competition. *United States v. E. I. du Pont de Nemours & Co.*, 351  
 9 U.S. 377, 391 (1956). Although it argues in its opposition brief that Google has such power,  
 10 Opposition to Motion to Dismiss 15, KinderStart does not identify any allegations to that effect  
 11 in the SAC.

12 KinderStart does allege that Google has control over an essential facility within the  
 13 market. SAC ¶ 219-21. The Court explained in the July 13th Order that a facility is “essential”  
 14 only if control of the facility carries with it the power to eliminate competition in the downstream  
 15 market. July 13th Order 14 (citing *Alaska Airlines, Inc. v. United Airlines, Inc.*, 948 F.2d 536,  
 16 544 (9th Cir. 1991); *see also id.* at 546 (“When a firm’s power to exclude rivals from a facility  
 17 gives the firm the power to eliminate competition in a market downstream from the facility, and  
 18 the firm excludes at least some of its competitors, the danger that the firm will monopolize the  
 19 downstream market is clear. In this circumstance, a finding of monopolization, or at least  
 20 attempted monopolization, is appropriate, and there is little need to engage in the usual lengthy  
 21 analysis of factors such as intent.”). However, while KinderStart claims in its opposition brief  
 22 that Google has the power to eliminate competition in the downstream market, it does not allege  
 23 facts supporting its argument in the SAC.<sup>11</sup>

---

24  
 25 <sup>11</sup> The most relevant allegation in the SAC asserts: “Defendant, through the maintenance,  
 26 exercise and abuse of monopoly power, have [sic] forced Class I and Class II Plaintiffs to either  
 27 surrender their business or to expend time and resources to find another means to secure Web  
 28 traffic and reach and serve consumers.” SAC ¶ 229. To the extent that Plaintiffs may still  
 “expend time and resources to find another means to secure Web traffic and reach and serve  
 consumers,” Google does not have the power to eliminate downstream competition. Google has

1 KinderStart also argues that Google has violated Section 2 under the “refusal to deal”  
 2 doctrine as set forth in *Aspen Skiing Co. v. Aspen Highlands Skiing Corp.*, 472 U.S. 585 (1985).<sup>12</sup>  
 3 The Court rejected this argument in its dismissal of the FAC, and KinderStart has made no  
 4 additional factual allegations that would affect the Court’s analysis. July 13th Order 14-15.

5 (2) Willful Acquisition or Maintenance of that Power

6 KinderStart alleges that Google willfully acquired and maintained its monopoly power.  
 7 SAC ¶¶ 218, 223-24, 232-33. Google does not argue the insufficiency of these allegations in its  
 8 motion or reply.

9 (3) Causal Antitrust Injury

10 KinderStart’s pleading burden with respect to a causal antitrust injury in a  
 11 monopolization claim is the same as it is with respect to an attempted monopolization claim. As  
 12 discussed above, the Court concludes that even if KinderStart could allege a relevant market, its  
 13 showing of antitrust injury is insufficient.

14 c. Claim III: False Representations in Violation of the Lanham Act

15 KinderStart next asserts a claim for false representations in violation of the Lanham Act.  
 16 Google moves to strike this claim on the ground that it is beyond the scope of amendments  
 17 permitted by the July 13th Order. Motion to Strike 6-8.<sup>13</sup> The July 13th Order neither expressly  
 18 permitted or prohibited KinderStart from adding claims arising from the facts alleged in the FAC.  
 19 While it would have been better practice for KinderStart to seek leave to add such additional  
 20 claims, the Court is not required to strike such claims out of hand. Instead, the Court will  
 21 exercise its discretion and assess the strength of the claim as it currently stands, in order to  
 22

23 \_\_\_\_\_  
 24 no obligation to aid its alleged competitors, and the Court cannot relieve these alleged  
 25 competitors of the effort required to compete in an apparently lucrative market.

26 <sup>12</sup> KinderStart makes this argument following its discussion of Google’s alleged  
 27 monopoly power. To the extent that it contributes to KinderStart’s overall claims for attempted  
 28 monopolization and monopolization, it provides no support for other parts of KinderStart’s  
 argument, such as its argument that Google engaged in exclusionary conduct.

<sup>13</sup> The Court addresses Google’s motion to strike the entire SAC below.

1 determine whether it should permit further amendment of the SAC.

2 The relevant section of the Lanham Act provides as follows:

3 (1) Any person who, on or in connection with any goods or services, or any  
4 container for goods, uses in commerce any word, term, name, symbol, or device,  
5 or any combination thereof, or any false designation of origin, false or misleading  
6 description of fact, or false or misleading representation of fact, which--

7 . . .

8 (B) in commercial advertising or promotion, misrepresents the nature,  
9 characteristics, qualities, or geographic origin of his or her or another  
10 person's goods, services, or commercial activities,

11 shall be liable in a civil action by any person who believes that he or she is or is  
12 likely to be damaged by such act.

13 15 U.S.C. § 1125(a).

14 Google argues that KinderStart lacks standing to bring an action under the Lanham Act  
15 on the basis of Google's alleged misrepresentations about the objectivity of its search results. To  
16 establish standing pursuant to the false advertising prong of the Lanham Act, 15 U.S.C. §  
17 1125(a)(1)(B), a plaintiff must show: "(1) a commercial injury based upon a misrepresentation  
18 about a product; and (2) that the injury is 'competitive,' or harmful to the plaintiff's ability to  
19 compete with the defendant." *Jack Russell Terrier Network of Northern Ca. v. American Kennel  
20 Club*, 407 F.3d 1027, 1037 (9th Cir. 2005). KinderStart does not allege an injury to itself from  
21 the misrepresentation as such; rather it alleges that it has been injured by Google's alleged  
22 manipulation of its allegedly objective search results. KinderStart thus lacks standing to bring a  
23 "blockage" claim under the false advertising prong of the Lanham Act.

