

Software piracy

Technology, Information Technology



Ethical Issues In Regard to Software Piracy The advances that have been made in technology today have resulted in a number of issues arising that have to be dealt with in order to create a more conducive environment for success in the IT sector. One of the major issues is the concern for software piracy that has steadily been on the rise over the years as more people have easier access to unauthorized information and programs that are meant for sale. Software piracy can be described as the duplicating of computer software without the proper authorization from its makers/dealers. This has led to many computer companies losing huge amounts of money through these unauthorized copies as they are sold for a cheaper price on what can be termed as the IT black market. One of the reasons for the rise of these copyright infringements is the emergence of the internet that has granted users easier access to software, which means that they do not have to go through an authorized dealer to get their hands on the programs that they want (Davis, 2007). A large number of people have resorted to downloading copies of unauthorized programs from the internet either for free or for a fee smaller than the original one, as they consider this act a normal part of their everyday life. However, despite the relative ease with which it can be done and advantages that downloading these pirated versions of software may hold, the act still remains illegal and such individuals hurt the growth and progress of companies whose software they are pirating. If caught, such an individual runs the risk of facing legal action taken against him/her by the government and/or the company and could end up paying huge sums of money, which can significantly reduce the initial savings that they thought they could accumulate through this cheaper alternative (McKeen & Smith,

2003). Software companies have not taken the emergence of this piracy lying down, however, and a number of solutions have been implemented in an attempt to curb this growing menace and make it harder for the perpetrators to get their hands on these illegal versions of their property (McKeen & Smith, 2003). These implementations include actions such as studying what the motivation behind the piracy is and ways to discourage the pirates. One of these is reducing costs. One of the major reasons that software piracy has become abundant in recent times is the cost of the original software. Most individuals turn to piracy with the argument that it would be much more expensive to buy an original copy of the software than to buy a pirated copy. Reducing the costs of the original software makes it affordable for users, thus removing the need to look for pirated alternatives. It had been shown that individuals prefer original copies over pirated versions; if they are given a choice and if they are able to obtain what they prefer at a lower cost, the attraction to pirated versions reduces dramatically (Davis, 2007). One more way is enhancing features. Software that has already been largely pirated can have its value reduced when a company adds new and improved features to the original version. New features that are not available on pirated copies will leave a user with the urge to discard their unauthorized versions in favor of the original as they look for better alternatives not available in the IT black market (McKeen & Smith, 2003). Yet one more way is increasing consequences. As mentioned earlier, pirating software is an illegal practice and the governments have devised stricter laws and punishments for their perpetrators in a bid to discourage them from the deed. This can be done by increasing the financial consequences that

they would face in the form of fines or alternatives such as longer jail term sentences. If the consequences are too great, a potential pirate would rather get an original copy, as the benefits of getting a cheaper pirated version are not worth the risk (Davis, 2007). The decisions mentioned above will result in less piracy and more profit for the software companies. They will also instill a practice of buying original copies among consumers, thus reducing the level of cyber crime that takes place in that region (McKeen & Smith, 2003). The utilitarian approach, which emphasizes that an action should produce benefits to those it affects, tries to ensure that piracy does not occur because it undermines the profitability of producers. Moreover, it can be considered that increasing consequences through larger fines and longer jail terms is the best way to curb this growing menace. An individual faced with strict consequences will be less motivated to commit the act of piracy knowing that if he/she is caught, he/she will have to pay tenfold the original price of getting an authorized copy of the software and thus will be less tempted to engage in piracy. References McKeen, James D., & Smith, Heather, A. (2003). Making IT happen: Critical issues in IT management. New Jersey: Wiley Series in Information Systems. Davis, N. (2007). Thanks for letting us pirate. Retrieved from http://apcmag.com/5254/thanks_for_letting_us_pirate