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FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Reuter Article about the LaMacchia Indictment

Author(s)

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Description

A Boston Globe article about the indictment of LaMacchia and the rather murky interpretations of law brought forward when trying to regulate the internet.

Body

Boston (Reuter) - A computer whiz at Massachusetts Institute of Technology has been indicted for allegedly operating a computer bulletin board that gave users around the world access to free software on the global network Internet, authorities said Friday.

David LaMacchia, 20, an electrical engineering and computer sciences student at MIT was indicted by a grand jury Thursday on charges of conspiring to commit wire fraud, resulting in the piracy of an estimated \$1 million in business and entertainment software, the U.S. Attorney in Boston said in a statement.

LaMacchia has agreed to surrender voluntarily to the federal authorities and will appear in court next week.

He is accused of using computers at MIT to operate a bulletin board known as "cynosure" that enabled Internet users all over the world to download a range of copyright-protected software without paying for it.

MIT said it reported the scheme to authorities as soon as it found out its computers were being used.

"We discovered last December that a computer was being used and we reported it to the campus police and the FBI," MIT spokesman Kenneth Campbell said Friday.

Internet is a largely unregulated collection of electronic networks that link educational, government and commercial computers around the world. Users are barred by law from copying software programmes protected by copyright.

"The pirating of business and entertainment software through clandestine computer bulletin boards is tremendously costly to software companies and by extension ... to the economy," said U.S. Attorney Donald Stern.

LaMacchia is not accused of making any money from the scheme but still faces a possible jail term and fines of up to \$250,000.

The case raises questions about future controls of data and programmes on the so-called "information superhighway." Prosecutors acknowledged that many computer buffs believe software should be free to all users.

However, computer industry estimates put the losses to software producers of piracy at \$3 billion a year.

LaMacchia's lawyer said his client was being used as a "guinea pig" in a government attempt to clamp tighter controls on the decentralized and unregulated Internet system.

"It's an extremely gray, murky area of the law," said his attorney, David Duncan. "I think it goes outside the boundaries of the wire fraud statute, which is very broad indeed."

Notes

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