

BitTorrent to Launch Movie, TV Downloads

Contributed by Admin
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By GARY GENTILE

BitTorrent Inc., makers of a technology often used to trade pirated copies of Hollywood movies, is launching a Web site that will sell downloads of films and TV shows licensed from the studios.

The BitTorrent Entertainment Network was set to launch Monday with films from Warner Bros., Paramount Pictures, 20th Century Fox, Metro-Goldwyn-Mayer and Lionsgate and episodes of TV shows such as '24' and 'Punk'd.'

The service is squarely aimed at young men and boys who regularly use BitTorrent to trade pirated versions of the same films and who more often watch such files on their computer instead of on a big screen TV in the living room.

The San Francisco-based company is betting that at least one-third of the 135 million people who have downloaded the BitTorrent software will be willing to pay for high-quality legitimate content rather than take their chances with pirated fare.

'The vast majority of our audience just loves digital content,' Ashwin Navin, president and co-founder of BitTorrent, told The Associated Press. 'Now we have to program for that audience and create a better experience for that content so the audience converts to the service that makes the studios money.'

To help wean users to paying for content, BitTorrent is featuring content and pricing that appeals to its target demographic _ males between the ages of 15 and 35.

TV episodes are \$1.99 to download to own, which is typical for competitor sites such as Apple Inc.'s iTunes.

The new site will rent movies for a 24-hour viewing period for \$3.99 for new titles and \$2.99 for older films, but the site has decided not to sell films for now because the prices demanded by the studios were too high.

'We're really hammering the studios to say, 'Go easy on this audience," Navin said. 'We need to give them a price that feels like a good value relative to what they were getting for free.'

The service also will offer Japanese anime and high-definition video, which is popular with its users. Individuals will be able to publish their works to the site, which will compete for attention beside studio content.

The BitTorrent technology pioneered by Bram Cohen assembles digital movies and other computer files from separate bits of data downloaded from other computer users across the Internet. Its decentralized nature makes downloading more efficient, meaning that a full-length movie should download in about a half hour, about twice as fast as some other sites.

Navin said TV episodes should download in about one-third that time.

BitTorrent's decentralized structure also frustrated the entertainment industry's efforts to find and identify movie pirates.

In 2005, after the studios won a key legal decision against another pirate software company, Grokster, Cohen agreed to remove links to pirated files and start talks to license legitimate content.

Studios also got more comfortable with the idea of distributing content over peer-to-peer networks after they adopted strong digital rights management safeguards created by Microsoft Corp.

BitTorrent's content is protected by Windows Media DRM and will only play back using Windows Media Player.

Studios striking deals with peer-to-peer networks is a good first step toward allowing users to more freely distribute films and TV shows on the Internet, but it may take another five years or more for Hollywood to become completely comfortable with that, one analyst said.

'Their biggest concern is that an anonymous person passes it to an anonymous person,' said Les Ottolenghi, chairman and president of Intent Mediaworks Inc., a company that helps content owners protect their works on peer-to-peer

networks.

Ottolenghi recently chaired a task force that looked at digital watermarking, a technology that helps content owners track the route of its files as they make their way around the Internet.

'Their greatest hope is that someone at home passes it on to someone at home, from one device to the next, and that becomes a value to the consumer,' he said.

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On the Net:

BitTorrent Inc.: <http://www.bittorrent.com>