

# Seven Reasons NOT to Steal Software, Music, Games or Movies

By M. E. Kabay, PhD, CISSP-ISSMP  
Associate Professor of Information Assurance  
School of Business & Management  
Norwich University  
*Tenth Edition, January 2010*

Some of the pathetic, bogus arguments people (including maybe even your friends or the swaggering criminal hackers trying to impress you with their devil-may-care antisocial bad-boy attitudes) will advance to defend the practice of software, music, game, and movie theft should be met immediately and squashed. Here are classic defenses of illegal copying and some suggested very blunt ripostes:

*Everyone's doing it.*

Response: So what? Doesn't make it right or legal. Ethical behavior is not conditional on popularity. If it's wrong or bad, it's wrong or bad regardless of how many people go along. Ever heard of Hitler? Pol Pot? The Mafia? The thugs running Burma? The creeps running China? Just because there are lots of bad people doing bad things doesn't give you a license to do whatever suits *you*.

*We won't get caught.*

Response: So what? Being caught has no bearing on whether the act is moral or legal. Doing bad things gets to be a habit regardless of whether anyone finds out about it. And companies that approve any kind of illegality are opening themselves up to blackmail or denunciation. Plus your chances of getting a good job requiring a security clearance are way down if you have a criminal record.

*It's the {software, music, game, movie} company's fault: if they don't want theft, they should charge less.*

Response: First of all, even shareware authors get cheated by people who use their software without paying for it – and these are packages for which the authors ask for a few dollars. Secondly, the owner of the software/music/game/movie has no obligation to meet someone else's view of appropriate pricing. Thirdly, no one has a right or entitlement to use the fruits of other people's hard work for free unless they're given permission; if you don't like the price, find a more cost-effective alternative or write it/compose it/create it/play it/film it yourself. Maybe then you'll find out that there's more to creating useful tools and entertainment than just whining about the unfairness of having other people work hard to create it and then demanding to be paid.

*But I need it and I don't want to pay for it.*

Response: hey, life's a bitch – get over it and grow up. Even if you could define *need* so flexibly as to include your wish to use someone else's tools, how does that justify theft? Are you going to rob a bank tomorrow so you want – oh, excuse me, need – a car? Or why not just mug someone so you can have their jacket? What nice tools there are at the hardware store – and man, wouldn't it be great to own (um, well, not exactly own) that

## Seven Reasons NOT to Steal Intellectual Property

---

laptop computer. So are you going to expect us to burst into tears as you explain why you stole the stuff?

*It doesn't hurt anyone.*

Response: Yes it does. All the people who try to earn a living from making, distributing and selling intellectual property (that's *in-te-llec-tu-al pro-per-ty*) including individual entrepreneurs and employees, suffer from having half to seven-eighths of their potential sales eliminated through theft. How would you like it if you were trying to earn a living providing a service or a tool – and half the potential clients simply stole your product without paying you anything at all? And furthermore, every software theft makes the next theft even more likely.

*It only hurts a company – I wouldn't steal it from an individual.*

Response: Oh, Robin Hood, eh? The company isn't a machine, it's a group of people who agree to work together according to terms they agree on. Steal from the company and you steal from employees, owners and other stakeholders. You may even hurt honest users by contributing to higher prices. Where's the line you're drawing? Would you steal from a corner store owned by Mom and Pop? How about it they had one employee? three? fifteen? Since when has morality involved counting up the victims and setting an arbitrary line to excuse one's depredations? What do you think you are, a corporation?

*No software/music/game/movie should ever be copyrighted--it should always be free.*

Response: Do you earn a salary or would you like to? Why not donate your time instead? How about cutting all your neighbors' lawns for free, taking out their garbage every week, and washing all their cars – without payment? Forever? Did you pay for your computer? But why? Why not decide that computer *hardware* shouldn't be patented – it should be always be free? Why shouldn't cars be free? Skateboards? Restaurants? Everything? Since when did people who buy their computers, drive purchased automobiles, pay for fast food and own DVD players decide they're in favor of communal property and voluntary labor? Who gave you the right to determine that other people's labor should be free? Even communists weren't stupid enough to think that an economic system could work without some basis for economic exchange. So why on earth would *anyone* take this criminal-hacker / warez / freeloader crap seriously?

