

Pirated TV content viewers face

Residents can face criminal action for viewing pirated TV services and content, a major broadcaster has warned. It follows a spate of raids on piracy dealers, leading to shop closures, heavy fines and even deportation. The Dubai-based OSN network said consumers can also be prosecuted for violating local copyright laws. The website includes information on the Anti-Piracy Coalition, which includes 28 broadcasters including OSN and MBC.

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Pirated TV content viewers face criminal action

OFFICIALS CLAMP DOWN ON UNDERGROUND MARKET FOR DISH TV AND OTHER UNLICENSED SERVICES WITH RAIDS ON PIRACY DEALERS

DUBAI

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 Staff Reporter

Residents can face criminal action for viewing pirated TV services and content, a major broadcaster has warned.

It follows a spate of raids on piracy dealers, leading to shop closures, heavy fines and even deportation.

The Dubai-based OSN network said consumers can also be prosecuted for violating local copyright laws.

CID officials and economic departments nationwide have investigated and conducted some 50 raids covering hotels, shops and labour accommodations, based on complaints filed by OSN.

Also, roughly 50 satellite channels showing pirated content were taken down following anti-piracy efforts by MBC as well. MBC is also Dubai-based and is watched by 120 million people daily. In June, OSN revealed that a manager of an Abu Dhabi shop selling unauthorised subscriptions and decoders for Indian pay-TV operator Dish TV was ordered to be deported.

"In the Abu Dhabi case, the manager was deported; he lost his visa. The consumer of piracy content is taking a risk too. It can be fines, and it can ultimately lead to the removal of your visa. That's what they are risking – criminal conviction. But the vast majority are



Clint Egbert/Gulf News

Eyesore and illegal

Satellite dishes on the roof of a residential building in Dubai. People are still watching content illegally.

not aware," OSN CEO David Butorac said.

Decoders for Dish TV and other Indian pay-TV services such as Tata Sky, Sun Direct, Nova and Airtel Digital TV are "illegal devices" in the UAE, say a public interest website called www.dotherightthingme.com.

The website includes information on the Anti-Piracy Coalition, which includes 28 broadcasters including OSN and MBC.

Indian content is hugely popular with expats from the Indian subcontinent who make up the bulk of UAE's population.

More than half of all families coming from the Indian subcontinent to Gulf countries are using pirated receivers, the website says. Pirates offer cheaper rates because they have low costs as they don't pay legitimate fees, Butorac added.

"People are still watching content illegally. By and large, consumers are not aware they are acting illegally. They may be shocked to realise they are actually paying to crime groups. We shouldn't dress it up as anything else." He added that while the economic departments and police "focus on the

dealers, large companies and labour camps, we'll continue our efforts on the supply side and also educate consumers on criminal liability, and reinforce the measures in making people aware of legitimate services".

Many consumers are unaware they are watching pirated channels, MBC Group CEO Sam Barnett added.

Piracy is "a significant crime" draining out millions of dirhams from the legitimate broadcast industry in the UAE and region, Barnett said.

Hugely popular content on MBC has been "stolen" hun-



David Butorac
 OSN CEO



Sam Barnett
 MBC Group CEO

dreds of times by "shady, Mafia-style channels" that do not pay huge sums in exclusive broadcast rights as MBC does, he said.

'Grey area fading'

The pirate channel operators make money from advertising and SMS services related to the channels. Barnett added that many consumers are aware they are watching pirated content on such channels.

"The grey area is fading away; it is becoming black and white. A choice will have to be made to operate legally or illegally, which is an ethical issue and one which also risks arrest," Barnett said.

Despite the clampdowns, unlicensed pay-TV services or pirated content on free-to-air satellite channels are not rare or hard to find. Many watchmen in residential towers also act as brokers between piracy dealers and tenants. But greater awareness about piracy – and

INFRINGEMENTS Erring channels

- Top Movies has made 326 infringements since September 2013, including 254 exclusive titles
- Kidzania Cartoon has made 137 infringements since September 2013, including 90 exclusive titles
- As of May, there were at least 65 Arabic movies infringing channels
- Source: MBC/ART
- Useful sites
- Anti Piracy Awareness: dotherightthingme.com
- Report piracy on 04 367 7222
- Anti Piracy Coalition: www.menaapc.org

reports of official crackdowns – has persuaded some residents to shun piracy.

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