Researchers find blocking Internet pirating sites is not effective

January 10 2013, by Bob Yirka

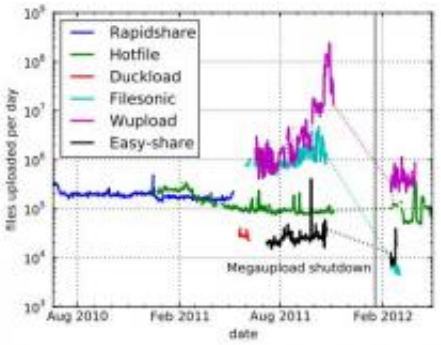

Figure 4. The global number of files uploaded daily to several OCHs. The dotted parts correspond to offline periods of the IDlogger.

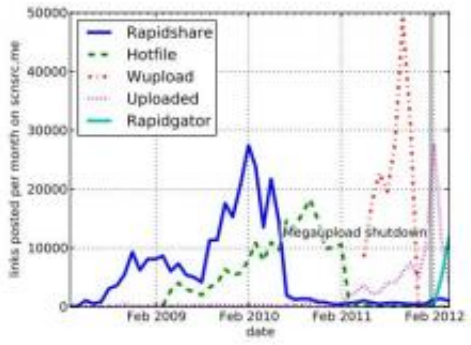

Figure 5. The number of links posted monthly on scnsrc.me for a selection of OCHs. Uploaders quickly switched to other OCHs in the event of unfavourable policy changes.

Credit: Tobias Lauinger et al.

(Phys.org)—Researchers at Boston's Northeastern University have conducted a study on the effectiveness of anti-piracy measures taken by content providers to deter the illegal sharing of files on the Internet. Their research shows that tactics such as blocking sites by seizing domains names does little to curb the sharing of protected files. They suggest that providers instead focus on blocking the income stream such sites generate.

There has been a lot of press coverage of pirating on the Internet and corporate efforts to stop it, yet to date, the researchers note, very little if any research has been conducted to determine if the methods used are

effective. To find out for themselves, the team began monitoring the availably of thousands of files spread across the Internet via popular file-hosting sites. They noted that as sites were blocked, availability of certain files dropped, but only for a short time – soon other sites picked up the slack and the files formerly found on the blocked site soon became available on other hosting sites, making the blocking action moot.

As part of their research, the team also noted that the shutdown of the wildly popular Megaupload site did little to curb the spread of content that users had previously found there. They suggest that if anything, shutting down arguably the most popular file sharing site on the Internet led to a more fractured landscape, with many more small sites sharing files, making stopping piracy even more difficult. The researchers also counted the number of file-sharing sites that are believed to currently host pirated content and found over 10,000 domain names covering more than 5,000 IP addresses.

After analyzing their data, the research team concluded that blocking file-hosting sites is ineffective and the practice has done little to lessen the number of illegally shared files available for download from such sites. They suggest that taking away the ability to process payments from such services would likely be much more effective, though they also note the difficulty content providers might find in separating legitimate file-hosting sites from those that share pirated material. Another approach they suggest is that a more reasonable alternative be created that reduces demand, similar to the model that has been created for downloadable music.

More information: Clickonomics: Determining the Effect of Anti-Piracy Measures for One-Click Hosting (paper PDF)