

# Hollywood Sues Suspected Movie Pirates

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Hollywood's major movie studios started production on their latest epic today, a remake of the recording industry's aggressive legal campaign to stop the illegal trading of copyrighted works on the Internet. The lawsuits, filed against hundreds of people suspected of trading movies online, are a first for the studios and are paired with an ambitious public education effort aimed at curtailing online piracy before it makes a significant dent in the film industry's bottom line.

The lawsuits, which could seek up to \$150,000 in damages for each film illegally copied, are the first of their kind to be filed by the movie industry. Motion Picture Association of America President Dan Glickman first signaled the lawsuits two weeks ago when he said that the studios would sue approximately 200 people suspected of illegally trading movies online.

"The future of our industry, and of the hundreds of thousands of jobs it supports, must be protected from this kind of outright theft using all available means," Glickman said in a release issued today.

The lawsuits were filed in federal courts across the country by Disney, Warner Bros., MGM, Universal, Fox, Paramount and Sony, said MPAA spokesman Rich Taylor. Taylor declined to say exactly how many suits the studios filed or where they filed them.

As in the case with the anti-piracy campaign launched last year by the Recording Industry Association of America, the movie studios are filing the suits without knowing the names of the suspected pirates. Instead, the studios filed "John Doe" suits that cite unique Internet addresses. Once a judge takes the cases, the studios will subpoena the Internet service providers associated with the addresses to obtain the names of their owners.

RIAA chief Mitch Bainwol called the studio action a "common-sense, prudent step."

"While we have all sought to educate fans about the laws and the impact of illegal downloading, education alone is not the answer," Bainwol said in a statement released today. "Deterrence is an essential piece of the larger strategy."

The lawsuits are unpopular among civil liberties advocates, who have urged alternate solutions to Internet piracy.

"I wish they would think more about how they're going to sell movies than how they're going to sue people," said Gigi Sohn, president of Public Knowledge, a Washington, D.C.-based civil liberties group that wants the entertainment industry to develop alternate business models to suit the needs of 21st-century technology.

Philip Corwin, a partner at Washington lobbying firm Butera and Andrews and the senior lobbyist for the



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company that owns the Kazaa file-sharing service, called the lawsuits "disappointing."

"They're within their rights to file these suits, but all the information that I've seen says that the thousands of lawsuits filed by the recording industry have done little to curb file sharing," Corwin said.

In addition to the lawsuits, the MPAA is offering a free software tool that people can use to identify and delete all file-sharing programs and illegally copied movie and music files on their computers. The software will not report evidence of illegal content back to the studios, the association said. The tool will be made available at [www.respectcopyrights.org](http://www.respectcopyrights.org), a site run by the MPAA.

The software was developed by DtecNet Software, a Copenhagen, Denmark-based software company. Its board of directors includes Chairman Johan Schluter, a member of the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry, a London-based group that represents musicians and music companies in 75 countries. Another board member is Niels Bo Jorgensen, a member of the Danish Anti-Piracy Group.

The MPAA and the Encino, Calif.-based Video Software Dealers Association also said they are launching a public education campaign in video stores, supermarkets and drugstores across the country warning of the damage and consequences of movie piracy. The campaign, "Rated I: Inappropriate for All Ages," includes two 45-second videos that will play on television monitors in 10,000 of the nation's 24,000 video stores across the country starting in December.

Blockbuster, which controls 34 percent of the video rental market, will run the trailers from Dec. 7 through March 28 in its 5,500 stores, said spokesman Blake Lugash. The videos will run once an hour and alternate every two weeks, Lugash said.

The educational videos, which the MPAA produced, are distributed by the Seattle-based ScreenPlay Inc. The Video Software Dealers Association's members include Blockbuster, Hollywood Video and the home video divisions of the major film studios. It also counts retailers such as Amazon.com and Circuit City among its members. It is not clear whether members like Blockbuster and NetFlix will distribute the educational fliers in the movie-rental-via-mail services that they operate.

Hollywood's fight against movie piracy is modeled on an ongoing campaign that the Recording Industry Association of America launched last year against suspected music pirates. The RIAA has sued more than 6,100 people since September 2003. The group has secured thousands of settlements between \$3,000 and \$4,000. People who are caught with pirated films but are not hardcore pirate distributors could be sued for up to \$30,000 per movie. Pirate distributors could be sued for as much as \$150,000 a pop.

Record companies' sales have plummeted as the popularity of free "peer-to-peer" file sharing services like Kazaa and eDonkey has grown. Compact disc sales fell from \$13.2 billion in 2000 to \$11.2 billion in 2003, the RIAA said in March.

Filmmakers so far have dodged a similar fate, posting growing sales each year, despite the widespread availability of pirated films on the Internet. Experts say that may be because downloading a feature-length film can take hours, even on a high-speed Internet connection. Songs can take minutes or seconds to download.

Glickman and his predecessor Jack Valenti have said, however, that advancements in Internet technology could reduce the amount of time it takes to download a movie.

The nation's video stores also are worried about the pinch of movie piracy.

"These are sales and rentals that are not being made, that's money that's not going to the retailer. That's tax

that's not being collected by governments. That's jobs that are not being created," said VSDA spokesman Sean Bersell. "[This] black market is siphoning off market share and what we don't want to see is it get worse than it already is."

--*washingtonpost.com Staff Writer Robert MacMillan contributed to this article.*

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