RIAA Wrath Hits Teen
Student's Software Provokes Harsh Reaction From Music Industry

By Lindsay Martell, Tech Live

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On April 3, 19-year-old Jesse Jordan received a call that changed his life.

The freshman at Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute in Troy, N.Y., learned he was being sued by one of the most powerful trade groups in the United States, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA).

Jordan, an information technology major, created ChewPlastic.com, the second most popular search directory on the RPI campus.

"You go to the site, you type in a search term, and it finds files on the network," Jordan said. Jordan compares his site to Google, the popular Internet search engine.

But the RIAA likens Jordan's site to Napster, the now defunct song-swap service that revolutionized the distribution of music.

"The people who run these Napster networks know full well what they are doing: Operating a sophisticated network designed to enable widespread music thievery," Cary Sherman, the president of the RIAA, said in a statement issued April 3.

"The lawsuits we've filed represent an appropriate step given the seriousness of the offense," Sherman added.

Admits No Wrongdoing

"I didn't tell people what to share. I never promoted piracy," Jordan said.

"Basically, Napster set out to create its own network specifically for music. What I did was ran a search engine on a campus network [where] the network already existed," Jordan said.

But Jordan did agree to pony up $12,000, his entire savings account, to the RIAA. Jordan and his father, Andy Jordan, felt the settlement was their best option.

"They agreed to allow Jesse to deny their allegations. They agreed to dismiss the case and all allegations against him," Andy said. "Basically they agreed that he didn't do anything wrong, but [they're] taking his 12 grand."

Jesse knew students were sharing files on his network: pictures, PowerPoint presentations, physics notes, anime, and music. But he refutes the RIAA's claim he "hijacked an academic network" and "installed an emporium for music trading."

Ruinin the Music Business?

Andy believes that the RIAA's intimidating tactics will undoubtedly hurt the music industry by alienating music buyers. An avid music fan for more than 40 years, he shudders at the impact this will have on the industry's most fervent fans.
"I don't know how strongly the music companies — the people who really run the music companies — I don't know if they realize what the impact of this misguided attempt at intimidation is going to be," Andy said.

While Andy questions the motives and actions of the RIAA, he basks in pride at his son's steadfast resolve.

"He has stood up to the schoolyard bullies that are pulling this and he's said, 'You are not going to make me say something that's not true,'" Andy said.

ChewPlastic.com is asking for donations to help recover the $12,000 settlement. As of June 6, the site has collected more than $1,700.