

The Reason Behind DRM

Here's a side of DRM I never seem to see, but I think is the real reason DRM technology is being pushed so hard by the Content Cartel: repurchasing power.

There are 3 groups of people in the media content marketplace that DRM technology might affect: Illegal Media Providers, Illegal Media Consumers, and Honest Consumers.

1.) Does DRM technology stop the Illegal Media Providers from bypassing DRM restrictions or the mass distribution of DRM-free binaries? No. Not one piece of DRM protected media has ever been released that couldn't be broken in minutes. Some say it is still a "speed bump" to illegal copying but this is not accurate. A technology that only needs one person on the planet to break it in order for all others to bypass, is an inconsequential hindrance. Some say the problem is just with the current generation of DRM and that the NEXT generation will really stop the piracy. But by the nature of encryption, you can't both give a person "the message" and keep it from them at the same time. The Content Cartel already knows that DRM encryption will always be broken swiftly.

We have laws to make mass distribution of copyrighted material illegal, but those laws exist

independently of DRM. DRM technology does not aid those laws in any way. Therefore, the Content Cartel isn't interested in DRM for its ability to stop people from ripping or distributing their content (because they know it can't).

2.) Does DRM stop the Illegal Media Consumers from downloading movies & music? No. By the time someone is downloading something the DRM has been removed. Therefore, the Content Cartel is not interested in DRM for its ability to stop the people from illegally downloading content.

3.a.) Does DRM technology stop Honest Consumers from using their content in ways that are illegal? No. They're "honest" consumers, remember? They don't want to do illegal things with their content. If they were dishonest then we'd have to put them in the second group.

3.b.) Does DRM technology stop Honest Consumers from using their content in ways that are legal? Yes! There are a many examples one could give of the fair use of digital media that is blocked by DRM (see below). So, if this is the ONLY group that DRM affects, why would the Content Cartel do this to Honest Consumers?

I think the answer to this question is grounded in the fact that digital media is lossless (that is, you can copy it an infinite number of times, and still have the same file, unlike analog formats such as records and tapes). Consider how much money

was made selling people music they already owned but was worn out, or just available in a new format: player-piano scrolls to 3-minute-waxes, 3-minute-waxes to 78's, 78's to 33's, 33's to Tapes, Tapes to CDs.

That last step was the mistake. CD technology is digital and that means if someone makes a backup copy of that music before it wears out, they won't just own it for the rest of their life, so will anyone they bequeath their music collection to. Forever. Even if there is a technology shift to a new medium, that new medium will be digital, so the conversion will happen without the need to repurchase the content.

It is this permanent ownership of perfectly reproducible content that I think terrifies the Content Cartel. And it is Honest Consumer repurchasing that I think the Content Cartel is really trying to perpetuate with DRM technology. Honest Consumers are in the VAST majority so forcing them purchase the same content multiple times generates far more revenue than finding a way to make Illegal Media Consumers purchase it just once.

"But how does DRM force repurchasing?" you may ask. Here are some examples:

1) If you own North American DVDs but move to Australia, the U.K. or any other differing "DVD region" you will have to repurchase your DVDs (or illegally buy a region-free DVD player).

2) If you "authorize" a media device

to play music, but it is stolen/broken/lost/etc. you cannot de-authorize that device. Do that 3 times (by the current rules -- which are subject to change at the whim of the Content Cartel) and you'll be repurchasing all your music. This "authorized for 3 devices only" rule is a nice fail safe to make sure that EVENTUALLY music you once owned will have to be repurchased. Maybe not by the first owner of the content if they are very careful, but the content almost certainly won't be passed to a new generation as a book or painting would.

3) If you want to make a VHS copy of a DVD so your kids can watch it on the VHS player you have in the car, you can't. You'll just have to buy a VHS version of the movie you already own.

This is the major reason I feel that DRM is wrong (though there are many others). I don't believe the Content Cartel is interested in DRM technology for stopping illegal copying at all. They want to stop LEGAL copying, and reap the staggering financial rewards of forcing Honest Consumers to buy, and buy again.

...Colin Foster , 16 Mar 2005
From: "TidBITS Talk Discussion List"
tbtalk.tidbits.com

[Note from TidBITS editor: As they said in All The President's Men, "Follow the money." This whole battle is for the ownership of our culture, a grandiose way of saying corporations want to own the content of our

AmigaMCCC News

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May Calendar

May 16 — Amiga By-The-Loop Chapter
7:00 pm — Grand Prairie Public Library
901 Conover Drive, Grand Prairie

May 16 — MCCC Board of Director's Meeting
Approx. 9:30 pm — Location TBD

May 28 — Newsletter Deadline — 7:00 am

culture's creative output and sell it back to us a copy at a time.

The Content Cartel are already the bottom feeders of our culture. Through the expiration of copyright. they already bring us, royalty free, those budget copies of Shakespeare and Dickens and other works that lapse into the public domain. But through the active swindling of talent (John Fogerty and Billy Joel are just two that spring to mind), they reap the benefits of creativity they did not themselves produce. Add to that the egregious extension of copyright into the distant future and we have a corporate stranglehold on the soul of our people.]