

January 2011

## Traffic Report: Online Piracy and Counterfeiting

# Traffic Report: Online Piracy and Counterfeiting

---

## Contents

Key Findings .....	4
Methodology .....	4
Criteria for Websites .....	5
Traffic Analysis .....	7
Conclusion .....	8

The Internet is arguably one of the greatest innovations of modern society—allowing for countless new businesses to thrive and dramatically altering the way society operates. The Internet has enabled a global marketplace to flourish with lightning-quick communication and an unparalleled access to information. However, the advancement of the Internet into nearly all of our daily activities, combined with rapid download speeds, the perfection of digital copies, the rise of e-commerce and the complexity of online enforcement, has magnified the seriousness and consequences of online counterfeiting and piracy. Websites offering pirated goods generate billions of visits annually, and websites that sell counterfeit luxury goods, fake drugs, and products that may pose health and safety risks attract hundreds of millions annually.

Recognizing that illicit online sales have a significant impact on the U.S. economy in financial terms as well as in public health and well-being, MarkMonitor® worked to identify a sample of rogue Internet sites that are responsible for trafficking counterfeit and pirated goods. The goal of the project was to illustrate the nature of this illicit ecosystem and, using publicly-available traffic information on the number of visits, determine its scope.

The first step was to identify business categories and brands targeted by online counterfeiters and digital pirates. Using 22 major brands as criteria—ranging from pharmaceuticals, luxury goods, and apparel to entertainment titles and software—MarkMonitor used its patented technology to comb the Internet for sites suspected of offering counterfeit goods or pirated digital content. The initial scans resulted in more than 10,000 results which were then de-duplicated and filtered further using MarkMonitor technology to identify dedicated e-commerce and digital download sites. The final step required hand-examination and verification of more than 600 results to determine classification. Since some sites offered multiple brands, this step led to almost 100 unique domains or websites which were then classified in one of two ways: ‘counterfeit’ or ‘digital piracy’.

Using publicly-available Internet traffic data from Alexa, the sites were then ranked by the number of visits, which were significant, speaking to the level of demand for these goods as well as to the website operators’ success in promoting these sites so they are visible and accessible online. Since the study used a sample of only 22 brands, it provides a small glimpse of the nature of online intellectual property (IP) theft and the dark side of illicit e-commerce. However, given the large number of popular brands, it is reasonable to assume that hundreds of thousands of other rights-holders, brands and content creators are suffering the same damage.

---

“*As our economy has worsened, brand abusers have sharpened their focus.*”

## Key Findings

The study's findings demonstrate that online distribution of pirated digital content and e-commerce sales of counterfeit goods is rampant. Specific findings include:

- In total, the 10 media brands in the study yielded 43 unique sites classified as 'digital piracy.' Traffic generated to these sites was over 146 million visits per day, representing more than 53 billion visits per year.
- The top-three websites classified as 'digital piracy'—rapidshare.com, megavideo.com, and megaupload.com—collectively generate more than 21 billion visits per year.
- The availability of reliable infrastructure is an important factor in the location of sites hosting piracy. The study found that North America and Western Europe represented the host location for 67 percent of the sites classified as 'digital piracy.'
- The combined traffic to the 48 sites selling counterfeit goods is more than 240,000 visits per day on average or more than 87 million visits per year.
- When it comes to host location of the sites categorized as 'counterfeit', 73 percent were hosted in North America or Western Europe. Eastern European countries hosted another 14 percent of the sites while 9 percent of the sites were hosted in Asia.
- The combined traffic to the 26 sites selling counterfeit prescription drugs is more than 141,000 visits per day on average or more than 51 million visits per year.
- The combined traffic to the 21 e-commerce sites selling counterfeit luxury goods is more than 98,000 visits per day on average or almost 36 million visits per year.

These findings are just the tip of the iceberg. The true scope of the problem is exponentially higher in terms of user traffic, lost revenue and risks to public health and safety.

## Methodology

Using a list of industries most affected by online counterfeiting and digital piracy,<sup>1</sup> MarkMonitor chose major brands from each industry and ran automated scans for those brands using its patented technology. In all, the study examined 22 brands in the digital content category (movies/TV shows, music and software/videogames) and the physical goods category (handbags, sports apparel, pharmaceuticals and luxury items, footwear, and apparel.)

