

MySpace to Block Unauthorized Copyrighted Material

By Anique Gonzalez

MySpace.com, the social-networking website owned by Fox Interactive Media, Inc., recently announced that it will test video-filtering technology that prohibits the use of unauthorized copyrighted materials. Audible Magic Corporation, a leader in the anti-piracy-services industry that provides technology to various corporations in numerous fields ranging from government to entertainment, is licensing the video-filtering technology to MySpace. According to Audible Magic's press release, the "filter screens video uploaded by users and blocks any video matching a fingerprint in MySpace's database." Essentially, the technology will scan all videos for signature vectors that serve as digital fingerprints. Audio filtering and limited video filtering have been available since last year.

In a statement, Chris DeWolfe, MySpace's chief executive and co-founder stated, "MySpace is dedicated to ensuring that content owners, whether large or small, can both promote and protect their content in our community. For MySpace, video filtering is about protecting artists and the work they create."

Audible Magic's CEO and founder, Vance Ikezoye, had this to say about the partnership: "Audible Magic has a long history with identification technology and the content industry that allows us to offer comprehensive, reliable, and mature solutions for user-contributed content. As a result, Audible Magic is ideally suited to support MySpace's protection of copyrighted works."

Even so, the announcement has not been welcomed with open arms by all. Critics have questioned the technology's ability to be effective, especially on a scale of such magnitude; the site currently has 154 million members, with an average of 300,000 new users registering each day. Some fear the technology will create false positives, which occur when the technology flags files that do not violate copyrights. However, the technology is said to be highly accurate, with a 99% positive-recognition rate.

During the program's initial stages, MySpace will prohibit video or music clips that contain content from Universal Music Group, a subsidiary of Vivendi, and will also provide the technology to other organizations that wish to block their videos, as well. Currently, the site plans to continue enabling users to post authorized promotional video and audio from the Vivendi SA unit. Before the implementation of the new video-filtering process, MySpace usually only blocked video clips after copyright holders filed complaints.

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Although MySpace officials say the suit is unrelated, in November, Universal Music Group filed a copyright-infringement lawsuit against MySpace after negotiations broke down over use of Universal's materials. According to court documents, Universal claimed that the site uses "the 'user-stolen' intellectual property of others" and that it is "a willing partner in that theft."

The lawsuit, which is currently pending, seeks unspecified damages that include a maximum of \$150,000 for each video or song that was posted on the website without permission. (Universal also threatened Google, Inc.'s YouTube, a free video-sharing site, with a lawsuit in the fall; however, the two were able to reach an acceptable licensing agreement before the matter went to court. The company has filed copyright-infringement suits against Bolt and Sony's Grouper, as well.)

MySpace's new effort to prohibit the use of unauthorized copyrighted material seems to be a preventative measure taken to protect itself in the ever-changing and dynamic Internet age, especially as more and more well-known Internet companies are coming under fire. Earlier this month, for example, Google and Live Digital were forced to release the names of users who uploaded complete episodes of *24* and *The Simpsons* after 20th Century Fox filed suit. Additionally, Viacom recently forced YouTube to take down 100,000 videos that were being used illegally.

Only time will tell how these recent actions and reactions will affect the delicate balance between adhering to copyright laws while continuing to appease users. While websites such as MySpace do not want to break the law, they also do not want to drive away the individuals who make their businesses successes. Moreover, it will be interesting to see how these—as well as future—developments will impact the "fair use" of copyrighted video or music on the Internet.

On the Net

MySpace
www.myspace.com

Universal Music Group
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Audible Magic
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