The ODE Classified section ... much more than a place for the crossword

Confessions of a CD 'burner'

A person who copies music CDs claims store prices are inflated

By David Ryan
Oregon Daily Emerald

The Emerald interviewed a student who claims to copy CD albums, using a store-bought CD burner to do the copying. While copying CD albums is not software piracy, it is copyright infringement and it does require the use of a computer to arrange music tracks on a blank CD. The person agreed to be interviewed on condition that the Emerald would not identify the person.

What do you do?

"I don't pirate software. You can make [software programs] into CDs, but it requires a lot of work. In the end it's not worth it. I wouldn't even do it for myself.

"If someone has a CD, or their roommate wants to copy it, then I'll [copy] it for them. I don't go on the Internet and get albums which are available. That's too much work for me. The price I want to charge in terms of the work required to get it, I'll say 'just go buy the CD.'"

You don't make a profit from it?

"Um, no, I'm charging more than it costs for me to buy the blank CDs, but that's only until I cover the $400 cost to buy the CD burner. So it's not really ever going to be a profitable operation."

When you first bought the CD burner, did you find you had a lot of people who wanted you to copy CDs?

"When I first got the burner, I was swamped with people who wanted copies of things, but now I think a lot of people kind of got the CDs they wanted. Now, every couple weeks there will be a new CD that comes out that everybody wants. I'll burn that. [Demand for copies of CDs] comes in spurts."

How many people wanted you to copy CDs in the last month?

"Maybe 20, 25."

Do you know it's copyright infringement?

"Technically, yes, but the other thing is that CDs are way overpriced. It's kind of a personal battle against the CD companies."

Are you afraid of getting caught?

"Not really. A lot of people are concerned about it, but I don't see the difference between [burning CDs] and putting a blank tape in your recorder up to an album and recording it. And everybody does that and that doesn't seem to be anything people are talking about.

I think that if I got into software pirating I'd be afraid there, because then you're really doing something. Also, I'm not actively trying to get clients."

The person went on to say there was a new product in stores made by a stereo manufacturer that will copy music CDs. The person said he didn't find anything wrong with what he was doing when there was a commercial advertising that kind of product.

Some of these answers have been edited for length and clarity.

Piracy

Because it can be easy, students might not know they are pirating software.

Copying a friend's computer game might be OK, according to the alliance, but only if it's something called "shareware" or "freeware," in which the maker of the program gives permission for the program to be copied without the maker's approval.

"I don't think it's so much a technical issue as it is an educational issue," said Joe St Sauver from the University Computing Center. "I think awareness [of software copyright laws] is a big part of it. It's like copying books: it's probably something [students] are not supposed to do, but they don't know about the copyright laws."

St Sauver said pirated software can bring viruses onto a student's hard drive. One program type, called a "Trojan horse" causes the computer to appear to be doing one thing while actually doing another, such as a screen saver that deletes programs off a hard drive. Pirated programs also offer no technical support service.

Not to mention how pirating software might grab the attention of federal agents.

A University of Oregon student caught the FBI's attention. Federal agents served a search warrant on Feb. 3 to a residence within the University-owned Agate Apartments and confiscated computing equipment. Assistant U.S. Attorney Sean Hoar, who is handling the case along with the FBI, said the student at the address was suspected of pirating software.

Acting on information that pirating had occurred at the Computing Center, federal agents also investigated a computer port there. The port showed signs of being used for software piracy, Hoar said.

"Obviously it's electronic and different than a normal computer [routinely used by a specific person], but we know who was using it at a certain time," Hoar said. "There's no question about" who was using the port to pirate software.

Barret and Hoar would not comment further on the incident because the case is still under investigation.

The FBI is not the only one after software pirates, and students are not the only ones at the University who have found themselves in trouble with agencies fighting software piracy.

The Software Publishing Association, a private organization that searches for software pirates, files lawsuits against violators in addition to holding educational lectures across the country.

The University of Oregon is no stranger to the SPA, according to a Feb. 7, 1993, article in the webzine "The Computer Underground Digest."

In settling the first software piracy lawsuit brought against a public university, the University paid $130,000 to the SPA in 1991. The University admitted no wrongdoing.

After the lawsuit, the University has required its employees to sign a legal agreement not to steal or use unauthorized software. Since then, no software piracy lawsuits have been filed against the University.

Individual schools at the University also use other measures to prevent piracy.

"Primarily we use lab monitors and active discouragement," said Rick Gross, the school of journalism's instructional technology coordinator. "We try to make sure students know what piracy means."

If caught, student pirates can be convicted of violation of the student conduct code.

"You're basically risking your college career," Gross said.

Christopher Wolf, an intellectual property attorney with the Washington, D.C., law firm Proskauer Rose, said the nature of software piracy is quickly changing.

"I think it's going to be easier to copy, and I think it will be easier to identify who's copying," he said. "There will be identifying information written onto the software so copies on [Web sites where software can be downloaded] can be identified."

Emerald online editor Jake Ortman contributed to this article.

Hot off the press
and into your hands

Oregon Daily Emerald
Circulating 10,000 papers daily