24 Moreover, KinderStart has no cognizable claim relating to PageRank, because any  
25 misrepresentations made through PageRank are not made "in commercial advertising and  
26 promotion." The Ninth Circuit has held that "[w]hile the representations need not be made in a  
27 'classic advertising campaign,' but may consist instead of more informal types of 'promotion,'  
28 the representations [] must be disseminated sufficiently to the relevant purchasing public to  
constituted 'advertising' or 'promotion' within that industry." *Coastal Abstract Serv., Inc. v.*

1 *First Am. Title Ins. Co.*, 173 F.3d 725, 735 (9th Cir. 1999).<sup>14</sup> PageRank is neither a “classic  
2 advertising campaign,” nor a “more informal type[] of promotion.” Even if Google had  
3 attempted “to dilute Google’s claimed objectivity with a factual assertion to reroute the public’s  
4 beliefs and understanding of search results,” Opposition to Motion to Dismiss 20, such an  
5 attempt would not satisfy the standard articulated by the Ninth Circuit.

6 d. Claim IV: Violation of Free Speech Rights Under the United States and California  
7 Constitutions

8 i. Free Speech Rights Under the United States Constitution

9 KinderStart alleges that Google has violated its rights under the Free Speech Clause of  
10 the First Amendment to the United States Constitution. *See* U.S. Const. amend. I. (providing that  
11 “Congress shall make no law . . . abridging the freedom of speech.”). Demonstration of state  
12 action is “a necessary threshold” that a plaintiff must cross before a Court can consider whether a  
13 plaintiff’s First Amendment rights have been infringed. *George v. Furlough*, 91 F.3d 1227, 1230  
14 (9th Cir. 1996). In the case of private-party defendants, a plaintiff must show that “the private  
15 parties’ infringement somehow constitutes state action.” *Id.* at 1229 (citing *Dworkin v. Hustler*  
16 *Magazine*, 867 F.2d 1188, 1200 (9th Cir. 1989)). The Supreme Court has articulated four  
17 different approaches by which to identify state action in different contexts: (1) public function;  
18 (2) joint action; (3) governmental compulsion or coercion; and (4) governmental nexus. *George*  
19 *v. Pacific-CSC Work Furlough*, 91 F.3d 1227, 1230-32 (citing *Lugar v. Edmondson Oil Co.*, 457  
20 U.S. 922, 939 (1982)). The Ninth Circuit also has applied the “symbiotic relationship” test to  
21 identify state action. *See, e.g., Brunette v. Humane Society of Ventura County*, 294 F.3d 1205,  
22 1213 (9th Cir. 2002) (citing *Burton v. Wilmington*, 365 U.S. 715 (1961)). “Satisfaction of any  
23 one test is sufficient to find state action, so long as no countervailing factor exists.” *Kirtley v.*  
24 *Rainey*, 326 F.3d 1088, 1092 (9th Cir. 2003) (citations omitted).

25 KinderStart argues that First Amendment protections apply in the instant action because

---

26  
27 <sup>14</sup> The Ninth Circuit cited *Gordon & Breach Science Publishers v. American Inst. of*  
28 *Physics*, 859 F.Supp. 1521 (S.D.N.Y.1994), adopted the test it set forth, and applied it to the case  
before it.

1 (1) there is a close nexus between or entwinement of Google and state agencies; (2) a symbiotic  
 2 relationship exists between Google and state agencies; and (3) Google's search engine is a public  
 3 forum.<sup>15</sup> For the reasons discussed below, the Court concludes that KinderStart has not  
 4 sufficiently alleged state action under any of these theories.<sup>16</sup>

5 (1) Nexus/Entwinement

6 "[T]he nexus test asks whether 'there is a such a close nexus between the State and the  
 7 *challenged action* that the seemingly private behavior may be fairly treated as that of the State  
 8 itself.'" *Kirtley*, 326 F.3d at 1094-95 (citing *Brentwood Academy v. Tennessee Secondary School*  
 9 *Athletic Ass'n*, 531 U.S. 288, 295 (2001)) (emphasis added). The actions that form the basis of  
 10 the SAC relate to the alleged manipulation of search results and PageRanks. *See, e.g.*, SAC ¶¶  
 11 11-12, 174, 179. The actions alleged by KinderStart as a basis for a finding of state action relate  
 12 to Google's digital library projects. *See, e.g., id.* ¶¶ 254-55. These two sets of actions are  
 13 distinct. KinderStart cannot establish state action on the basis of actions that are peripheral to the  
 14 claims articulated in the SAC. KinderStart has alleged no facts suggesting that a close nexus  
 15 existed between Google and any state entity in the creation or execution of Google's alleged  
 16 policy of favoring some websites over others in the results of a web search.<sup>17</sup> Accordingly, the  
 17

---

18 <sup>15</sup> KinderStart does not explain how its discussion of Google as a public forum connects  
 19 with its state actor argument. *See* Opposition to Motion to Dismiss 22-25. KinderStart provides  
 20 no authority indicating that success on its public forum arguments would render the state action  
 21 inquiry unnecessary. Accordingly, the Court will consider the arguments regarding the public  
 22 forum to the extent that they contribute to the dispositive issue in this claim: the presence of state  
 23 action.

24 <sup>16</sup> The Court explained in the July 13th Order that KinderStart had not met the public  
 25 function, joint action or governmental compulsion/coercion tests. KinderStart has added no  
 26 allegations in the SAC that would allow the Court to find state action on any of these bases. To  
 27 the extent that KinderStart reasserts facts in the SAC that pertain to the public function, joint  
 28 action, or government coercion/compulsion tests for state action, *see* SAC ¶¶ 110, 253, 255, the  
 Court reaffirms its earlier conclusion that KinderStart's pleading is insufficient to meet any of the  
 applicable tests.

<sup>17</sup> Moreover, even if KinderStart had complained of actions associated with Google's  
 relationship with state universities, the level of entwinement might not be sufficient to establish  
 state action. In *Brentwood*, eighty-four percent of an ostensibly private association's members

1 nexus or entwinement test does not support a finding of state action in the present case.