The study used very narrow criteria to classify sites selling physical goods as 'counterfeit.' It is important to point out that many of the e-commerce sites that did not meet that strict guideline did display multiple factors arousing suspicion. This

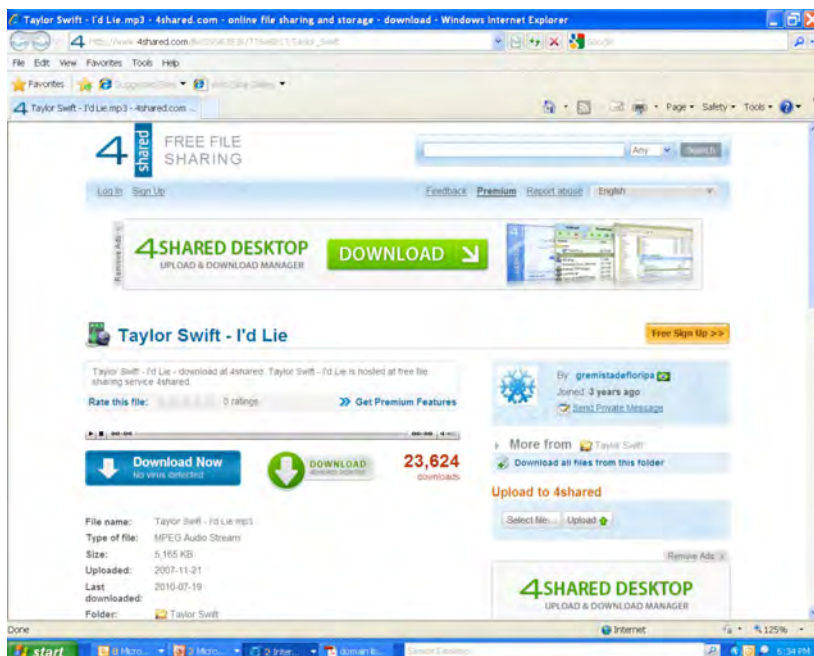
---

*“The study used only 22 brands, so we can assume that many other brands and content-creators are suffering similar damage.”*

<sup>1</sup> Digital Content industries: Entertainment (music/movies/television shows), Software/Videogames; Physical Goods: Handbags, Sports Apparel with logos, Pharmaceuticals, luxury items, footwear, and apparel.

underscores the crucial role that brand owners and law enforcement personnel trained by brand owners play in determining whether a site is offering counterfeit goods. Technology can be used to conduct the heavy lifting in identifying and prioritizing sites for further action, but the in-depth market and product knowledge of brand owners' is vital.

The scans focused on identifying e-commerce and peer-to-peer, streaming, and torrent sites that yielded high traffic levels. In order to be classified as an e-commerce site, the site needed to contain a shopping cart while the sites classified as piracy needed to contain some type of link, index or player that could be used to download, stream or share digital content. These criteria were designed to eliminate editorial, blog or discussion sites and to focus exclusively on sites where pirated goods could be shared, viewed, streamed or downloaded and counterfeit goods could be purchased.



Site attracts more than 10 million visits per day.

The initial scans resulted in more than 10,000 results which were then de-duplicated and filtered further using MarkMonitor technology to identify dedicated e-commerce and digital content sites used for downloading, sharing or streaming. The final step required hand-examination and verification of more than 600 results to determine classification. Since some sites offered multiple brands, this step led to almost 100 unique domains or websites which were then classified as either 'counterfeit' or 'digital piracy'. The results were ranked by the amount of traffic, defined as the number of daily visits, using Alexa-supplied information. None of the scans contained MarkMonitor customer data or information.

## Criteria for Websites

The results from the initial scans were examined further by MarkMonitor experts in order to classify these sites, or domains, into one of two categories: 'counterfeit' or 'digital piracy.' After thorough analysis, MarkMonitor concluded that 91 websites with high traffic numbers qualified for inclusion in one of these categories. The 'counterfeit' classification referred to e-commerce sites selling counterfeit physical goods while the 'digital piracy' classification refers to sites offering pirated versions of music, movies, television shows, software, and videogames.

