Software piracy worsens in Asia: study

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Software piracy in the Asia-Pacific region continued to worsen last year, according to an annual study by the Business Software Alliance (BSA). The study said piracy was being driven by the rapid growth in computer sales and the availability of bootleg programmes online.

Software piracy in the Asia-Pacific region continued to worsen last year, a study said Tuesday, driven by the rapid growth in computer sales and the availability of bootleg programmes online.

The annual survey by the Business Software Alliance (BSA) and industry research firm IDC showed that in 2008, an average of 61 percent of the region's software were unlicensed.

The figure was up from 59 percent the previous year.

This led legal software vendors to lose 15.26 billion US dollars, up 8.3 percent from 14.09 billion dollars the previous year, according to the study.

The global average of unlicensed software worsened to 41 percent in 2008 from 38 percent the previous year, causing losses of almost 53 billion dollars, the study said.

Globally, the problem may worsen this year as the financial crisis forces consumers to hold back on new purchases, the study added.

"The economic crisis is likely to have a bigger effect on software piracy in 2009," it said.

"Since consumers are more likely to hold on to their PCs longer, this may result in increased software piracy because older computers are more likely to have unlicensed software."

Jeffrey Hardee, BSA's vice president and regional director, said last year's increase in software piracy rate was due to the rapid growth in computer sales.

"Even if piracy were to go down in every high-piracy country, their growing market share for PCs could drive the regional average up," he said.

Widespread use of the Internet was another factor behind the increase, according to the study.

"The availability of pirated software on the Internet, which ironically is facilitated by increasing broadband penetration in the region, is also a major concern," said Hardee.

Software includes operating systems, systems software like databases and security packages and application software like office packages, finance and tax packages and PC computer games.

Bangladesh was the biggest culprit in the Asia-Pacific last year with a piracy rate of 92 percent, followed by Sri Lanka at 90 percent and Pakistan at 86 percent, the study showed.

Japan had the lowest rate, at 21 percent, followed by New Zealand at 22 percent and Australia at 26 percent.

In China, the average piracy rate dropped to 80 percent last year from 82 percent in 2007, the study showed.

The improvement in China is due to "more vigorous enforcement and education," it said.

Central and eastern Europe had the world's highest software piracy rate last year with an average 66 percent, followed by Latin America at 65 percent, with the Asia-Pacific coming in third, the study said.

The Middle East/Africa region had a piracy rate of 59 percent and Western Europe had 33 percent. North America had the lowest software piracy rate at 21 percent.

BSA is an industry group that works for copyright protection and counts among its members some of the world's biggest technology companies, including Apple, IBM, Microsoft and Adobe.

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