

Intellectual Property: web business sold illegal copies of software

A father and son have pleaded guilty to selling USD1 million worth of counterfeit computer software through the Internet. And used search-engine small-ads to promote their activities.

Robert D. Cook, 56, and his son, Todd A. Cook, 23, both of Wichita Falls, Texas, have pleaded guilty to criminal copyright infringement and conspiracy to commit criminal copyright infringement before U.S. District Court Judge T.S. Ellis III, in Alexandria, Virginia.

According to court documents, from July 2006 through May 2008, the Cooks operated several Web sites that sold large volumes of counterfeit software with a combined retail value of approximately USD1 million. The defendants admitted that they used these Web sites to sell downloadable counterfeit software without authorisation from the copyright owners. The defendants also admitted that they promoted their illicit scheme by purchasing advertising for their Web sites from major Internet search engines.

Both defendants face up to five years in prison, a fine of USD250,000 and three years of supervised release. Sentencing has been scheduled for 18 June, 2010.

The convictions of Robert and Todd Cook are the latest in an investigation out of Wichita Falls, in which four other men have been convicted for operating Web sites engaged in the sale of illegally copied software. Thomas C. Rushing III, William Lance Partridge and Brian C. Rue all pleaded guilty to criminal copyright infringement in U.S. District Court in Austin, Texas, on 22 Aug., 2008. Timothy K. Dunaway pleaded guilty to criminal copyright infringement on 20 Oct., 2008, in U.S. District Court in Wichita Falls.

Combined, the counterfeit software sold by these individuals had a retail value of more than USD10 million.

Including the guilty pleas by the Cooks, the DoJ has obtained 46 convictions involving online auction and commercial distribution of counterfeit software.