2 (2) Symbiotic Relationship

3 “[I]f a private entity . . . confers significant financial benefits indispensable to the  
4 government’s ‘financial success,’ then a symbiotic relationship may exist.” *Brunette*, 294 F.3d at  
5 1213. Such a relationship may be sufficient to establish state action. *Id.* “In a symbiotic  
6 relationship the government has ‘so far insinuated itself into a position of interdependence (with  
7 a private entity) that it must be recognized as a joint participant in the *challenged activity*.’” *Id.*  
8 (citing *Burton*, 365 U.S. at 725) (emphasis added). Here, Kinderstart does not allege the  
9 existence of a symbiotic relationship between Google and a government *with respect to the*  
10 *activities that form the basis of the SAC*. KinderStart only alleges that a symbiotic relationship  
11 exists with respect to Google’s digital library projects. See SAC ¶¶ 254-55.

12 (3) Public Forum

13 KinderStart argues that the Google search engine “is now a public forum.” Opposition to  
14 Motion to Dismiss 25. KinderStart alleges in the SAC that:

15 Anyone with Internet access can go to Defendant’s own website or any number of  
16 thousands of other Websites having a ‘Google Search Box’ as provided by Google  
17 to use the Engine without payment or charge. . . . Google has willfully dedicated  
18 the Engine for public use.

19 SAC ¶ 91.

20 Defendant Google created and now manages, with the largest search engine in  
21 history, a freely accessible, nationwide public forum for the exchange and flow of  
22 Speech Content by virtue of the Engine. Defendant Google has intentionally,  
23 willfully and openly dedicated the Engine for public use and public benefit.  
24 Defendant Google, by and through the Engine, is a speech intermediary.

25 SAC ¶ 251.

26 \_\_\_\_\_  
27 were public schools which “largely provided for the Association’s financial support” and whose  
28 officials, acting in their official capacity, “overwhelmingly perform[ed] all but the purely  
ministerial acts by which the Association exist[ed] and function[ed] in practical terms.”  
*Brentwood*, 531 U.S. at 299. In addition, the state appointed members to the association’s  
governing body, and association employees participated in the state retirement system. *Id.* at  
300. KinderStart’s allegations fall far short of the level of “entwinement” with respect to  
finances, organization and personnel described in *Brentwood*.

1           These allegations repeat much of what the Court found insufficient in dismissing the  
2 FAC. *See* July 13th Order 8-9. For example, KinderStart alleged in the FAC that Google is a  
3 “speech intermediary.” FAC ¶ 104. KinderStart now argues that access to speech content on the  
4 Internet through the Google search engine warrants treatment of the search engine as a public  
5 forum, that KinderStart’s goal of gaining further exposure of its speech requires as much, and  
6 that Google’s search engine also should be treated as a public forum because *third-party* speech  
7 emanates from the return of search results. None of these arguments has merit.

8           KinderStart cites no authority suggesting that a search engine is a public forum for speech  
9 simply because it allows consumers to find speech on the Internet. The principal case upon  
10 which KinderStart relies, *Cornelius v. NAACP*, 473 U.S. 788, 800 (1985), does not hold that a  
11 private space may be transformed into a public forum merely because it is used for speech.  
12 Rather, the Supreme Court explained that the manner in which a forum is used is relevant to the  
13 classification of that forum for First Amendment purposes. Nor does KinderStart’s argument  
14 find support in *Currier v. Porter*, 379 F.3d 716, 722 (9th Cir. 2004) (concluding that the general  
15 delivery service, not the mail system as whole, is the forum at issue in a case where it was  
16 “axiomatic” that the First Amendment was implicated). Finally, KinderStart provides little  
17 argument or authority suggesting that the emanation of third-party speech from a search engine  
18 somehow transforms that privately-owned entity into a public forum.<sup>18</sup>

19           KinderStart also has failed to address the contradiction in its pleadings noted by the Court  
20 in the July 13th Order. As the Court observed,

21           KinderStart’s argument that “[t]he sole function and purpose of the [Google]  
22 search engine is to promote and realize 24-7 speech and communication, openly  
23 and freely” is inconsistent with its allegation that “Defendant Google derives at  
least 98% of its total company revenues from [] *search-driven* advertising, which

---

24           <sup>18</sup> KinderStart cites *National A-1 Advertising, Inc. v. Network Solutions, Inc.*, 121  
25 F.Supp.2d 156, 179 (D. N.H. 2000), for the proposition that “third party speech emanates  
26 through the return of a ‘hit’ by a search engine.” This appears to be a restatement of its first  
27 argument that a search engine is a public forum for speech because it allows web-users to access  
28 speech. However, *National A-1 Advertising* provides minimal support for KinderStart’s  
argument. The case pertains to the registration of domain names and does not address the issues  
presented in this case.

1 exceeded \$3.1 billion for the year ended December 31, 2004.

2 July 13th Order 9 (citations omitted). KinderStart nonetheless continues to allege that Google  
 3 received 98% of its revenues in 2004 from search-driven advertising. To the extent that  
 4 KinderStart has amended its allegations with respect to Google's commercial purpose, it has de-  
 5 emphasized speech, stating: "The Engine operates 24-7 to allow any user to perform a search for  
 6 Websites and Web Content and viewing and receiving speech and information of all forms."  
 7 SAC ¶ 91. KinderStart has not alleged facts tending to show that Google has dedicated its search  
 8 engine for public use as a forum for *speech*.

9 ii. Free Speech Rights Under the California Constitution

10 The California Supreme Court has held that a "protective provision more definitive and  
 11 inclusive than the First Amendment is contained in [California's] constitutional guarantee of the  
 12 right of free speech and press." *Robins v. Pruneyard Shopping Ctr.*, 23 Cal.3d 899, 908 (1979)  
 13 (citation omitted), *aff'd sub. nom. PruneYard Shopping Ctr. v. Robins*, 447 U.S. 74, 78 (1980).  
 14 "[S]ections 2 and 3 of article I of the California Constitution protect speech and petitioning,  
 15 reasonably exercised, in shopping centers even when the centers are privately owned."  
 16 *Pruneyard Shopping Ctr.*, 23 Cal.3d at 910. In *Trader Joe's Co. v. Progressive Campaigns*, 73  
 17 Cal.App.4th 425 (Cal. Ct. App. 1999), the California Court of Appeal, applying *Pruneyard*, held  
 18 that a trial court did not abuse its discretion by concluding that a stand-alone grocery store had  
 19 the right to exclude petitioners. The *Trader Joe's* court explained that

20 [Pruneyard] did not hold that the free speech and petitioning activity can be  
 21 exercised only at large shopping centers. Nor did it hold that such activities can be  
 22 exercised on any property except for individual residences and modest retail  
 23 establishments. Rather, in resolving the specific dispute before it, the court  
 24 developed a balancing test which can be applied to other situations. *Pruneyard*  
 instructs us to balance the competing interests of the property owner and of the  
 society with respect to the particular property or type of property at issue to  
 determine whether there is a state constitutional right to engage in the challenged  
 activity.

