

Successful legal action against computer retailers protects consumers from the dangers of illegal software

Microsoft aims to reduce the risks that unlawful computer programs pose by educating local PC stores about the hazards of selling unauthorised software

Reading, UK, 7th May: Today, Microsoft announces success against computer retailers around the UK who have admitted to unlawfully trading in Microsoft software. Today's news reveals that ten computer shops have been found guilty, or admitted to dealing in counterfeit or unlicensed software* over a period of six months. This highlights that the illegal software trade is a big issue for consumers, who are put at risk when they unwittingly purchase illegal computer programs. Microsoft's aim is to protect these consumers, who are vulnerable to computer viruses and identity theft when they use this software, and to support genuine businesses whose livelihood is endangered by unscrupulous traders.

Ipswich business guilty of trading in unlicensed software

Following an extensive Trading Standards led investigation, Ipswich based computer tradesman, Andrew Largent admitted to dealing in unlicensed Microsoft software at South East Suffolk Magistrates' Court. He also pleaded guilty to fraud and selling goods without copyright permission. The court ordered Largent to do 240 hours of unpaid work for the community and to pay court costs.

In a further nine separate cases, the following PC retailers have each faced court action and admitted to involvement in unlawful software activity including the sale of unlicensed software and hard disk loading:

Wicked Computers (Devon)
Computer Shop (Birmingham)
SupportTech (Newport)
MP Computers (Dewsbury)
OneStopComputers Ltd (Stoke on Trent)
Inspire Media Solutions (Falkirk)
Whitchurch Computer Centre (Bristol)
Director CTi Technology Ltd (Oldham)
Powerpacks PC (Eastbourne)

Michala Wardell, Head of Anti Piracy at Microsoft UK, comments "Today's announcement indicates that illegal software is not just a top level, national problem but very much a local issue. Microsoft is determined to protect customers from the pitfalls of unlawful software and is committed to working with local businesses to convey the importance of selling genuine computer programs. This latest success in clamping down on the sale of illegal software underlines just how important it is for Microsoft to work on a local level - it is our job to ensure customers are not being ripped off when they buy Microsoft computer programs. We have a duty to ensure that customers are given a good deal and are not unwittingly purchasing illegal software that puts them at risk from dangers such as computer viruses and identity theft.

By educating and informing local firms to ensure they are fully aware of the rights and wrongs when trading in Microsoft software, we can ensure that customers are not left out of pocket by illegal software trading. We want to help local computer firms operate in a legal and safe way and we believe that selling reliable, genuine software is the best way for them to keep their customers happy and their businesses profitable.

What most people don't realise is that they could have unwittingly bought counterfeit computer programs which they purchased with their PC, that are likely to be infected or harmful. In Britain, we've found that one in three computer programs installed on computers are counterfeit which puts consumers at great risk as using these programs can lead to a loss of bank details, for example, or even a loss of items such as family photo albums and music collections saved on their computer. Because of this, it's important that we minimise the dangers consumers face from fake software by educating local computer shops and clamping down on the dishonest PC dealers who are also putting genuine computer firms out of business."

Suffolk's Trading Standards department joins forces with Microsoft's regional efforts.

Microsoft's regional approach to educate local computer businesses about the dangers of selling illegal software and the consequences this has for their customers is helped by the work of Suffolk County Council's Trading Standards Department.

As a spokesman for Suffolk County Council's Trading Standards said: "Counterfeit products, software piracy and Intellectual Property theft cause substantial financial loss to legitimate businesses in Suffolk and to the software industry overall. Trading Standards can take enforcement action but the message is made more powerful to the business community and to the public when companies like Microsoft educate and inform local computer retailers on the do's and don'ts of software trading."

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Notes to Editor

Definitions

Unlicensed software

Unlicensed software is a common type of piracy. It happens when individuals and businesses make copies of software without a licence to do so. People may copy a program and give it to their friends/family without realising that this is software piracy.

Sometimes an organisation will install software on more computers than its licences allow. Aside from the financial harm this causes, it puts users at risk because they are using software without a licence.

Hard disk loading

Hard disk loading normally happens when builders of computer systems sell PCs with unlicensed software pre-installed. These dealers use one copy of a software program but install it illegally on many machines. The original disks and the documents that should come with the PC are often missing or incomplete. If they are supplied, they frequently turn out to be counterfeit.

About Microsoft

Founded in 1975, Microsoft (Nasdaq "MSFT") is the worldwide leader in software, services and solutions that help people and businesses realise their full potential.

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