

Feds Target Internet Piracy Organizations

By *srlinuxx*

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The government announced an 11-nation crackdown yesterday on Internet piracy organizations responsible for stealing copies of the latest "Star Wars" film and other movies, games and software programs worth at least \$50 million.

FBI agents and investigators in the other nations conducted more than 90 searches starting Wednesday, arresting four people, seizing hundreds of computers and shutting down at least eight major online distribution servers for pirated works.

The Justice Department "is striking at the top of the copyright piracy supply chain -- a distribution chain that provides the vast majority of illegal digital content now available online," Attorney General Alberto R. Gonzales said.

Called Operation Site Down, the crackdown involved undercover FBI operations run out of Chicago, San Francisco and Charlotte, and involved help from authorities in Australia, Belgium, Britain, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands and Portugal.

Among those arrested was Chirayu Patel of Fremont, Calif., on charges of violating federal copyright protection laws.

Patel is alleged to be a member of a "warez" group, a kind of underground Internet co-op that is set up to trade in copyrighted materials.

Warez (pronounced "wares") groups are extraordinarily difficult to infiltrate because users talk only in encrypted chat rooms, their computer servers require passwords, and many are located overseas, the FBI has said.

Such groups are believed responsible for stealing and distributing copyrighted works including films "Star War Episode III: Revenge of the Sith" and "Mr. and Mrs. Smith," and software such as Autodesk's Autocad 2006 and Adobe's Photoshop.

President Bush signed a new law last month setting penalties of up to 10 years in prison for anyone caught distributing a movie or song before its commercial release.

Associated Press

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