

A Letter To The Editor

7A Jeff Yau

Dear Editor,

I am writing to express myself on copyright infringement on the Internet. Technology nowadays is so advanced that I reckon that most of the computer users, including me, have tried downloading music or movies from the Internet. So, is downloading entertainment from the Internet right or wrong?

To make a start, let us talk about the rights of doing so. Internet users have been exposed to the power of online music sharing when they first reach the Internet. Having read a lot about this phenomenon in the last two years, I am nevertheless amazed by the availability of music and the perfect simplicity of accessing it. The most popular means of getting files are called "Peer to Peer" and "Bit Torrent". People would rather choose these methods to get the songs they want because it is so easy and convenient. Downloading music is such an advantage because you can download songs without buying the whole album. Apart from this, it is argued that this practice is comparable to buying a CD and lending it to a friend. It just digitizes the music or movies by time shifting and format shifting and these are allowed by the Copyright Act.

Being a computer enthusiast, I admit that I have downloaded music illegally. However, I also know what will happen to an artist when their music is downloaded without any royalties. Piracy is a crime. Downloading music is just like going to a department store and stealing a T-shirt. When you download music, you are just taking away the achievement from the artist who spends countless hours producing the album and distributing it to their audience. Moreover, stealing music is no different from stealing anything else. It is illegal and the negative consequences are real for you and for the music industry. Stealing music is against the law. It betrays the songwriters and artists who create music and threatens the livelihood of thousands of working people, from recording engineers to music retailers and their staff who are employed in this field.

Artists only see a percentage of their earnings when they sell their albums. The record company, producers, and promotion team have to get a chunk of the proceeds as well. Musicians don't really earn much until their albums sell a certain number, such as reaching gold or platinum status. Therefore, it has a very real and harmful impact on virtually everyone, from countless musicians, songwriters, performers, producers, recording engineers to others who use music as their platform. So, just put yourself into others' shoes before you download another illegal song or album.

In addition, owing to the downturn of the music industry, there are sites such as AOL music, Itunes and MOOV.com that offer people who would rather download music from home a chance to get the latest albums or songs for a good price. Not only can users download music legally in this way, they can also give a percentage to the artist that they love. Even if the artist is not one's favorite, people can still either buy the artist's record or just download the single they want because this can help the singers get the earnings.

Everyone knows that piracy is against the law, but when it comes to stealing digital recordings of copyrighted music, people somehow seem to think in another way. Most of the downloaders feel that they are not going to get caught when they go on site and can get whatever songs they like through file sharing. So, I believe that there will still be a number of people who will continue breaking the law even if they risk being prosecuted and the criminal penalties can be as high as five years in prison or \$20,000 fine for each file uploaded for sharing. This is because many people are not willing to pay a cent for a song if they can get it free of charge. Those people may think that the officers would rather chase after the uploaders than the downloaders because prosecuting the former can help to deter the offenders.

In order to maintain the competitiveness of the local entertainment industry and balance the interests of both copyright owners and users, it is a must for the government to go one step further to amend the law.

Yours faithfully,
Chris Wong

Teacher's Feedback : Jeff has presented a thorough discussion on the problem of illegal copying from the Internet. He has looked into the state of mind of those people who upload and download entertainments from the Internet illegally and has shown good insights in the future trend. At the same time, he warns and urges the authority concerned to take prompt action because of the profound effect of this issue. The development of arguments of the essay is systematic and coherent. A good range of vocabulary and idiomatic expressions is shown. Jeff has always been a proficient writer with his sensibility to language. His good common sense has also contributed to the quality of his essays. (Miss Chan Siu Ying)

Food For Thought : The problem of infringing intellectual copyright is rampant especially in Asia, with Hong Kong and China on the top of the list. Can our society, and the world at large, withstand this strong current? We all have a part to play in upholding and respecting intellectual property. If you have uploaded or downloaded material from the Internet, will this essay stimulate your ethical thinking?