

What's On

Illegal downloaders could have limited web access

Entertainment firms adopt piracy warning system

LOS ANGELES, July 9, (RTRS): A broad coalition of entertainment industry companies, guilds, Internet services and telecommunications providers said Thursday they have joined to launch a new warning system to tell consumers when they have downloaded copyrighted material illegally.

Under the new measures, illegal downloaders could find their ability to surf the web restricted for a time — though not have their access to the Internet terminated indefinitely, the coalition maintains.

If a few well-timed slaps on the wrist fail to stop users from stocking up on pirated movies or music, Internet providers can temporarily slow or limit access.

The coalition includes the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), the Recording Industry of America (RIAA), industry guilds and Internet, phone and cable companies including AT&T, Cablevision Systems Corp, Comcast Corp, Time Warner Cable, and Verizon. The effort has been dubbed the "Copyright Alert System."

Cary Sherman, President of RIAA, called it "a significant step forward not only for the creative community, which invests in and brings great entertainment to the public, but for consumers and the legitimate online marketplace as well."

But it is not, the coalition maintains,

Schmidt wants more Facebook, Twitter integration

Google sees room for several social networks

SUN VALLEY, Idaho, July 9, (RTRS): Google Inc is leaving open the door to more co-operation with social-media giants Facebook and Twitter, and believes there is room for multiple social networks as it rolls out its own, executive chairman Eric Schmidt said.

He also said the company will cooperate fully with US antitrust regulators but will not let the formal probe launched last month distract or disrupt its strategy. He was speaking to journalists at the Allen & Co media conference in Sun Valley, Idaho.

Schmidt, who vacated his CEO

seat to co-founder Larry Page in April and now oversees government affairs, said it was too early to say how its new social network, Google Plus, was faring — but one key indication of success is the number of people clamoring to be part of the limited group currently using Plus, which launched in trial mode last week.

One of the more popular features on Plus, especially with younger users, was online video chat, he said.

Singling out two services where Google Plus can now be viewed as a competitor, Schmidt said he would "love to have deeper integration with

Twitter and Facebook."

Google's search deal with Twitter recently expired, and despite "a substantive and lengthy discussion," the companies could not agree on terms, he said.

And Google's overtures to Facebook to discuss letting Plus users import Facebook friends also went nowhere, Schmidt said.

Schmidt laid out a future with multiple sources of online identity and multiple social networks, even as detractors say Facebook's service, with millions of users around the world, is too entrenched to allow for serious competition.

Japan firm eyes renewable energy

NTT DoCoMo plans 'green' towers

TOKYO, July 9, (AFP): Japan's largest mobile phone operator, NTT DoCoMo, plans to start powering its cellphone tower network with renewable energy such as solar, wind or biomass, the company said Friday.

The move could one day allow the company to feed excess electricity back into the grid, and would also act as a safeguard during power grid outages caused by natural disasters such as the March 11 quake and tsunami.

NTT DoCoMo, which has 90,000 cellphone relay stations, will start the project by building

some 10 renewable energy facilities in fiscal year 2012 to supplement the conventional electricity supply, media reports said.

Daisuke Sakuma, a spokesman at NTT DoCoMo, told AFP that "we are planning 'green transmission stations,' which would be run on eco-energy such as bio-fuel cells, wind or solar power."

"We have not decided details yet, including how many stations would be operated that way," he said, adding that the company could one day sell excess energy, although for now its aim was to meet its own power needs.

analogous to the controversial "three strikes" policies adopted in some European countries that bar Internet access to users who violate copyright protections repeatedly.

"This is not a three-strikes plan. It creates no new laws or legal procedures," Tom Dailey, Deputy General Counsel

for Verizon, said on a conference call.

The primary distinction seems to be that this is not being put forward as law, but rather a series of "best practices" that Internet providers will implement voluntarily. Coalition members said on the call that they will not be pushing for new legislation stemming from this initiative.

Perhaps the most important element is the entertainment industry's securing the participation of Internet providers, who studios and record companies have long complained were largely indifferent to the problem of digital piracy.

Coalition members portrayed the move as educational, versus punitive.

Dailey said during the call that the system was designed to "educate and inform customers, not to penalize them."

