

Pirates plundering streaming television market

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While stunning televisions and sizzling content services starred at the Consumer Electronics Show, not far away a light was shined on cable service plundering pirates.

"Pirates closely follow legitimate technology innovations," Irdeto senior security director Mark Mulready told AFP while demonstrating streaming television piracy gear and tactics in hotel suite not far from the CES show floor that closed on Friday.

"Pirates are moving to rebroadcast over set top boxes."

And piracy has become such an established and lucrative business that it can be challenging for consumers to figure out which streaming television services are legitimate, according to Mulready.

Irdeto, an arm of South Africa-based Internet services titan Naspers, specializes in hunting down and sinking [pirates](#).

"Set-top box piracy is really a global problem that is growing very fast," Mulready said.

Manufacturers in China openly hawk set-top boxes that pirates can distribute to subscribers, according to Irdeto. The set-top boxes themselves are legal, the trouble begins when pirates rampantly restream cable programs without permission.

"They basically take what's coming through a legitimate set-top box and restream it," Mulready said. "Unfortunately, it is terribly easy."

The top show on pirated boxes last year was "Game of Thrones," followed by "The Walking Dead" and "Breaking Bad," according to Irdeto data.

An aspiring pirate can buy 500 boxes for less than \$21,000 and bring in \$173,000 in annual subscription revenue from customers who pay an average of \$390 for 12 months of access, according to Irdeto, which buys boxes under cover in its investigations.

In 2013, Google searches for set-top boxes allowing access to pirated content surpassed online hunts for legitimate boxes, Mulready said.

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