

# US shuts down 82 counterfeit goods, music sites (Update)

November 28 2010, by Chris Lefkow

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Consumers shop online in 2006. US authorities have shut down dozens of websites offering counterfeit goods and pirated music, five months after a crackdown on sites offering movie downloads.

US authorities announced Monday the shutdown of 82 websites selling mostly Chinese-made counterfeit goods, including golf clubs, Walt Disney movies, handbags and other items.

The court-ordered seizure of the domain names of the online retailers was the second phase of a crackdown dubbed "Operation In Our Sites" that began in June with the closure of nine websites offering pirated movies.

"The sale of counterfeit US brands on the Internet steals the creative work of others, costs our economy jobs and revenue and can threaten the

health and safety of American consumers," said John Morton, director of the Immigration and Customs Enforcement (ICE) agency.

"We are dedicated to protecting the jobs, the income and the tax revenue that disappear when counterfeit goods are trafficked," said Morton, whose agency is part of the Department of Homeland Security.

The ICE director told a press conference here that most of the websites were based in China and shipped products made in China to the United States.

The sites targeted over the past few days include burberryoutletshop.com, cheapscarfshop.com, dvdcollectionsale.com, handbagcom.com, mydreamwatches.com, rapgodfathers.com, sunglasses-mall.com, torrent-finder.com and usaoutlets.net.

The online retailers offered sports equipment, scarves, shoes, handbags, athletic apparel, sunglasses and other items as well as illegal copies of copyrighted DVD boxed sets, music and software.

A visitor to the sites Monday is met with a message reading: "This site has been seized by ICE -- Homeland Security Investigations, pursuant to a seizure warrant issued by a United States District Court."

It informs visitors that copyright infringement is a federal crime carrying a penalty of five years in prison and a 250,000-dollar fine, while trafficking in counterfeit goods carries a 10-year sentence and a two million dollar fine.

"By seizing these domain names, we have disrupted the sale of thousands of counterfeit items, while also cutting off funds to those willing to exploit the ingenuity of others for their own personal gain," US Attorney General Eric Holder said.

Morton noted the crackdown coincides with "Cyber Monday," the busiest online shopping day of the year in the United States, and just ahead of the Christmas holiday shopping season.

He acknowledged some of the sites will "reappear under different domain names" but said "it's going to take quite some time to generate the traffic that they had before."

As part of the investigation, US agents purchased goods from the sites to determine whether they were counterfeit and obtained seizure orders for the domain names from US magistrate judges, US officials said.

An ICE spokeswoman confirmed the shutdown of the websites to AFP over the weekend but declined to provide any details about the operation.

The crackdown coincided with approval by the Senate Judiciary Committee of a bill that would give US law enforcement even more tools to crack down on websites abroad engaged in piracy of movies, television shows and music.

The Combating Online Infringement and Counterfeits Act, which has the support of the entertainment industry but has been strongly criticized by digital rights and other groups, was approved by a vote of 19-0 last week.

Senator Patrick Leahy, a Democrat from Vermont who co-sponsored the bill, praised the Obama administration on Monday for its "commitment to aggressively protect American intellectual property."

"We can no longer sit on the sidelines while American intellectual property is stolen and sold online using our own infrastructure," Leahy said.

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