Under the new system, users will be directed to a landing page after receiving five to six warnings, which will require them to contact their Internet providers or respond to some educational materi-

als. Before their Internet access is restricted, users will have the option of requesting an independent review at a cost of \$35.

The copyright infringement warnings are being likened to alerts that consumers receive when their credit cards have been compromised.

Technology

iPhone up in US

'Civilization' lets players to rule

SAN FRANCISCO, July 9, (Agencies): Facebook friends will be able to conspire together to rule the world in a free version of blockbuster "Civilization" strategy videogame crafted for the online social network.

2K Games on Thursday released a "Sid Meier's Civilization World for Facebook" application online at apps.facebook.com/civworld.

"Our team set out to create an exciting 'Civilization' game for Facebook where for the first time, players can join with their friends to build a powerful empire and rule the world," said Sid Meier, director of creative development at Firaxis Games studio.

The Facebook game is set in an online world where players collaborate to build the strongest nation and become the most powerful civilization by wielding economic, technological, political, or military might.

"With over ten million units sold worldwide, 'Sid Meier's Civilization' is world renowned as one of the greatest strategy game franchises," said 2K president Christoph Hartmann.

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iPhone: Apple's iPhone has leapfrogged Research In Motion's BlackBerry to grab fourth-place among handset manufacturers in the United States, tracking firm comScore said Tuesday.

The iPhone's share of US mobile subscribers rose to 8.7 percent in the three months ending in May from 7.5 percent three months earlier, while RIM's share fell to 8.1 percent from 8.6 percent, comScore said.

Samsung was the top handset manufacturer overall with a 24.8 percent share of US mobile subscribers, unchanged from three months earlier, comScore said.

LG was next with a 21.1 percent share of mobile subscribers, up from 20.9 percent, followed by Motorola, which fell to 15.1 percent from 16.1 percent.

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Netflix: Netflix is expanding its movie and TV show streaming service into 43 countries throughout Latin America in the online movie rental company's largest international expansion yet.

Analysts said the expansion was larger than expected. The company's stock hit an all-time high of \$283.50 in morning trading Tuesday.

Netflix Inc. subscribers in Mexico, South and Central America and the Caribbean will be able to watch TV shows and movies streamed on a wide range of gadgets starting this year. The company did not announce a pricing plan or say exactly when the service will be available.

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Twitter: The US micro-blogging website Twitter is gaining value and is now worth an estimated \$8 billion, the New York Times reported Friday.

The newspaper, citing two people briefed on the matter, said the popular website is in the process of raising \$400 million in a deal that has provided the latest estimation of its value.

The Wall Street Journal had reported a similar deal on Tuesday, putting the company's valuation at up to \$7 billion.

The Times cited one of its sources as saying that the financing round will be led by DST Global, the investment firm headed by Russian billionaire Yuri Milner, and that previous investors, including the venture capital firm Kleiner Perkins Caufield & Byers, will also participate.

Gaming



In this video game image released by Microsoft, a giant mech battles electronic monsters in a scene from 'Trenched'. (AP)

'Trenched' witty mash-up with laugh-out-loud gags

Game downloads, big fun at a small price

By Lou Kesten

Video-game publishers seem to believe their audience would rather risk sunburn than have fun in air-conditioned comfort, so you won't find many major new games in stores during the summer. But that doesn't mean there's nothing new out there - and you don't need to search any further than the online services Xbox Live Arcade and the PlayStation Store.

One studio that's made a big impression in the download-only market is Double Fine Productions, led by industry legend Tim Schafer. Its new release is called "Trenched" (Microsoft, for Xbox 360, \$15), and it's a witty mash-up of the third-person shooter and tower defense genres.

You control a "trench," a giant, walking mech that you can deck out with machine guns, cannons, grenade launchers and other weapons. You can also place a limited number of stationary turrets to help defend your territory. You'll need all that to save Western civilization from the Tubes, an electronic menace bent on enslaving humanity.

"Trenched" isn't as silly as Double Fine's previous downloadable titles, "Costume Quest" and "Stacked," though it does have some laugh-out-loud gags. (From a menu describing an olive paint job you can apply to your trench: "This paint is not actually made of olives. Please do not eat it.")

