



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
November 8, 2007

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Members of a Business Software Piracy Ring Plead Guilty to Criminal Charges

BSA Works with FBI and DOJ to Help Bring Software Pirates to Justice

WASHINGTON – Two Lakeland, Florida brothers pleaded guilty this week to managing several for-profit software piracy websites and selling massive amounts of pirated computer software. In early 2004, the Business Software Alliance (BSA) began investigating these individuals after receiving complaints from software copyright holders. After reviewing the reported websites, BSA made undercover purchases and determined that the software sold was pirated. The BSA then referred the case over to the Federal Bureau of Investigation's Washington Field Office who conducted their own investigation and subsequently shut the operation down in October 2005.

Maurice A. Robberson, 48, and his brother Thomas K. Robberson, 54, were scheduled to stand trial before U.S. District Judge Claude M. Hamilton in Alexandria, Virginia. Moments before the trial was to begin, Thomas Robberson agreed to plead guilty to a single count of copyright infringement, while Maurice Robberson agreed to plead guilty to conspiracy to commit copyright infringement and trafficking in counterfeit goods as well as a substantive count of copyright infringement. Thomas Robberson faces up to five years in federal prison while Maurice Robberson faces up to ten years. Their sentencing is scheduled for March 7, 2008.

A third conspirator, Danny Ferrer, pled guilty to conspiracy and copyright infringement charges on June 15, 2006. Ferrer is currently serving 72 months in federal prison in addition to forfeiting a wide array of assets and paying restitution of more than \$4.1 million.

“Operations like the Robberson brothers are not rare. Software pirates lurk in the trade routes, claiming to offer steep discounts on authentic products,” said John Wolfe, Director of Internet Enforcement for the BSA. “It’s important that consumers be aware of online dangers and recognize threats posed by software pirates. Purchasing unlicensed software online not only makes computers vulnerable to viruses, but can place sensitive financial information in the hands of criminals when personal credit cards are used to make the purchase. In this case, the Robberson brothers deceived unsuspecting consumers by advertising the sale of legitimate software but ultimately provided them with only pirated copies.”

The FBI investigation determined that from late 2002, these individuals conspired to sell more than \$5 million of counterfeit software products that were copyrighted by BSA member companies such as Adobe and Autodesk at discount prices. For example, software purchased by the BSA which had a retail value of over \$600, was purchased for \$57. The conspirators manufactured pirated copies on CD-R discs and included labels that featured trademarks of the legitimate software companies, tactics that were meant to dupe unsuspecting consumers. The Internet websites used by the conspiracy included BUYSUSA.com, CDSalesUSA.com, AmericanSoftwareSales.com, TheDealDepot.net, and BestValueShoppe.com.

“If consumers see prices that appear too good to be true, then they probably are,” explained Wolfe. “Software offered at such low prices should be an immediate red flag to all online consumers. We commend the Federal Bureau of Investigation Washington Office for working to bring the operators of some of the largest U.S. for-profit software piracy websites to justice.”

Thirty-five percent of the software installed in 2006 on personal computers (PCs) worldwide was installed without legal licenses, amounting to nearly \$40 billion in global losses because of software piracy infringements. An independent study shows that 21 percent of software in the United States is unlicensed.*

To learn more about how you can avoid becoming a victim of online fraud, or to report suspected piracy, visit www.bsacybersafety.com where you can also view BSA’s educational video “Software Piracy Exposed: A Dangerous Business for Buyers and Sellers,” which discusses ways consumers can protect themselves from online dangers posed by software pirates. The video also features Danny Ferrer, one of the co-conspirators.

**“Global Software Piracy Study,” conducted by IDC for the Business Software Alliance, May 2007.*

About BSA

The Business Software Alliance (www.bsa.org) is the foremost organization dedicated to promoting a safe and legal digital world. BSA is the voice of the world's commercial software industry and its hardware partners before governments and in the international marketplace. Its members represent one of the fastest growing industries in the world. BSA programs foster technology innovation through education and policy initiatives that promote copyright protection, cyber security, trade and e-commerce. BSA members include Adobe, Apple, Autodesk, Avid, Bentley Systems, Borland, CNC Software/Mastercam, McAfee, Microsoft, Mindjet, Monotype Imaging, PTC, Siemens PLM, SolidWorks, Sybase, Symantec, and The MathWorks.

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