25 *Id.* at 433. The court held that because Trader Joe's, unlike the shopping center in *Pruneyard*,  
 26 neither invited nor provided facilities for the public to meet friends, eat, rest, be entertained or  
 27 otherwise congregate, it revealed a stronger interest in maintaining exclusive control, and that the  
 28 "single structure, single-use store" was "not a public meeting place and society has no special

1 interest in using it as such.” *Id.*

2 A three-justice plurality of the California Supreme Court subsequently clarified the  
3 relationship between California’s free speech clause and private property in ruling that the  
4 California Constitution did not guarantee petitioners access to an urban apartment complex:

5 [W]e conclude that the actions of a private property owner constitute state action  
6 for purposes of California’s free speech clause only if the property is freely and  
7 openly accessible to the public. By establishing this threshold requirement for  
8 establishing state action, we largely follow the Court of Appeal decisions  
9 construing [*Pruneyard*]. For example, our Courts of Appeal have consistently held  
10 that privately owned medical centers and their parking lots are not functionally  
11 equivalent to a traditional public forum for purposes of California’s free speech  
12 clause because, among other things, they are not freely open to the public.

13 *Golden Gateway Ctr. v. Golden Gateway Tenants Assn.*, 26 Cal.4th 1013, 1033 (2001) (plurality  
14 opinion). Two years later, the California Court of Appeal considered the question of what  
15 constituted a public forum (though not the question of state action) in light of *Golden Gateway*:

16 Nothing in *Golden Gateway* can be interpreted to support the conclusion that any  
17 large business establishment is a public forum for expressive activity simply  
18 because it is ‘freely and openly accessible to the public.’ . . .  
19 Rather, the test appears to remain whether, considering the nature and  
20 circumstances of the private property, it has become the ‘functional equivalent of  
21 a traditional public forum.’

22 *Albertson’s, Inc. v. Young*, 107 Cal.App.4th 106, 117-18 (Cal. Ct. App. 2003) (holding that the  
23 privately-owned sidewalk outside a grocery store at a shopping center was not a public forum).

24 This Court explained in its July 13th Order that KinderStart had not alleged sufficiently  
25 that users’ freedom to use the Google search engine extends to the realm of speech. July 13th  
26 Order 10. The Court noted that “[n]owhere does KinderStart allege that Google has invited the  
27 public to speak through Google’s search engine, either by enabling public editing of  
28 results/rankings or by promising that every website created by the public will be indexed, ranked,  
and displayed.” *Id.* KinderStart alleges that Google “claims that it indexes every site it locates  
on the Internet,” SAC ¶ 54, but it also alleges that Google publicly acknowledges that it stops  
indexing pages in some circumstances. SAC ¶ 151. As in the FAC, KinderStart does not suggest  
that *the public* has the ability to edit rankings or search results. Thus, KinderStart fails to allege  
facts tending to show that Google’s search engine, encompassing its index, web search form,

1 Results Pages and PageRank scores, is the “functional equivalent of a traditional public forum.”

2 *See Albertson’s*, 107 Cal.App.4th at 117-18.

3 e. Claim V: Unfair Competition in Violation of California Business and Professions  
4 Code §§ 17200 et seq.

5 KinderStart next claims that Google has violated California Business and Professions  
6 Code § 17200, which prohibits “any unlawful, unfair or fraudulent business act or practice and  
7 unfair, deceptive, untrue or misleading advertising.” Cal. Bus. & Prof. Code § 17200.

8 According to KinderStart, “Defendant Google has engaged in, and continues to engage in, []  
9 unfair competition. Defendant’s acts and practices are wrongful, arbitrary, without reasonable  
10 business or commercial justification, unethical, oppressive, and have caused substantial harm and  
11 injury to Plaintiff KSC . . . .” SAC ¶ 264. KinderStart alleges that Google’s unlawful business  
12 practices include PageRank deflation of competitors’ websites, filing misleading statements with  
13 the SEC, blockage of competitors’ websites, unfair and uncompetitive use of the PageRank  
14 patent, claiming PageRank processes as a trade secret, false advertising about the purported  
15 objectivity of the search engine, wilful termination and reduction of referrals to competitor sites,  
16 and sudden, sharp price escalation. *Id.* ¶ 266. KinderStart alleges that it “has suffered  
17 irreparable injury in fact and have [sic] lost money, property, value, business opportunities as a  
18 result of Defendant Google’s actions and practices and bring this cause of action on behalf of  
19 itself and on behalf of all other similarly situated and injured [class members].” *Id.* ¶ 268.

20 KinderStart also alleges that the AdSense agreement deceives the public into expecting that it can  
21 benefit by participating in the program. *Id.* ¶ 265.

22 The Court dismissed the Section 17200 claim in the FAC on the grounds that KinderStart  
23 had alleged no facts to support its conclusory allegations and that KinderStart had not adequately  
24 pled a violation of the antitrust laws. July 13th Order 17. Both inadequacies remain in the SAC.

