

The Over Thirty Crowd Doesn't Understand How Easy It Is to Pirate Content

By **CHRISTOPHER MATTHEWS** | January 23, 2012

Internet companies like Google and Mozilla dealt backers of SOPA and PIPA a pretty vicious, if not deadly, [blow](#) last week with a [coordinated online protest](#) against the proposed laws, which seek to curb online piracy of copyrighted content. Though representatives of content producers, like the Motion Picture Association of America, [claim](#) that online piracy costs the U.S. economy \$58 billion a year and more than 373,000 jobs, Internet firms and non-profits like Wikipedia successfully countered with the argument that SOPA and PIPA would needlessly stifle the free flow of information and the continued evolution of the Internet. (TIME's parent, Time Warner, backs the laws.)

Much of the web's chattering class rallied around opponents of the laws. Commentators like the Cato Institute's Julian Sanchez [poked serious holes](#) in the MPAA's estimates — and argued that the collateral damage of SOPA and PIPA, including the costs of enforcement and administration, would outweigh the benefits of any jobs and money saved by the laws. And Matthew Yglesias [argued](#) that it's impossible to know the real costs to the entertainment and software industries of online piracy: Just because someone pirates a CD or movie, for instance, doesn't mean they would have bought it if it weren't free.

(MORE: [SOPA Protests Gain Steam as Web Activists Flex Growing Clout](#))

But even if SOPA and PIPA are seriously flawed, it remains true that piracy is a real threat to the creative class and their corporate backers. There have been many arguments [made](#) that file sharing is actually good for artists because it spreads awareness of their work. But that argument only holds water if a large number of people would end up buying the product eventually. And there are at least two reasons to doubt that they will. First, piracy is thoroughly engrained in youth culture. A [study](#) published in the International Journal of Cyber Criminology states that over half of th graders have pirated copyrighted content in the past month, and 25% pirate content every day.

Second, stealing content is astoundingly easy to do and getting easier — and if you doubt that, you probably came of age before the Internet became ubiquitous. When a forty-year-old wants to listen to, say, the new Fleet Foxes album, *Helplessness Blues*, what does he do? If he's web savvy, he might head over to Amazon.com or iTunes and fork over \$10 dollars for an mp3 version. Often times this involves clunky processes like entering in credit card information or typing in a password.

(LIST: [Ten Prominent Websites Protesting SOPA and PIPA](#))

What does a twenty year old do? He goes to Google and types in “Fleet Foxes Helplessness Blues zip.” (Zip is the format in which many compressed media files are stored online.) He might then click on the very first link that pops up — in this case, a site called Mediafire, a free file-hosting site — and then on a button that reads “Download.” Roughly seven minutes later, the entire album is sitting on his desktop, ready to go. No credit card, no password, no waiting.

Or say that 20-year-old wants to watch the latest season of HBO's *Boardwalk Empire*? He simply goes to the website [1 Channel](#), searches for Boardwalk Empire, and watches it for free.

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This isn't just about entertainment either. Even expensive computer software can be easily downloaded using BitTorrent clients like [Vuze](#). [BitTorrent](#) is a peer-to-peer program that allows users to download tiny bits of a file from tens or hundreds of users simultaneously. Clients like Vuze are user friendly and can also be used to steal music and movies, and the more popular the file one tries to download, the less time the process takes.

Perhaps SOPA and PIPA are ham-handed instruments written by men who don't [understand the Internet](#). Perhaps this legislation would hamper our freedom and the evolution of the Internet. But the problem of piracy is real and growing. A generation of adolescents and twenty-somethings have grown up thinking that music, movies and software should be free. They bristle at the idea of paying for it. And as those consumers become the next engine of the American economy, content producers will face huge hurdles in overcoming that mindset.

Read more: <http://business.time.com/2012/01/23/the-over-thirty-crowd-doesnt-understand-how-easy-it-is-to-pirate-content/#ixzz1kJVQqVeT>