Policy group says Google soft on piracy

By Gregg Goldstein

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NEW YORK (Hollywood Reporter) - Hoping to see "Blood Diamond," "Spider-Man 3" or other full-length movies, TV series and concerts for free online? The National Legal and Policy Center on Tuesday released a list of the top 50 videos it found on the Google Video search engine, uploaded by Web users who might be guilty of copyright infringement.

Walt Disney Pictures' "Cars" and "Meet the Robinsons," Picturehouse's "Pan's Labyrinth" and episodes of HBO's "Da Ali G Show" were among the titles that were easy to find in a search at Video.Google.com as of Monday, according to the watchdog organization's research. Even Michael Moore's "Sicko," the subject of much press coverage over its appearance a few weeks ago on the search engine and its YouTube site, reappeared and was available this week. NLPC said the content in its initial top 50 list had appeared on Google Video for an average of 168 days.

"It's difficult to know for sure whether all of the content included in the top 50 list is being hosted in violation of copyright laws -- NLPC makes no assertions," chairman Ken Boehm said. "But it's a reasonable assumption that much of the content has been uploaded without the copyright owner's knowledge or approval."

Boehm said the group's intention is to raise awareness of piracy. "We realize that this is probably a drop in the bucket in ferreting out copyrighted content among the millions of videos posted on Google Video, YouTube and other popular video sites," he said. "But we hope that our efforts serve as a resource for copyright owners to check if their content is on the sites without their knowledge or approval."

For its part, Google is laying the responsibility on the shoulders of studios, filmmakers and others involved in the pirated material. "For all of the content we host, whether from premium content providers or creative end users, we require the content provider to hold
all necessary rights to the material. We cooperate with copyright holders to identify and promptly remove any infringing content," Google spokesman Gabriel Stricker said in response to the list.

"Of course, no system is bulletproof," he added. "As a company that respects the rights of copyright holders, we will continue to take the lead in providing state-of-the-art DMCA (Digital Millennium Copyright Act) tools and processes for all copyright holders."

NLPC is far from satisfied with the company's efforts. "Google has been dragging its feet for months in coming up with a solution to pirated content," Boehm said. "(It) still requires copyright owners to go through the laborious process of issuing DMCA take-down notices before the content is removed, while smaller companies are beginning to show real leadership on this issue."

Picturehouse president Bob Berney, whose company distributed the Oscar-winning "Labyrinth," seemed resigned to some leaks online. "We have programs to prevent piracy, but you can't stop it all," he said when informed of the NLPC report.

The list is available at the group's Web site, www.nlpc.org.

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