25 First, Kinderstart still fails to identify specific terms of the AdSense agreement that are  
26 deceptive and does not indicate how the agreement as a whole is deceptive. Nor has KinderStart  
27 alleged facts in the SAC suggesting that the public would expect that participation in the program  
28 would prevent a participant’s removal from Results Pages or devaluation of a participant’s

1 PageRank. Accordingly, KinderStart has failed to allege a deceptive business practice.

2 Second, as the Court explained in its July 13th Order, “[w]hen a plaintiff who claims to  
3 have suffered injury from a direct competitor’s ‘unfair’ act or practice invokes section 17200, the  
4 word ‘unfair’ in that section means conduct that threatens an incipient violation of an antitrust  
5 law, or violates the policy of spirit of one of those laws because its effects are comparable to or  
6 the same as a violation of the law, or otherwise significantly threatens or harms competition.”  
7 *Cel-Tech Communications, Inc. v. L.A. Cellular Tel. Co.*, 20 Cal. 4th 163, 186-87 (1999). In  
8 light of the insufficiency of KinderStart’s claims for attempted monopolization and  
9 monopolization, these claims cannot form the basis of a Section 17200 claim.

10 Because Kinderstart has failed to plead sufficient facts to allege a deceptive business  
11 practice, and because the Court will dismiss the antitrust claims in the SAC without leave to  
12 amend, the Court also will dismiss the Section 17200 claim without leave to amend. In light of  
13 this disposition, the Court does not reach Google’s alternative argument that KinderStart has  
14 failed to identify a redressable injury that would confer standing under Article III or California’s  
15 Proposition 64. *See* Motion to Dismiss 33-35.

16 f. Claim VI: Defamation and Libel

17 KinderStart asserts a claim for defamation and libel against Google based on Google’s  
18 public presentation of a PageRank of ‘0’ for KinderStart.com. “The tort of defamation exists  
19 whenever a false and unprivileged statement which has a natural tendency to injure or which  
20 causes special damage is communicated to one or more persons who understand its defamatory  
21 meaning and its application to the injured party.” *Jackson v. Paramount Pictures Corp.*, 68  
22 Cal.App.4th 10, 26 (Cal. Ct. App. 1998) (citation omitted). To prevail on these claims,  
23 KinderStart must allege a provably false statement. *See Edwards v. Hall*, 234 Cal.App.3d 886,  
24 901-03 (Cal. Ct. App. 1991).

25 The Court dismissed the defamation and libel claim in the FAC on the basis that  
26 KinderStart had failed to explain how Google caused injury to it by a provably false statement  
27 about the output of Google’s algorithm regarding KinderStart.com, as distinguished from an  
28 unfavorable opinion about KinderStart.com’s importance. The Court noted that the FAC

1 included only the conclusory assertion that Google's actions have "cause[d] irreparable harm and  
2 damage to the goodwill, value and revenue-generating capabilities of KinderStart KSC's Website  
3 . . . ." July 13th Order 22 (citing FAC ¶ 170).

4 KinderStart now alleges:

5 275. The statements of PageRank are false because Plaintiff's site KS.com and  
6 those sites of members of Class III, in spite of Defendant Google's wrongful  
7 conduct, retain Website Content and remain hyperlinked to other sites throughout  
8 the Internet, and continue to have relevance to users. Further, a 0-PR for any  
9 Website is mathematically impossible within the normal operation of the  
10 algorithm within the Engine.

11 276. Defendant Google holds out in public PageRank as an opinion of the value  
12 of a given Website of Class III members but the user reliably and reasonably  
13 believes that the numerical figure presented with PageRank is based on the  
14 application and embodiment of an issued U.S. patent and determined by objective  
15 methods, with one or more computer algorithms.

16 . . .  
17 278. Defendant Google has failed to disclose to the user and the public the  
18 methodology, operation and basis for a PageRank figure of a Website and has  
19 repeatedly overridden and substituted the normal, computer-determined PageRank  
20 figures with its standard methodology with a human-determined value below the  
21 calculated figure produced by the computer algorithm, in some cases all the way  
22 down to 0-PR.

23 . . .  
24 281. Defendant Google's defamatory and libelous statements using PageRank  
25 Deflation of KS.com and those sites of members of Class III to artificially low  
26 figures placed them from time to time temporarily and permanently inside  
27 Google-designated "bad neighborhoods" and directly and proximately caused a  
28 loss of business and revenues whereby prospective and actual business partners  
and viewers of such deranked sites stop or refrain from doing business or from  
visiting and engaging with such sites.

19 SAC ¶ 275-76, 278, 281. The core of these allegations seems to be that KinderStart was harmed  
20 as a result of a false statement by Google that Google had determined objectively that the  
21 KinderStart website was not worth visiting, when in fact Google objectively had determined the  
22 opposite. However, the allegations are vague and ambiguous, and KinderStart makes only  
23 general claims as to the type of injury it allegedly suffered. While the defect conceivably could  
24 be cured by amendment, in this instance further leave to amend is inappropriate because  
25 materials properly before the Court under the incorporation-by-reference doctrine, *see In re*  
26 *Silicon Graphics, Inc. Securities Litigation*, 183 F.3d 970, 986 (9th Cir. 1999), establish that  
27 Google in fact does not represent that PageRank is a purely objective process free from human  
28 involvement. In addition, KinderStart still has failed to identify a provably false statement, and

1 Google is entitled to immunity under the common interest privilege.

2 KinderStart alleges that the public reasonably interprets PageRank as an objective  
3 statement. SAC ¶ 276. According to KinderStart, PageRanks “are presented as objective facts or  
4 opinions based on provably true or false facts, and are reasonably understood by those to whom  
5 publications are made as objective facts and opinions based on provably true or false facts.”  
6 SAC ¶ 279. KinderStart asserts that Google has made a series of statements about the objectivity  
7 of its search results and the absence of human manipulation from these search results. SAC ¶  
8 116-29. KinderStart also alleges that Google represents that in order to provide users with  
9 “thorough and unbiased search results,” it will stop indexing pages “**only at the request of the**  
10 **webmaster who’s responsible for the pages**, when it’s spamming our index, or as required by  
11 law.” SAC ¶ 151 (emphasis in original). KinderStart does not allege that Google has made  
12 specific statements about the objectivity of its PageRank tool, other than to say that Google  
13 describes PageRank as explaining “how Google’s algorithms assess the importance of the page [a  
14 web user is] viewing.” SAC ¶ 140. It alleges that PageRank “is a mathematically-generated  
15 product of measuring and assessing the quantity and depth of all the hyperlinks on the Web that  
16 tie into a PageRanked Website, under programmatic determination by Defendant Google.” SAC  
17 ¶ 141. It also represents that Google has stated that it will remove a website from its index if “it  
18 didn’t conform with the quality standards necessary to assign accurate PageRank.” SAC ¶ 153.

