



PRESS RELEASE

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SIX JAILED FOR INTERNET FILM PIRACY CONSPIRACY IN FIRST CASE OF ITS KIND IN UK

A major internet piracy conspiracy has been broken up and six men sentenced to terms of imprisonment ranging from four years to six months on Friday (8th December) at Birmingham Crown Court for offences relating to the manufacture, distribution and sale of pirate DVDs.

The PIR8 web forum facilitated the selling of pirate material to over 13,000 users. The conspirators were involved in the running of and/or the manufacture and distribution of counterfeit films sold via the website and via other outlets.

The Federation Against Copyright Theft ('FACT') prosecuted the case which followed a three year investigation and prosecution by FACT into the group. Assistance in the investigation was given by the BPI (the record industry trade body) Anti-Piracy Unit.

The following, aged 21 to 37 years old, (with PIR8 usernames) all pleaded guilty to Conspiracy to Defraud:

Lee Richard Bennett ('Mack'), from South Normington, Derbyshire, and the owner of the PIR8 site was sentenced to four years imprisonment.

Barry Jarvis ('Leafy'), from Johnstown, Wrexham, the website administrator, was sentenced to one year's imprisonment.

Kevin Bowles ('Taz'), from Doncaster, but living in Darlington at the time of the offences received a one year jail sentence.

Robert Chester ('Killalot'), from Eastbourne, Sussex, also a received one year jail sentence.

Jason Morgan ('Monkfish'), from Lanchester, Co. Durham and Christopher Pomroy ('Trinity'), from Stretford, Greater Manchester were sentenced to six months' imprisonment.

Karl Smith ('Toon'), from Peterlee, Co. Durham and Marcus Jones, from Brynteg, Anglesey, were sentenced to 240 hours Community Punishment Orders.

Adrian Hodgson ('Eda'), from Kingston Upon Hull, was sentenced to 200 hours Community Punishment Order.

Also sentenced was Paul Bowes, from Co. Durham, who was not part of the conspiracy but pleaded guilty to manufacturing pirate DVDs. He was sentenced to 150 hours' Community Punishment Order.

The judge's comments made it clear that this was a groundbreaking case. He noted that this was the first case of its kind to come before the UK criminal courts and that his sentencing included a strong deterrent element.

Kieron Sharp, FACT Director General, said: *“This was a major criminal conspiracy and a sophisticated organisation making hundred of thousands of pounds from their illegal activities. This should send a strong message to those involved in film piracy in all forms, including online, that FACT will trace and prosecute criminals seeking to profit from defrauding legitimate businesses and that the Courts can and will hand out strong sentences. The public should also be aware that in purchasing pirate DVDs they are contributing to these criminals’ profits, bringing criminal activity to their neighbourhoods and affecting the livelihoods of local businesses.”*

Working with Police and Trading Standards across the UK, and with the help of the BPI’s Anti-Piracy Unit, FACT was able to facilitate the arrest of the defendants and the search of both private and business premises occupied by them. A further search warrant was granted and the business premises of Jason Morgan in Co. Durham were searched and a large duplicating factory of counterfeit product found.

The remaining defendants were the subjects of search warrants on the same date and all of these proved to be positive in the search for counterfeit product. In total 26 computers were seized together with a server that was lodged on an industrial site in Sheffield and linked directly back to Bennett.

Costs in the case were awarded to FACT and all seized equipment, including computers, was ordered for destruction.

- Ends

Notes to editors:

Enquiries of the PIR8 internet site in 2004 revealed that it was a structured site led by a moderator together with selected administrators who monitored the site at all times. There was an organised rank structure on the forum with the administrators having the authority to ban, upgrade and downgrade members on the forum. It also became apparent that there was a fee structure to the site with all monies going to the moderator Lee Bennett. He also authorised the selling of counterfeit entertainment media and a higher price for this service was paid. A number of test purchases were made and these were found to be counterfeits.

About FACT

The Federation Against Copyright Theft is the UK’s leading trade organisation established to protect and represent the interests of the film and broadcasting industry against copyright and trademark infringements. Established in 1983, FACT works closely with statutory law enforcement agencies to combat the growth of pirate DVDs, film and other forms of broadcast material including the increasing threat from online/internet-based piracy. FACT has been accepted as a prosecution authority and engages in criminal prosecutions in its own right.

The maximum penalty for offences of film piracy is 10 years imprisonment and/or an unlimited fine. Proceeds of Crime Act legislation now also enables confiscation of assets and goods obtained through criminal activity.

www.fact-uk.org.uk