Top Pirate Reveals Warez Scene Secrets, Attracts MPAA Lawyer's Attention [1]

Last week, a senior member of the warez scene took part in a rare interview. In it, he reveals some interesting things about this shadowy world but the question is: Did he reveal too much? MPAA pirate-chasing lawyer Espen Tondel now says that The Scene will be "brought to justice".

We've carried articles [2] in the past [3] about the Scene. So legend goes, these people are ultra-secretive but of course there's always a few who like to talk, despite being targeted by law enforcement in cases such as Operation Fastlink [4] and Operation Buccaneer [5].

Last week, an administrator of a Topsite [6] (an important guy, near to the top of the so-called 'Piracy Pyramid [7]') linked to some very famous release groups [8], broke cover in a very rare interview [9] with Trond Bie of itavisen.no, seemingly giving away quite a few secrets such as the security techniques used by the Scene and the locations of some of their servers. He also explains why the Scene dislikes torrents and sites like The Pirate Bay, and reveals how some torrent sites manage to get Scene releases so quickly.

In the interview, the Site-Op mocks the efforts of Norwegian police in trying to shutdown the Norwegian Scene, joking that Norwegian law prevents them from being caught in the traditional ways. This attitude could've been the thing that attracted the eye of Espen Tondel, the aggressive MPAA/IFPI lawyer who also talked about action [10] against torrent sites recently. RayJoha, a reader of TorrentFreak who did a lot of work on this article, contacted Tondel and asked him a few questions which you can read at the bottom of this article.

The Interview (translation from Norwegian, courtesy RayJoha)

The guy we talked to is one of the few administrators of a Topsite in Norway. He's in his mid twenties, is a student of programming and has been a part of the Scene for many years. He first became a Topsite Site-Op in 2003 and has since been responsible for adding users, banning ruleset violators and programming automating IRC-scripts.

In addition to being a Site-Op he also has his own home-based server where he downloads movies, games and TV-shows to and from the Topsites. He has a very fast Internet connection which make it possible to download a DVD movie in minutes.

Everybody keeps everybody informed

In addition to categories such as games, software, music and movies we have a news category on the Topsites warning against raids. Lamers are also posted in this news category. It's also possible to find out who leaks warez to trackers and the P2P community. Those who leak will be banned from the Scene. It is very easy for the police to find those people who are spreading torrents.

One of the reasons it is quite difficult to break the Scene is due to a very sophisticated security system. The system we use on Topsites and IRC is SSL. This comes on top of Blowfish-aggregation on IRC. You have to log in to one of the Topsites to get the Blowkey password. Without Blowkey everything will be encrypted. The Topsites encrypt everything with SSL. It's not unusual to have 30 TerraBytes of warez on a Topsite. Last summer German police raided a Topsite which had 40 members. The following was posted on Topsites news sections to warn the entire Scene, (from German):

> *New police action in Germany. This morning 40 members got a visit from the BKA, (Bundes Kriminal Amt). All user accounts etc…. Everybody that has visited the site is in great danger!*
>
> *I miss you*

Laws must change?

Changing the laws will have no effect. The MP3 legislation… the only thing they do is make it difficult for ordinary downloaders/torrent users – those who download from a website, torrentsite, Limewire or with any other P2P software. It would be easier for the government if the police could create their own 'entrapment servers', but they could only hurt the Scene, not destroy it.

What's the probability of getting caught?

HaHa, there's almost no chance of getting caught in Norway. The Norwegian police cannot do anything illegal to get somebody. By law, they cannot set up servers to entice users to join. All the users in the network know each other. Members of the Scene have joined only through someone vouching for them. I do it because it's a learning experience and fun. I learn a lot

about running servers, programming, (C, C ++, Java and scripting). I started with this before I realized I could have a career in programming. When you learn a few programming languages it's quite easy to pick up new ones.

His interest in file sharing has been there for years, but it took some time before he became a Topsite Site-Op. He reveals that there are lot of Norwegian ISPs, especially those that deliver fiber connections, that have Topsite servers as customers.

The first time I became a Site-Op it was 2003. I started setting up servers on my own, but at that time we had no affiliation with the Scene. There are lots of sites on Lyse, Hafslund and Sandefjord and I also know that servers are found around university campuses.

The Site-Op tells us that he has no plans of quitting piracy, even when he gets a real job in the software business.

It's real hard to catch pirates, i've learned. I get to understand how it works, making it possible to protect myself against it. Anything that comes to market is cracked even before we post it. There's no point for the industry in spending millions on copy protection.

The social side of the Scene

Is there a social environment in the Scene or is it just IRC chatting all the time?

Nobody sees anybody. The IRC OPs knows who the others are, but normally we don't know who they are in real life. We only use nick names.

The Site-Op feels it's easy to replace persons that are arrested in raids with some exceptions. Game crackers [people who remove copy protection] can't easily be replaced. There's just a few people with their skills around.