19 These factual allegations do not tend to prove that Google ever has represented that  
20 PageRank is objective and free from human manipulation. Google’s discussion of objectivity in  
21 its April 29, 2004, S-1 form, which properly may be incorporated by reference here, indicates  
22 that the objectivity to which Google refers is the absence of paid influence in its search results.  
23 See SAC ¶ 121 (“*Objectivity*. We believe it is very important that the results users get from  
24 Google are produced with only their interests in mind. We do not accept money for search result  
25 ranking or inclusion. We do accept fees for advertising, but it does not influence how we  
26 generate our search results.”). KinderStart’s allegation that PageRank is subject to  
27 “programmatic determination” actually undermines its claim that Google represents PageRank as  
28 free from human manipulation. The term “programmatic determination” necessarily implies

1 human inputs that define the parameters of the program. KinderStart's own allegations are  
2 inconsistent with a claim that PageRank is an independently-discoverable value free from  
3 programmatic manipulation. Moreover, KinderStart itself alleges that Google represents that it  
4 will remove a website from its index "if it didn't conform with the quality standards necessary to  
5 assign accurate PageRank." SAC ¶ 153. KinderStart does not seriously dispute that such a  
6 statement is equivalent to a statement that Google will assign a PageRank of zero if a website  
7 does not meet Google's quality guidelines.

8 KinderStart's argument that it is mathematically impossible to assign a PageRank of zero  
9 presumes that Google in some way has represented that PageRank is a purely objective measure.  
10 As discussed above, PageRank is a creature of Google's invention and does not constitute an  
11 independently-discoverable value. In fact, Google might choose to assign PageRanks randomly,  
12 whether as whole numbers or with many decimal places, but this would not create "incorrect"  
13 PageRanks.

14 The Court noted in the July 13th Order that the question of whether a reasonable person  
15 might consider PageRank a matter of opinion or a statement of fact might not be resolvable at the  
16 pleading stage. July 13th Order 21. The Court noted that KinderStart's position would be  
17 bolstered by evidence that Google actually had represented that PageRank is "objective." *Id.*  
18 Despite this express direction from the Court, KinderStart has not alleged any additional facts  
19 sufficient to support its assertions. To the contrary, KinderStart has alleged that "Google holds  
20 out in public PageRank as an opinion of the value of a given Website," and that *users* reasonably  
21 believe that PageRank is objectively determined. SAC ¶ 276. KinderStart's apparent  
22 acknowledgment that *Google itself* holds out PageRank as an opinion undermines any claim that  
23 Google has made a *provably false* statement concerning KinderStart's PageRank.

24 Google also asserts correctly that KinderStart fails to allege malice and that any statement  
25 by Google, even if provably false, thus is subject to California's common interest privilege and  
26 right of fair comment. Motion to Dismiss 26. KinderStart argues that its pleading gives Google  
27 fair notice that malice is claimed. Opposition to Motion to Dismiss 33. However, because the  
28 SAC does not indicate which specific actions by Google demonstrate malice toward KinderStart,

1 KinderStart has not alleged malice sufficiently. Although malice may be proved by legitimate  
 2 inferences, *Burnett v. National Enquirer, Inc.*, 144 Cal.App.3d 991, 1007-08 (Cal. Ct. App.  
 3 1993), it still must be alleged in a discernible manner. The two sets of allegations identified by  
 4 KinderStart as bases for inferring malice are inadequate. *See* Opposition to Motion to Dismiss  
 5 34 (citing SAC ¶ 58(d); SAC ¶¶ 144-45).<sup>19</sup> Neither alleges facts with the required degree of  
 6 specificity. One does not even appear among the allegations pertaining to defamation, *see* SAC ¶  
 7 58(d) (anticompetitive behavior), and the other does not refer to KinderStart. *See* SAC ¶¶ 144-  
 8 45. Because it concludes that the common interest privilege bars the instant defamation action,  
 9 the Court need not decide whether the right of fair comment also applies.

10 Cal. Civil Code § 47(c) provides that a communication is privileged when made

11 [i]n a communication, without malice, to a person interested therein, (1) by one  
 12 who is also interested, or (2) by one who stands in such a relation to the person  
 13 interested as to afford a reasonable ground for supposing the motive for the  
 communication to be innocent, or (3) who is requested by the person interested to  
 give the information.

14 Google argues that any statement it makes through the PageRank feature of its toolbar is  
 15 privileged as a communication by a person “who is requested by the person interested to give the  
 16 information.” Motion to Dismiss 27-28. On September 22, 2006, Google provided the Court  
 17 with a printout explaining the proactive steps that a user must take to solicit a PageRank. Volker  
 18 Decl. Exh. B<sup>20</sup>. In order to receive PageRank information, a user must download and install the  
 19 toolbar, activate the PageRank feature, navigate to a particular website, and then rest the cursor  
 20 over the PR icon on the toolbar. *Id.* The Court concludes that such actions constitute a request  
 21 for information within the meaning of Cal. Civ. Code § 47(c). The Court also concludes that  
 22 KinderStart has not alleged actions that amount to “excessive publication, [ ] a publication of  
 23 defamatory matter for an improper purpose, or [defamation] beyond the group interest.” *Brewer*

24  
 25  
 26 <sup>19</sup> The term “malice” does not appear in the SAC.

27 <sup>20</sup> Google requests judicial notice of this printout and other web-page printouts. The  
 28 Court will grant this request.

1 *v. Second Baptist Church*, 32 Cal.2d 791, 797 (1948).<sup>21</sup> The *Brewer* limitations on the scope of  
 2 publication do not apply in the instant action, in which the publication is limited to the PageRank  
 3 shown when an individual user visits the website.

4 g. Google's Assertion of Immunity from Suit

5 Google argues that it is immune from all claims asserted by KinderStart in the SAC both  
 6 under general First Amendment principles and under the Communications Decency Act, 47  
 7 U.S.C. § 230(c)(2)(A). However, because the Court will grant the motion to dismiss on other  
 8 grounds, the Court need not address these arguments.

