

Music Piracy

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Dear colleagues and friends:

We all enjoy music. This goes without saying. If we look at the matter more closely, we find that some of us music-lovers love illegal music. By this I mean music that is unauthorized and illegally distributed.

I cannot deny that pirated music is usually an easy and a cheap option for getting access to popular music, whether acquired in the form of pirate CDs or downloaded in MP3 format from the Internet. But it is still illegal, and music-lovers who get their hands on such materials are committing a crime.

Now, I suppose none of us highly educated, sophisticated people want to be criminals. Yet, when listening to music we may commit crimes without even knowing it. This is why I want to tell you today about the basics of music piracy. Above all, I want to equip you with knowledge about piracy that can help you detect pirated music.

Piracy can be defined as copying or reproduction of sound recordings without the permission of their owners. The person making the pirate copy is stealing the intellectual input of the creative people behind the original recording. The victims of this crime are the composer, lyricist, the music arranger, the performing artist and the producer of the recording. However, the ultimate victims are we, the music lovers, as the loss suffered by the music industry means less money to invest in new artists, new music and new albums.

To give you an idea of the scope of contemporary music piracy, I would like to draw your attention to the fact that in 2000, the International Federation of the Phonographic Industry estimated the value of the global pirate market at 3.76 billion euros. Despite that pirates rob such sums of money from the music industry, they contribute nothing back. They do not pay royalties to the composers or the performers. They make no investment in the production of the albums or the development of new talents. They bear no risk or expenses in marketing and distributing the recordings. Finally, they destroy the livelihood of everyone who is in the music industry.

There are three main types of unauthorized recordings: Pirate Products, Counterfeit Products and Bootleg Products.

A pirate product is an unauthorized copy of a recording that has labels, artwork, trademarks and packaging that are different from the original CD. When buying a CD, you can usually recognize a pirate CD by its characteristics. First, pirate CDs are often compilations of songs recorded by different artists. Second, they often feature "unknown" or no labels or logos. Thirdly, there may be misspellings on CD or packaging, such as in the artists' names or song titles, and inlay cards usually have no proper copyright notices. Finally, the title of the album may not be indicated on the actual CD, which is because printing on CDs costs extra money for pirates.

A counterfeit product is an unauthorized copy of a recording, packaged to resemble the original as closely as possible. The original label, artwork, trademarks and packaging are reproduced in order to mislead the consumers into believing that they are buying an original product. However, you may recognize a counterfeit product by looking at the center of the CD. A CD that is a counterfeit may not have a Source Identification Code printed on the CD.

A bootleg product is an unauthorized recording of an artist's performance. It may have been recorded live in a concert or from a live radio broadcast. They are duplicated and sold without the permission of the artist, composer or record company. The packaging and the artwork are completely up to the pirate who has made the bootleg.

Music piracy is unfortunately not limited to illegal CD manufacturing. The tremendous growth of the Internet has led to another kind of an abuse of legitimate recordings. Unauthorized copies of sound recordings are available in the thousands online to anyone with a personal computer. These recordings are distributed mainly as files that are in the MP3 compression format. Music is uploaded and downloaded without any concern for the legitimacy of the action. It is important to notice here that many people fail to see that this is but another form of theft, as the owners of these recordings have not authorized such a use of their music.

There are currently hundreds of programs available on the Internet offering unauthorized sound recordings. Among them are programs like Morpheus, Kazaa and Audio Galaxy, the last of whom has currently some 71 million users world-wide. What these programs have in common is that they allow individual users, sitting at home, to download MP3 files directly from other users' hard drives via the Internet. Understandably, when millions and millions of computer users start using one of these peer-to-peer programs and to share their files like this, unauthorized music spreads exponentially.

Ultimately, despite the fact that illegally distributed music bites only a small bit out of consumers' wallets, it is the consumers who will suffer because of this abuse of Internet technology. Instead of using technology to bring music to a much greater audience and at a much greater speed, pirates have hindered the development of legitimate on-line music businesses. What is more, unauthorized, low-cost sound recordings in the form of pirate, counterfeit and bootleg CDs are produced with no respect towards people in the music business or towards the consumers: the greedy criminals who distribute such CDs are after personal gain only.

This criminal activity is, however, dependent on you, average music-lovers. If you do not want to be a part of criminal activity, do not support it. Do not purchase or download unauthorized music. You can detect music piracy and now it is time to stop it!

[Top Page](#)