By Mike Collett-White
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LONDON (Reuters) - U.S. pop star Prince plans to sue YouTube and other major Web sites for unauthorized use of his music in a bid to "reclaim his art on the Internet."

The man behind hit songs "Purple Rain," "1999" and "When Doves Cry" said on Thursday that YouTube could not argue that it had no control over which videos users posted on its site.

"YouTube ... are clearly able (to) filter porn and pedophile material but appear to choose not to filter out the unauthorized music and film content which is core to their business success," a statement released on his behalf said.

YouTube did not immediately reply to questions e-mailed to its press room.

In addition to YouTube, Prince also plans legal action against online auctioneer eBay and Pirate Bay, a site accused by Hollywood and the music industry as being a major source of music and film piracy.

The legal action is the latest bid by the music industry to wrest back control over content in an age where file sharing, mobile phones and video sites make enforcing copyright increasingly difficult.

But it is believed to be rare for an individual artist of Prince's stature to take on popular Web sites, while some up-and-coming performers actually encourage online file sharing to create a fan base and buzz around a record.

"Prince strongly believes artists as the creators and owners of their music need to reclaim their art," the statement added.

"These actions mark a historic moment for music artists in terms of the battle to retain..."
These actions mark a historic moment for music artists in terms of the battle to regain control of their rights on the Internet.”

British company Web Sheriff has been hired to help coordinate the action.

"In the last couple of weeks we have directly removed approximately 2,000 Prince videos from YouTube," said Web Sheriff managing director John Giacobbi.

"The problem is that one can reduce it to zero and then the next day there will be 100 or 500 or whatever. This carries on ad nauseam at Prince's expense,” he told Reuters.

He said his company had also removed around 300 items from eBay, where whole lines of pirated goods trading on Prince's name had appeared, including clocks, socks, mugs and key rings.

Prince's latest initiative is likely to please record industry executives and music retailers, who have not always seen eye-to-eye with the 49-year-old.

He has referred to the record industry as "the speculation business" and gave away copies of his new album "Planet Earth" for free with a British Sunday newspaper.

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