9 **2. Special Motion Pursuant to the California "Anti-SLAPP" Statute**

10 Google has filed a special motion to strike pursuant to California's "anti-SLAPP" Statute,  
 11 Cal. Code Civ. Proc. § 425.16. In particular, Google moves to strike Count Four of the SAC,  
 12 which alleges that Google has infringed KinderStart's freedom of speech under the United States  
 13 and California Constitutions. Google also moves to strike Count Nine of the FAC, which alleges  
 14 Google's negligent interference with KinderStart's prospective economic advantage.<sup>22</sup> Google  
 15 seeks attorney's fees pursuant to the statute.

16 The "anti-SLAPP" statute provides that:

17 A cause of action against a person arising from any act of that person in  
 18 furtherance of the person's right of petition or free speech under the United States  
 19 of California Constitution in connection with a public issue shall be subject to a  
 special motion to strike, unless the court determines that the plaintiff will prevail  
 on the claim.

20 Cal. Code Civ. Proc. § 425.16(b)(1). Actions that qualify for the remedy afforded by this statute

---

21  
 22 <sup>21</sup> "For this conditional privilege extends to false statements of fact, although the  
 23 occasion may be abused and the protection of the privilege lost, by the publisher's lack of belief,  
 24 or of reasonable grounds for belief, in the truth of the defamatory matter, by excessive  
 25 publication, by a publication of defamatory matter for an improper purpose, or if the defamation  
 26 goes beyond the group interest. Thus the privilege is lost if the publication is motivated by  
 hatred or ill will toward plaintiff, or by any cause other than the desire to protect the interest for  
 the protection of which the privilege is given." *Id.* (citations omitted).

27 <sup>22</sup> Google cites no authority indicating that the Court may strike a claim from a  
 28 superseded complaint. The Court need not address its power to do so because it will deny all  
 aspects of the motion on other grounds.

1 include:

2 (1) any written or oral statement or writing made before a legislative, executive, or  
3 judicial proceeding, or any other official proceeding authorized by law; (2) any  
4 written or oral statement or writing made in connection with an issue under  
5 consideration or review by a legislative, executive, or judicial body, or any other  
6 proceeding authorized by law; (3) any written or oral statement or writing made in  
7 a place open to the public or a public forum in connection with an issue of public  
8 interest; (4) or any other conduct in furtherance of the exercise of the  
9 constitutional right of petition or the constitutional right of free speech in  
10 connection with a public issue or an issue of public interest.

11 Cal. Code Civ. Proc. § 425.16(e). Perceiving abuse of this section, the California legislature  
12 passed Cal. Code Civ. Proc. § 425.17, which provides generally that the “anti-SLAPP” law may  
13 not be used against actions brought solely in the public interest. Section 425.17 also provides  
14 that the “anti-SLAPP” law does not apply to certain commercial lawsuits, although this is not  
15 true of lawsuits against a person or entity engaged in the creation, dissemination, exhibition,  
16 advertisement, or other promotion of literary work.

17 Google argues that it meets the threshold requirement of Section 425.16 that its speech be  
18 protected by the United States or California Constitutions. “Anti-SLAPP” Motion 5-6. It asserts  
19 that it “speaks” in the form of PageRanks and search results, *id.*, and that it is a corporation  
20 engaged in the creation of a literary work. *Id.* at 13-14. However, the Court concludes that even  
21 if Google’s characterizations of its speech are accurate, the actions that form the basis of  
22 KinderStart’s claims against Google are not of public interest. *See* Cal. Code Civ. Proc. §  
23 425.16(e)(3)-(4).

24 “The definition of ‘public interest’ within the meaning of the “anti-SLAPP” statute has  
25 been broadly construed to include not only governmental matters, but also private conduct that  
26 impacts a broad segment of society and/or that affects a community in a manner similar to that of  
27 a governmental entity.” *Damon v. Ocean Hills Journalism Club*, 85 Cal.App.4th 468, 479 (Cal.  
28 Ct. App. 2000). The boundaries of ‘public interest’ have not been precisely defined, but the  
cases that have found that a party’s speech to be of ‘public interest’ involve matters in the public  
eye, conduct that could directly effect a large number of people beyond the direct participants, or  
a topic of widespread public discussion. *Rivero v. American Federation of State, County, and  
Municipal Employees*, 105 Cal.App.4th 913, 924 (Cal. Ct. App. 2003). The conduct at issue here

1 does not meet these criteria. Although the instant lawsuit received media coverage after it was  
2 filed, there is no indication that a significant number of customers became aware of KinderStart's  
3 low PageRank or Google's removal of KinderStart from Google's search results prior to the  
4 filing of the lawsuit. Nor is there any indication that any debate or discussion arose over these  
5 matters, except between Google and KinderStart. Tellingly, KinderStart has yet to identify the  
6 similarly situated websites that it alleges suffered similar treatment at the hands of Google.<sup>23</sup> The  
7 Court finds it implausible that the fate or content of these websites could have been of public  
8 interest when an interested party apparently cannot identify them.<sup>24</sup>

9 Google argues that the Court should follow *New.Net, Inc. v. Lavasoft*, 356 F.Supp.2d  
10 1090 (C.D.Cal. 2004), and find public interest in the conduct at issue in this case. The *New.Net*  
11 court described the dispute in that case as follows:

12 This case presents a dispute between two downloadable software providers,  
13 New.net whose software, NewDotNet, is downloaded onto individual computers  
14 often without the knowledge or request of the computer owner, and Lavasoft  
15 whose software, Ad-aware, is purposefully downloaded by the computer user to  
16 detect and remove programs like the one written by New.net. New.net complains  
17 that the injuries caused by Ad-aware's inclusion of NewDotNet in its database are  
18 actionable under both state and federal law.