On the other hand, the game play is more expertly paced, smoothly ramping up the difficulty as it provides access to more powerful weapons. It's a relatively short campaign, but the ability to join forces with up to three friends online boosts its replay value. Three stars out of four.

In "Half-Minute Hero: Super Mega Neo Climax" (Marvelous Entertainment, for Xbox 360, \$10), you have just 30 seconds to stop a madman from unleashing Armageddon. Fail, and you can reset and try again. Succeed,

and the credits roll - until you discover there's another madman waiting in the next town over.

Over the course of more than 60 quests, "Half-Minute Hero" deftly parodies all the clichés and conventions of Japanese role-playing games like "Final Fantasy." As someone who has spent hundreds of hours saving the

world, I really got a kick out of saving two or three during a TV commercial break. Three stars.

"Red Johnson's Chronicles" (Lexis Numerique, for PlayStation 3, \$13) is less frenetic but still absorbing. It's a detective story laced with brain-teasers, much like Nintendo's Professor Layton games, but the mystery is more

and "Star Wars: The Old Republic" tap into this vein.

These storytelling games could not come at a better time. US sales of gaming consoles and video games hit a peak in 2008, at \$21.4 billion, according to market research firm NPD Group. Since then, annual sales have fallen 13 percent to \$18.6 billion in 2010. So far in 2011, sales are flat compared with last year.

With the recent Supreme Court decision protecting violent games as free speech, it is more appropriate than ever for games to have more of a message.

Part of the goal of involved storytelling is to keep players occupied longer, playing out stories through to the end. Video game makers are trying to stop players from getting bored and quickly offloading games onto used game shops, which can sap sales.

The new games merge first-person shoot-em-ups with movie plot lines to develop what some in the industry are calling a new art form.

In the past, games mostly sandwicheed so-called theatrical "cut scenes" between bouts of trigger-finger action. In "Grand Theft Auto IV," for instance, players are given mis-

sions on a roughly linear progression as other hoodlums call by cell phone and recruit them to participate in crimes that will elevate the player in rank. Players can follow along or ignore the story lines in favor of other pursuits, such as discovering hidden details like the giant, chained heart inside the Statue of Liberty lookalike.

Gradually, non-action scenes are becoming more central to games and the story is the focus. "Grand Theft" was a start in that direction, with two different endings depending on player choices. The new "Star Wars" game will have about 20 different endings and a billion ways to get there.

"Photographs tell stories. Movies tell stories. Songs tell stories. Games tell stories," said Ken Levine, creative director for Irrational Games.

Levine's studio is poised to release "BioShock Infinite" next year. The shooting game confronts main character Booker with moral decisions such as saving a man from execution or putting down a horse, all the while roaming around an immersive floating world that resembles early 20th century America.

"My mom's not going to connect to the story of 'Mega Man 2,'" Levine said, referring to the pixelated

Capcom game from the late 1980s. "But hopefully she can connect to a story like this."

These storytelling games represent yet another way the video game business is reaching out to people who have not traditionally considered themselves "gamers." Mobile games including "Angry Birds" and addicting social-network games such as "FarmVille" have gotten more women to play. Motion controllers from Microsoft, Sony and Nintendo have turned video gaming into a physical workout that appeals to young and old.

Storytelling games could appeal to those attracted to character development more than killing.

Lindsay Grace, professor of interactive media studies at Miami University, said the video game industry is trying to accomplish what Hollywood has turned into a science: entering new markets by offering a little something for everyone: a little romance, a little action, a little this and that.

"Games have started to understand this in the last four to five years, but they are later to understand that than film," he said. "Before, it was a shooting game, and that's what you do."

down-to-earth: Who killed a much-loathed street thug? It's not a particularly surprising or rewarding case, and the end game - in which you have to answer about 50 multiple-choice questions to build an indictment - is a drag.

However, during the investigation you have to solve a few dozen puzzles of observation and logic. These chal-

lenges are generally clever, and a few are downright diabolical (but fair). "Red Johnson" is an odd beast, mixing noir atmospherics, Soviet-style graphics, a jazzy soundtrack and a protagonist who looks more hipster than gumshoe. But it delivers a satisfying set of puzzles for a good price. Two-and-a-half stars. (AP)