**Digital Piracy:** The total number of unique domains identified as 'digital piracy' totaled 43. To fit the 'digital piracy' classification, the domain needed to offer or point to one or more of the brands used in the digital content portion of the study for free. While some of these sites do offer takedown processes for pirated

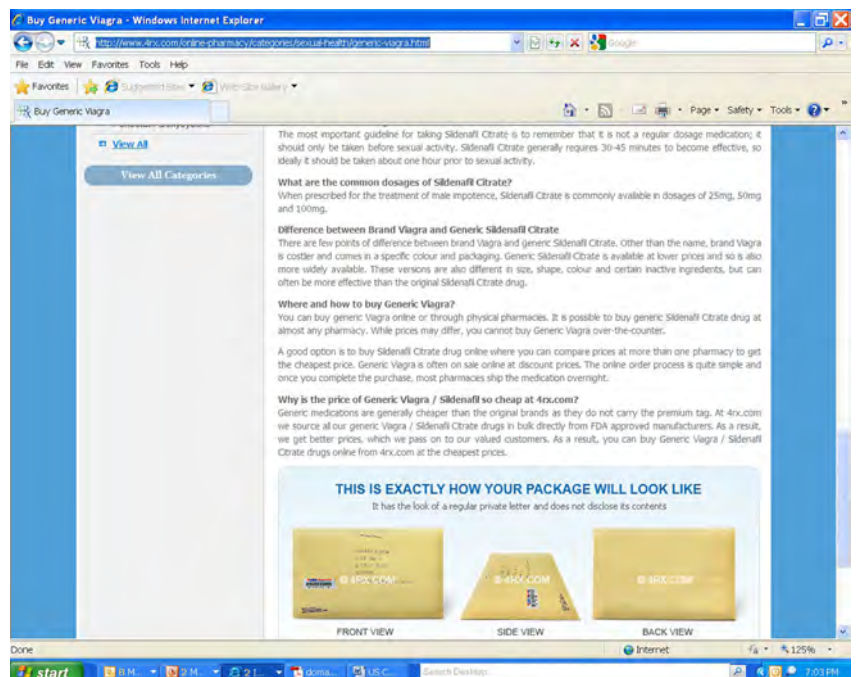
content, the action must be initiated by the content owner. The resulting domains were then sorted by traffic volume.

**‘Counterfeit’:** In the case of e-commerce domains selling physical goods, the domains needed to satisfy one of two conditions to be deemed as selling counterfeit goods: (1) either the domain itself specified that the goods were not authentic (i.e., using terms like ‘replica,’ ‘knock-off,’ and ‘copy’) or (2) in the case of pharmaceuticals, the domain offered ‘generic’ versions of prescription drugs that are not available in generic form in the U.S., targeted the U.S. market by providing pricing in U.S. currency, and did not require a prescription.<sup>2</sup> Since some domains offered more than one type of product, the domain is counted only once, even if multiple URLs for that domain surfaced during the scans. MarkMonitor found that 48 websites fell under the criteria for selling counterfeit goods.

While the online pharmacies displayed the ‘generic’ label prominently on product listings, MarkMonitor needed to consult FAQ or ‘About’ sections of the online drugstores, or even needed to follow the purchase process, in order to determine if prescriptions were required by the online pharmacy. In addition, MarkMonitor examined the currency used to quote prices, shipping information or other information on the site that indicated markets served, such as flags, shipping information, telephone numbers or references to the U.S. Drug Enforcement Agency. Many of the e-commerce domains selling counterfeit goods displayed the term ‘replica’ quite prominently while others included such information in their FAQ or ‘About.’



Site sells ‘generics’ without prescription for prescription drugs that are not available in generic form.



Site explains the difference between ‘generic’ and branded prescription drugs and highlights unmarked shipping envelopes.

<sup>2</sup> During the course of the study, MarkMonitor identified some additional sites that fit the criteria for inclusion but did not use one of the original media brands such as sites offering key generators used to ‘unlock’ protected material.

## Traffic Analysis

As a backdrop to examining website traffic figures, it is important to point out that traffic measurements can vary greatly depending on methodology. Some traffic measurement sources depend on technology, others depend on some type of user panel or community, and a third category uses a hybrid approach. Each approach has advantages and disadvantages which, as a result, allow publicly-available traffic data to vary based upon the measurement source. In this study, MarkMonitor used data based on Alexa. The more than 90 unique domains culled from the initial set of over 10,000 results display a wide range of traffic figures, depending on the type of goods being offered.

