

Movie pirates break records for stolen previews of latest Hollywood movies

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Hunting movie pirates? Credit: BagoGames/flickr, CC BY-NC

Hollywood has broken two very different records this holiday season. Star Wars: The Force Awakens has become the [first movie](#) to reach US \$1 billion in gross sales in just 12 days. This beats the previous record of

the movie "Jurassic World" which had the additional benefit of sales from the world's second biggest market, China. Star Wars opens in China in January and so it will likely push its sales to even more astronomical levels.

The other record however is one that the movie industry will not be so proud of. According to [TorrentFreak](#), movie pirates have released 12 DVD quality movie previews, called [screeners](#) for download on the Internet. These screeners feature movies like the latest James Bond [Spectre](#), the new Tarantino movie "[The Hateful Eight](#)" and a list of others that include: Suffragette, Legend, In The Heart of The Sea, Joy, Steve Jobs, Spotlight, Creed, Concussion, The Danish Girl and Bridge of Spies.

What is even more worrying for the movie industry however is that the group of individuals behind the releases, who go by the name of Hive-CM8, claim that they have 40 screeners in total to release.

Screener DVDs are typically sent to a range of movie producers, critics and movie awards voters under strict conditions to avoid the films being leaked. Security mechanisms are built in to the films that can theoretically tie a particular movie back to a specific person sent the screener.

The FBI are already [investigating](#) how a copy of The Hateful Eight, linked to Andrew Kosove, the co-CEO of film production-finance company Alcon Entertainment, wound up in the hands of the movie pirates.

Hive-CM8 are thought to be a loose collective of individual movie pirates associated with the website [crikeym8.com](#) which makes money from early releases of the movies to subscribers of the site. The site appears to be run by an Australian(s) given the name, the Australian

cultural references and the location of the Twitter [account](#) in Melbourne, Victoria. The site is allegedly [not responsible](#) for the process of producing the pirated movies, nor does it host the content.

For the movie industry, the problem of sending screeners out to reviewers and potential awards voters is a challenge that doesn't seem to have any simple solutions. [Previous](#) attempts to stop sending preview DVDs was met with fierce opposition from many, especially the smaller independent film makers, who saw their chances of being noticed by reviewers being significantly affected by not being able to market their films in this way.

Technically, the pirates are able to remove security measures added to the films like digital watermarks that link the movie to a specific individual. There is little the [movie industry](#) can do to prevent this as all measures they could take come with the disadvantage of complexity and cost when the purpose of the exercise is to get as many key people to see the movie and promote it. As soon as a movie has leaked, the companies involved can issue "takedown notices" to Google and even to the "torrent" sites that link to the copies available for download. [Thousands](#) of links have been taken down since the latest batch of screeners hit the Internet over the last week. Despite the attempts to take down links, the movies are still readily available and Spectre is expected to see at least a [million](#) downloads over the few days since its release on the Internet.

Legal measures may have more effect. Last week, five of the UK's most active movie pirates were [sentenced](#) to a total of 17 years in prison for their releasing over 2,500 films. Investigators from the Federation Against Copyright Theft (FACT), tracked the downloaders through slip-ups they had made with leaving traces of their identities on forums and posts. This is one of the weaknesses of people who engage in movie piracy that they often seek praise and thanks for their efforts and this requires the establishment of identities that are not always as anonymous

as they think.

Other legal avenues have been far less successful. Attempts to go after the public who download [movies](#) and threaten them with huge fines has recently met with failure, at least in Australia. Other [attempts](#) to use new legislation to force ISPs to block sites associated with piracy of copyrighted content are also likely to have a very limited effect.

In all likelihood, movie piracy is going to be something that the industry will just have to live with as long as the incentives to use high quality previews still exist. It is no coincidence that Disney has chosen not to send preview copies of Star Wars to anyone. Disney also [employed](#) a range of special anti-piracy measures by issuing encrypted versions of the film to exhibitors with the keys to decrypt them being sent separately. Despite this, people have been able to record versions of the film using video cameras and there are copies already in circulation. It is unlikely that given the success of the film so far, that Disney will be too worried. There is also the fact that Star Wars is definitely a movie that should be experienced on a big screen.

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