It's correct that you can't easily replace a cracker, it's a real genius game. Sometimes we might lose everyone, but they're real hard to catch. Let's say they manage to cripple the Game-Scene, but they still have to deal with movies and music, and thats something Mr. anybody can do. [Rip movies and music]

The FBI are allowed to set up fake servers, but they are not successful in their endeavors. If the Norwegian police are going to catch anyone they have to adopt the same strategy. You can't take down Topsites without resorting to illegality: they'd have to distribute copyrighted material. Actually doing something illegal. note: *strictly prohibited in Norway*

Site-Op's responsibilities

I don't know any informants, but there is a strong possibility there are some. If the Scene discovers this the individual will be banned with the help of Topsite news and barred from access to any resource within the Scene.

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As a Site-Op he has a series of tasks perform in order for the site to work properly.

A Site-Op adds users and makes sure the ruleset are obeyed. He's programming and scripting. Linux servers are almost always running glftpd.

Pre-Information

The Site-Op is one of a selected few who has pre-information. Pre-information is information about a specific warez that haven't been shared with anyone yet. The different groups, (Razor1911, Fairlight etc), have their own folders on the Topsites with not yet released content. The competition is fierce when it comes to being the first to release a movie or a game.

When a "ware" is pre-released a so-called Race starts. A Race means that every Topsite tries to be the first to distribute. In this way the Scene is almost like an economy in itself. First to market doesn't mean monetary survival but rather the gain of Respect.

There are unbelievably few people that has pre-information. Only Admins can browse all Pre-folders. One shouldn`t sneak a peak on a pre. It's a rule not to browse on somebody else's folder.

The Site-Op's connections with the 'Big' people in the Scene

A Site-Op communicates with the real 'big-wigs' in the Scene – the ones that really puzzle the game and movie industries. The largest groups use their own IRC servers to communicate, while the Topsites often use Linknet with SSL.

We are in direct contact with Fairlight and the others. We talk to them on IRC. A great proportion of them are Linknet. The largest Topsites have their own servers giving them increased security.

Additionally, the Site-Op reveals that many Sceners post internal information on Wikipedia.

The scene harbours ill feelings towards the torrent community. According to the Scene they are stealing their warez and posting it on trackers. The Scene is of the opinion that it's real easy to bust people that posts warez on torrent sites like The Pirate Bay.

What happens is that people leak from the Scene to torrent sites just before a release. That indicates that these lamers have access to early sites. And if you are the one of those that does this you are categorized as an Insecure user and therefore banned from the Scene. So, to be clear, this is the only connection we have to the torrent scene.

Dislike of The Pirate Bay

We, as Site-ops, have no fondness for The Pirate Bay. We do not want to talk to the press because it pressures the police to focus on us. As a software programmer I dislike file sharing, because of the small companies that suffers from it. Members of the Scene learn a lot and find it to be a fun experience. The top Sceners buy the music and the movies on DVD anyway.

As an example I have purchased, (With money), FlashFXP to support the developers. This is software I use a lot. If you follow this thinking the best thing to do is to get rid of all the file sharers, mainly because it`s so insecure. The police are able to just walk in and identify the sharers. **END**

Q+A: Espen Tondel, MPAA/IFPI lawyer

Q: Is there anything in this interview that gives you tips on how to get these guys?

Let me put it this way – we have a considerable amount of information about these sites. We know how they work.

Q :Do you think this article [the original interview] will make it easier to bring the Norwegian Scene to justice, considering that he reveals what kind of software and which ISPs they're using?

From my point of view the Norwegian Scene will be brought to justice, we possess a lot of information.

Q: Norway has always been at the forefront of technology development. Do you think Hollywood should target Norway first?

Norway is obviously a good place for tech development and we have necessary legislation hence Norway is a good place for pursuing these kind of activities. We have the full backing of the Motion Picture Association in doing that.

Did this guy give away too many secrets or is Tondel simply bluffing? Time will tell.

Update: Some people are naturally questioning the authenticity of the guy claiming to be a Site-Op. The author of the original article, Trond Bie from Norway's ITavisen [11] has just confirmed that he conducted this interview at his home and all the time he was watching the Site-Op doing

that he conducted this interview at his home and all the time he was watching the Site-Op doing 'administrative stuff' on the topsite which he says, couldn't be mistaken for anything else.

1. http://torrentfreak.com/top-pirate-reveals-warez-scene-secrets-071119/

2. http://torrentfreak.com/shining-light-on-the-warez-darknet-a-scene-insider-speaks/

3. http://torrentfreak.com/interview-with-a-warez-scene-releaser/

4. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Fastlink

5. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Operation_Buccaneer

6. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Topsite_%28warez%29

7. http://theminiblog.co.uk/archives/2006/06/03/the-internet-piracy-pyramid/

8. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/List_of_warez_groups

9. http://itavisen.no/sak/496550/M%F8te_med_norsk_topp-pirat/

10. http://torrentfreak.com/oink-down-norwegian-bittorrent-trackers-next-071024/

11. http://www.itavisen.no/