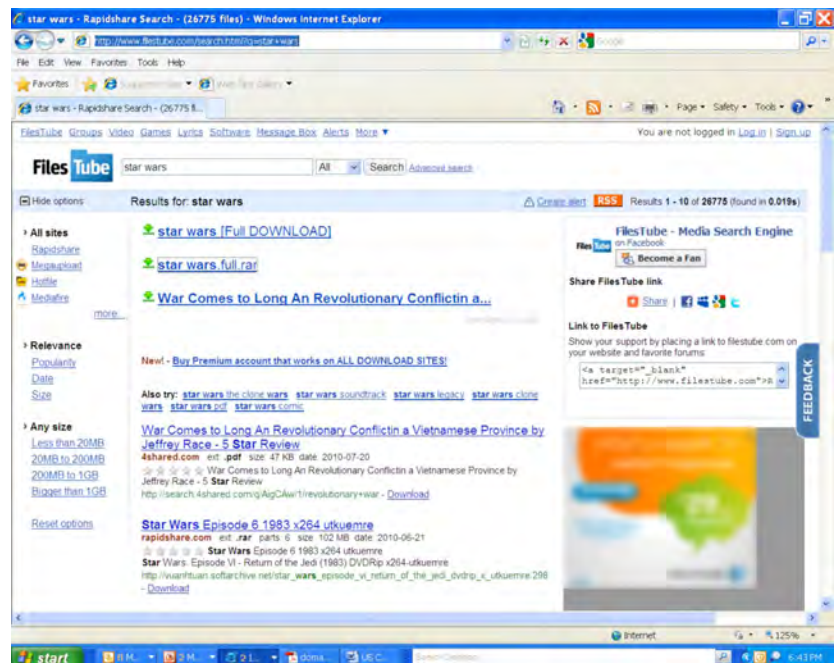
**Digital Piracy Web Traffic Analysis:** Those domains classified as ‘digital piracy’ attracted the highest levels of traffic with a high in excess of 32 million daily visits on average for the most-trafficked domain—rapidshare.com. On an annual basis, that traffic equates to more than 11.8 billion visits per year for that site. This pattern continues with the second and third most-trafficked sites—megavideo.com and megaupload.com—each of which generates more than 13 million visits per day on average, or more than 4.9 billion visits per year to each site. Collectively, these three digital piracy sites generate more than 21 billion visits per year.

In total, traffic generated to the sites classified as ‘digital piracy’ was more than 146 million visits per day, representing more than 53 billion visits per year. Lest these figures be viewed as anomalies, examining the ten least-visited ‘digital piracy’ sites show annual visits total more than 781 million per year, demonstrating that even the lesser-trafficked sites in this category drive significant traffic.

The bulk of the ‘digital piracy’ sites, or 67 percent, were hosted in North America or Western Europe.

**Counterfeit Website Traffic Analysis:** Due to the narrow criteria used to classify sites as ‘counterfeit,’ all the sites included in the analysis, with one exception, sold prescription drugs or luxury goods, including handbags, watches or jewelry. The combined traffic to the 48 sites selling counterfeit goods is more than 240,000 visits per day on average or more than 87 million visits per year. The majority of these sites reflect similar patterns as the sites classified as ‘digital piracy’ when it comes to the server’s host location with or 56 percent hosted in North America and Western Europe. However, Eastern European countries hosted 22 percent of the sites while 14 percent of the sites were hosted in Asia.

“Traffic to sites suspected of offering pirated content was over 146 million visits per day.”



Site attracts more than seven million visits per day.

However, examining the site registration information for these ‘counterfeit’ sites suggests that more of these sites may be linked to Asia as seven sites hosted in non-Asian countries are actually registered by Asian registrars. Factoring in that information indicates that 29 percent of the sites have some connection to Asia, either through host location or registrar.

While not at the scale of the suspected digital piracy sites, e-commerce domains classified as ‘counterfeit’ attracted considerable levels of traffic as well with the most-trafficked site, an Internet pharmacy, driving 28,000 daily visits on average, representing more than 10 million visits to the site per year.

