

Interview: Wozniak, Dotcom slam US piracy case

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In this May 2012 photo released by Kim Dotcom, Apple cofounder Steve Wozniak, right, and Kim Dotcom, founder of file-sharing site Megaupload, stand together in Auckland, New Zealand. Wozniak said the U.S. piracy case against Dotcom is "hokey" and a threat to Internet innovation. Wozniak and Dotcom spoke out against the federal case in separate interviews on Wednesday, June 27, 2012. (AP Photo/Kim Dotcom)

(AP) — Apple cofounder Steve Wozniak says the U.S. piracy case against Kim Dotcom is "hokey" and a threat to Internet innovation.

Wozniak and Dotcom spoke out against the federal case in separate interviews with The Associated Press Wednesday. Dotcom, the flamboyant founder of file-sharing site Megaupload, is accused by federal authorities of facilitating Internet [piracy](#) on a massive scale.

Charged with racketeering and money laundering, he's fighting U.S. attempts to extradite him from New Zealand.

Wozniak said he was visiting New Zealand last month to give a speech when he learned Dotcom couldn't come to see him because he was under house arrest. So Wozniak said he visited Dotcom and the two have kept in touch by email since.

"It's just kind of ridiculous what they did to his life," Wozniak said in a telephone interview. "An awful lot of Kiwis support him. The U.S. government is on thin ground."

Wozniak said plenty of people used Megaupload for legitimate purposes before federal authorities shut it down in January and filed criminal charges against seven of its officers, including Dotcom. In a dramatic raid the same month, New Zealand police swooped down in helicopters onto the grounds of Dotcom's mansion and cut their way into a safe room where they found him hiding. He was jailed for a month before a judge decided he could be monitored from his home.

Wozniak likened the Megaupload site to a highway and those who shared pirated movies and songs to speeding motorists.

"You don't just shut down the whole street because somebody is speeding," he said.

U.S. authorities allege in their indictment that Dotcom and Megaupload deliberately thwarted attempts to remove pirated material from the site by removing individual links but not the pirated content. Prosecutors claim the "mega conspiracy" netted Dotcom and others \$175 million in illicit advertising revenue and download fees.

In an email interview, Dotcom said the charges are bogus.

"The more people learn about this case the more they realize that this type of copyright disagreement between Hollywood and new cloud storage technology is a political debate, not something that belongs in the criminal court and certainly not something to justify breaking down the door to my house," he said.

Dotcom said Megaupload had been applauded for its content removal policies. But he also acknowledged the site could host pirated files.

"What people uploaded and downloaded in their storage areas was up to them. One person's licensed music MP3 file is potentially another person's infringing file," he wrote.

Wozniak said he believes that people should pay for content. But he also believes in keeping the Internet open to encourage innovation. He said trying to shut down sites like Megaupload is futile.

"If you've got a huge steamroller coming, instead of trying to stop it, you should get out of the way," he said.

Wozniak, a founding member of the nonprofit Electronic Frontier Foundation which has sought to return frozen Megaupload files to users, said authorities need to release some of Dotcom's frozen financial assets so he can pay his mounting legal fees.

Born Kim Schmitz in Germany, Dotcom, who changed his name in 2005, has been in trouble before. He was convicted in 1998 in Germany of computer fraud and dealing in stolen phone cards. In 2002, he was convicted of manipulating the stock price of an Internet startup. Both times, he was fined but managed to avoid jail time. He also portrayed himself at the time as a super hacker, although German hackers spoken to by the AP say he did little of what he claimed. He moved to New Zealand after gaining residency in 2010.

Asked if he might be being fooled by a clever conman, Wozniak said it "could very well be the case."

"If I hear details that have credibility, I could totally turn against him," Wozniak said. "But I'm not finding it anywhere from what I've heard so far."

Dotcom has portrayed himself as the victim in rare interviews and on his new Twitter account, where he's posted photos of his family. He's also been thumbing his nose at authorities and the case against him. One photo he posted shows him standing in a field, his arms outstretched, with the caption "Flight risk!!!!" Another photo shows a colleague scrubbing bills in a bowl of soapy water: "Money laundering."

The irreverence and anti-authoritarian streak has appealed to many New Zealanders. In the eight days since starting his Twitter account, Dotcom has amassed more than 40,000 followers, rivaling the 51,000 who follow New Zealand's Prime Minister John Key.

Ira Rothken, one of Dotcom's lawyers, said he is pleased with the way New Zealand authorities have relaxed Dotcom's bail rules pending an August extradition hearing by gradually removing the restrictions on his movements and freeing some of his assets so he can pay personal expenses.

Dotcom's lawyers are seeking to have the case against the company — although not the individuals — thrown out on the basis that Hong Kong-based Megaupload had no legal presence in the U.S. They're also seeking the release of millions of dollars to pay for the legal fees.

[Dotcom](#) said he's optimistic New Zealand will deny the U.S. extradition request and is hopeful the U.S. will eventually drop the criminal case. Then, he said, he'd be free to focus on launching some new products,

including a music service he's named "megabox." For now, he's got a new crowd offering support.

"That's why I love the Internet," he tweeted last week. "From zero to 1000 followers in one day. Let's make history together."

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