

Swedish court to issue verdict in Pirate Bay case

15 April 2009, By MALIN RISING , Associated Press Writer



(AP) -- Innovative digital pioneers or reckless cyber pirates? The founders of file-sharing hub The Pirate Bay are either heroes or villains depending on whom you ask.

On Friday a Stockholm court will rule on whether the four men broke Swedish copyright law by running and funding the Web site, which has become the entertainment industry's enemy No. 1 after successful court actions against file-swapping sites such as Grokster and Kazaa.

The [Pirate Bay](#) provides a forum for its estimated 22 million users to freely download music, movies and computer games so-called torrent files - popular because they enable users share the parts they have already downloaded, increasing [download speeds](#) for the most sought-after files. But the site itself doesn't host any protected material, which is why defendants Gottfrid Svartholm Warg, Peter Sunde, Fredrik Neij, and Carl Lundstrom say they haven't done anything illegal.

Prosecutors charged them with accessory and conspiracy to break copyright law and asked the court to hand down one-year prison sentences to each. They also face 120 million kronor (\$14.3

million) in compensation claims from Warner Bros. Entertainment Inc., MGM Pictures Inc., Colombia Pictures Industries Inc., 20th Century Fox Films Co., Sony BMG, Universal and EMI.

In keeping with The Pirate Bay's defiant attitude, Sunde told The Associated Press by telephone the site would keep running regardless of the verdict, and insisted he wouldn't give the entertainment companies a single krona in damages.

"I would rather burn that money than give it to them," he said.

Experts say the ruling is significant because a guilty verdict would raise questions about whether mainstream search engines like Google or YouTube can be held accountable for content downloaded illegally by its users. Andre Rickardsson, a computer expert and former investigator for the Swedish security police, said that, in essence, the only thing that separates Google from The Pirate Bay is their attitude.

"Google has a more humble and smarter approach than The Pirate Bay," Rickardsson said.

Google has a stated policy that says anyone can ask them to remove copyright-protected material. The Pirate Bay openly mocks such requests from record companies, publishing them on the site along with their own explicit responses.

The court hearings, which ended March 3, renewed debate about file-sharing in Sweden, where many defend the right to swap songs and movies freely on the Internet. Critics say that Swedish authorities caved in to pressure from the U.S. when they launched the crackdown on The Pirate Bay in 2006.

The Pirate Bay's supporters set up a Web site dedicated to the trial, and the defendants sent updates from the court hearings through social

network Twitter.

Prosecutor Hakan Roswall rejected claims there isn't enough evidence to convict the defendants, saying the site provides three services that are essential for the users to be able to share files of copyright protected material.

The verdict Friday is likely to be appealed by the losing side. The judge could also decide to request advice from the European [Court](#) of Justice before making a decision.

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APA citation: Swedish court to issue verdict in Pirate Bay case (2009, April 15) retrieved 20 January 2022 from <https://phys.org/news/2009-04-swedish-court-issue-verdict-pirate.html>

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