16 *New.Net*, 356 F.Supp.2d at 1095-96. The court explained that "Lavasoft had its genesis in a  
17 project to notify the public that unwanted software applications were being downloaded to  
18 personal computers without the user's knowledge or consent." *Id.* at 1105. Lavasoft  
19 programmed its software "relying primarily on submissions from the public." *Id.* The court

21 \_\_\_\_\_  
22 <sup>23</sup> KinderStart has filed the declaration of Daniel D. Savage ("Savage"), a manager of  
23 TradeComet.com LLC. Savage asserts that a sudden increase in minimum bids for keywords  
24 under AdWords caused a dramatic drop in TradeComet.com's revenue. This single declaration  
25 of one other company does not transform the conduct in this case into a matter of public interest.

26 <sup>24</sup> The Court is unpersuaded by Google's reference to the large traffic counts claimed by  
27 KinderStart in its SAC. The Court has explained elsewhere that the "anti-SLAPP" statute covers  
28 statements made in connection with a public issue, not statements that could have an impact on  
the public. Order Den. Special Mot. to Strike and Den. Req. for Att. Fees, *Sherwood v.*  
*Wavecrest Corp.*, C 05-02354 (N.D.Cal., Nov. 1, 2005). The alleged volume of traffic that  
moved to other sites as a result of the conduct in question may indicate impact on the public, but  
it does not indicate that the conduct itself was a public issue.

1 described Ad-aware as “a service akin to Consumer Reports and other consumer information,  
2 databases, but in a new form,” and analogized it to a “newspaper, magazine, or other material  
3 that addresses a matter of public importance.” *Id.* at 1106. The court emphasized the importance  
4 of evidence of an ongoing public debate about Internet privacy and the threats posed by software  
5 like NewDotNet: “[this evidence] confirm[s] that there is indeed a community concerned with  
6 internet privacy, that the subject is a matter of public discussion, and that [New.net’s]  
7 surreptitious downloads are a topic of discussion and concern in that context.” *Id.* The court  
8 further noted that much of the speech with which New.Net took issue was not in fact Lavasoft’s  
9 speech, but rather “speech engaged in by numerous others in the internet community including  
10 individual computer users.” *Id.* The court concluded:

11 Because the issue of public awareness of, and protection from, the unknown are at  
12 the heart of the public information service Defendant provides and because that  
13 service is of public significance, speech in this area should not be chilled by  
litigation brought by Plaintiff who seeks to stifle speech to enhance its profits.

14 *Id.*

15 *New.Net* is distinguishable from the instant case in at least three ways. First, while the  
16 NewDotNet software was a subject of discussion, there is no evidence that there has been any  
17 public debate about the contents of the KinderStart website or that Google was contributing to  
18 such debate. Second, while the relief sought by New.Net would have stifled speech by many  
19 parties beyond the lawsuit, including other companies and members of the public, there is no risk  
20 of such a sweeping effect on speech in this case. Third, the search services Google provides do  
21 not have “the issue of public awareness of, and protection from, the unknown” at their heart.

22 Alternatively, the Court concludes that, even if the conduct at issue is of public interest,  
23 the interest is limited. “[W]here the issue is not of interest to the public at large, but rather to a  
24 limited, but definable portion of the public (a private group, organization, or community), the  
25 constitutionally protected activity must, at a minimum, occur in the context of an ongoing  
26 controversy, dispute or discussion, such that it warrants protection by a statute that embodies the  
27 public policy of encouraging participation in matters of public significance.” *Du Charme v.*

*International Broth. of Elec. Workers, Local 45*, 110 Cal.App.4th 107, 119 (Cal. Ct. App. 2003).

28 The *Du Charme* court contrasted such limited public interest with “widespread public interest,”

1 citing cases which involved the construction of a mall, domestic violence, a religious institution  
2 with extensive media coverage, a television show that created significant debate, and child  
3 molestation in youth sports. *Id.* at 117. In contrast, it is difficult to see how KinderStart’s low  
4 PageRank and the exclusion of KinderStart from Google’s search results are matters of public  
5 significance that merit protection by a “statute that embodies the public policy of encouraging  
6 participation in matters of public significance.”

### 7 **3. Motion to Strike**

8 Finally, Google moves to strike the SAC in its entirety. Google asserts that the SAC  
9 contains structural deficiencies, irrelevant allegations, and a misleading and improper use of  
10 ellipses. Google also moves to strike KinderStart’s Lanham Act claim on the basis that the Court  
11 did not grant KinderStart leave to include additional claims in the SAC. In light of the foregoing  
12 discussion, the motion to strike is moot.

13 Having concluded that it should grant the motion to dismiss, the Court must consider  
14 whether to grant leave to amend the complaint. Leave to amend may be denied for reasons  
15 including “undue delay, bad faith or dilatory motive on the part of the movant, repeated failure to  
16 cure deficiencies by amendments previously allowed, undue prejudice to the opposing party by  
17 virtue of allowance of the amendment, [and] futility of amendment.” *Foman v. Davis*, 371 U.S.  
18 178, 182 (1962). In its July 13th Order, the Court gave KinderStart explicit, detailed direction  
19 that KinderStart largely failed to follow in the SAC. Instead, KinderStart reasserted the same  
20 deficient allegations identified in the July 13th Order. The instant case has been intensively  
21 litigated for more than eleven months. Under these circumstances, the Court concludes that there  
22 is no reasonable likelihood that KinderStart will cure the defects in the SAC by further  
23 amendment. Accordingly, the motion to dismiss will be granted without leave to amend.

## 24 **IV. ORDER**

25 Good cause therefor appearing, IT IS HEREBY ORDERED THAT:  
26  
27  
28

- 1 (1) The Motion to Dismiss is GRANTED without leave to amend.<sup>25</sup>
- 2 (2) The Special Motion Pursuant to Cal. Civ. Code § 425.16 is DENIED.
- 3 (3) The Motion to Strike is DENIED as moot.
- 4
- 5

6 DATED: March 16, 2007

7   
8  
9 JEREMY FOGEL  
10 United States District Judge

11  
12  
13  
14  
15  
16  
17  
18  
19  
20  
21  
22  
23  
24  
25  
26

---

27 <sup>25</sup> KinderStart's pending motion for a preliminary injunction, filed on May 26, 2006, is  
28 denied as moot.