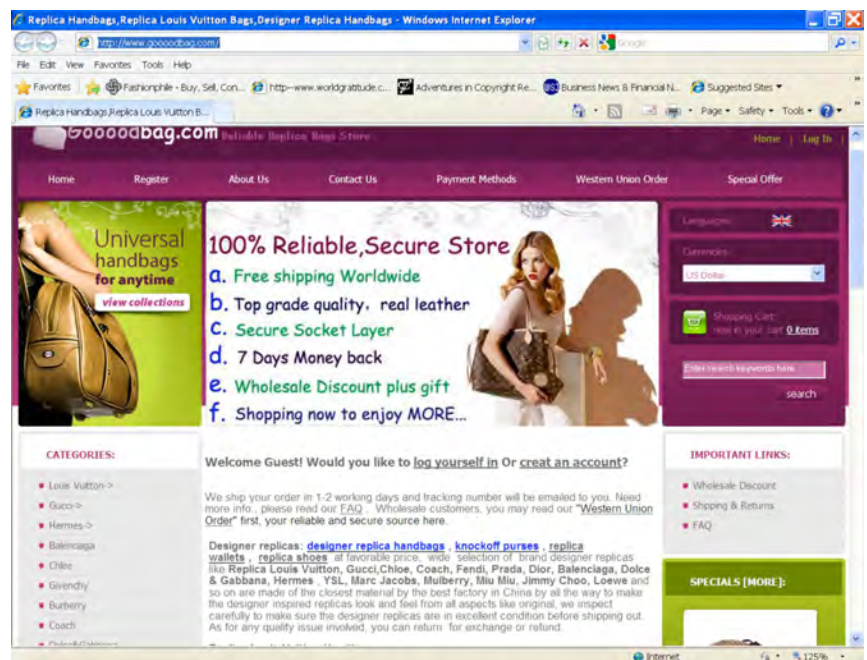
**Suspicious Sites:** During the course of the research, we identified sites that displayed one or more factors that appeared questionable, such as significant price discounts, links to sites selling counterfeit goods, trade dress issues, or, in the case of online pharmacies, no requirement for prescriptions. These types of issues underscore the crucial role that brand owners and law enforcement personnel trained by brand owners play in determining whether a site is offering counterfeit or pirated goods. While some sites are very clear in specifying their goods are ‘copies’ or ‘replicas,’ others are less forthcoming. In many cases, deep discounts combined with promises of high-quality goods from the current season raise questions that only the brand owner—with knowledge of channel strategy, pricing and partnerships—can address.

In the case of highly regulated goods like pharmaceuticals, intellectual property protections for pharmaceutical patents or regulations governing generics may differ across national boundaries. Instead, the business practices of the pharmacy itself—such as prescription requirements or sales of individual pills—are more useful in identifying suspicious drugs. The role of the brand owner, with in-depth knowledge of distribution channels, pricing and local business practices, is vital. In each of these examples, the most authoritative answer is provided by a physical examination of the goods themselves.

## Conclusion

The research presented in this study demonstrates the wide availability of pirated digital content and counterfeit goods via the Internet and e-commerce. The websites yielded in the research and analyses of this study all have one thing in common: business models that are indisputably centered on the sale or distribution of counterfeit and pirated goods. These illegal operations are shifting revenue

“Combined traffic to the sites selling counterfeit goods is more than 87 million visits per year.”



This site promotes replica designer bags and attracts more than two million visits annually.



from legitimate brands' e-commerce sites, causing economic harm and risking consumer health. This study highlights the type of data that needs to be examined in order to identify and locate sites trafficking in counterfeit and pirated goods. Accurate and unbiased information describing the scope of online counterfeiting and piracy as an essential prerequisite for safeguarding consumer safety and economic well-being.

While counterfeiting and piracy in the physical world are serious problems, these issues are growing at a significant rate online and pose unique challenges in remediation, due to the inherent nature of the Internet with its global reach, cost efficiencies, and anonymity. Awareness and educational efforts focused on the distinctive nature of online counterfeiting and piracy are necessary in developing effective response mechanisms to this global, cross-border problem. Necessary government policies, corrective legislative measures, law enforcement action and, most importantly, actively-engaged brand owners are all needed to stem this growing tide of illegal Internet activity. The bottom line is that online IP theft ultimately affects the most creative and innovative sectors of the economy, contributing to billions in lost revenue and millions of lost jobs. Protecting IP rights is a critical component of our economic resurgence, and vitally important to our future; stopping the spread of pirated and counterfeit goods is a necessity.

---

*“Combined traffic to the pharmacies selling suspected counterfeit prescription drugs is more than 51 million visits per year.”*

## About MarkMonitor

MarkMonitor, the global leader in enterprise brand protection, offers comprehensive solutions and services that safeguard brands, reputation and revenue from online risks. With end-to-end solutions that address the growing threats of online fraud, brand abuse and unauthorized channels, MarkMonitor enables a secure Internet for businesses and their customers. The company's exclusive access to data combined with its patented real-time prevention, detection and response capabilities provide wide-ranging protection to the ever-changing online risks faced by brands today. For more information, visit [www.markmonitor.com](http://www.markmonitor.com)

More than half the Fortune 100 trust MarkMonitor to protect their brands online. **See what we can do for you.**

MarkMonitor, Inc.  
U.S. (800) 745.9229  
Europe +44 (0) 207.840.1300  
[www.markmonitor.com](http://www.markmonitor.com)