LOS ANGELES (Hollywood Reporter) - Federal authorities have met -- and in some cases exceeded -- the goals set out for them two years ago when the Bush administration ordered a more aggressive response to intellectual property crimes, according to a progress report the Department of Justice is set to release Tuesday.

Under the leadership of Attorney General Alberto Gonzales, the Justice Department said it has implemented each of the 31 recommendations made by then-Attorney General John Ashcroft in March 2004. Beyond that, authorities said they have taken at least eight additional steps to combat these crimes, which include the counterfeit trading and online piracy of movies, music and video games.

"The Department of Justice will continue to wage an aggressive campaign to protect the nation's intellectual resources," according to the 104-page report, which concludes that these crimes are a "threat to our national economic security."

The Task Force on Intellectual Property report was unveiled in 2004 as a blueprint for the DOJ's most ambitious crackdown on intellectual property infringement, which was estimated to be costing the U.S. economy about $250 billion annually.

The most immediate and fundamental goal was increasing the number of prosecutors specifically assigned to Computer Hacking and Intellectual Property teams in various cities. The DOJ said that in addition to the five new units called for by Ashcroft it has created an additional seven teams in such cities as Baltimore, Denver, Detroit and Philadelphia.

There are now more than 230 specially trained prosecutors and coordinators assigned to these DOJ teams.

The DOJ also has worked to build relationships with law enforcement agencies
throughout the U.S. and internationally.

The FBI has increased its undercover operations and coordination with overseas police as well as state and local law enforcement. This has led to a 22% increase, from 304 to 372, in intellectual property investigations from 2003-05 and an 87% increase in undercover investigations.

In all, the number of individuals prosecuted for these crimes rose 98% last year, from 177 defendants in 2004 to 350, the DOJ said.

DOJ officials said they also have fostered partnerships with piracy victims including the MPAA and RIAA.

"This impressive catalog of accomplishments makes clear that this administration recognizes the importance of intellectual property and continues to make enormous efforts to protect it," RIAA chairman and CEO Mitch Bainwol said. "Along with the entire music community, we applaud the ongoing efforts of the task force and look forward to continued work with its dedicated members."

Prosecutors highlighted two undercover FBI operations that targeted high-level "warez" release groups that are frequently the source of pirated movies, music and other content. These operations reached across 12 countries and led to more than 200 searches, at least 60 convictions and the seizure of at least $100 million in pirated works.

The DOJ said it also obtained convictions against the ringleader of a large-scale DVD bootlegging operation based in China, two California men who were mass-producing pirated music and software CDs and five people in the San Jose, Calif., area who were the source of stolen movies on the Internet.

There also were a number of firsts, including the first-ever criminal convictions for piracy through P2P networks and the first conviction under a 2005 law against using a camcorder to record a theatrical movie.

The report also contained a number of recommendations, including principles for future legislation like the Intellectual Property Protection Act of 2005. According to this draft language, the DOJ would like to criminalize the attempt to commit copyright infringement; the possession of counterfeit goods with the intent to sell them, not just the actual sale; the ability to use wiretaps in intellectual property investigations, something not currently allowed by law; and the ability to prosecute people who are accused of intellectual property crimes in another country, provided the violation also would have been a crime in the U.S.

Officials with the Electronic Frontier Foundation, a nonprofit digital rights advocacy group, said they understood the government's desire to prosecute commercial piracy but questioned the need for more expansive laws targeting such acts as "attempted" piracy.

"The legal changes that DOJ is seeking are completely outrageous and legally unjustifiable," EFF staff attorney Fred von Lohmann said. "Those changes are intended to make it possible to criminally convict someone without having to prove that actual copy infringement took place. There's no evidence here that we need to make it any easier to throw a person in jail than it is to sue them for money for infringement."

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