

Thailand's subscription video industry faces new threat as consumers' viewing habits shift to pirated TV boxes

45% of Thai consumers use pirated TV boxes, survey finds

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Bangkok, 13 November 2018 – In a recent study of the content viewing behaviour of Thai consumers, it was revealed that 45% of consumers use a TV box which can be used to stream pirated television and video content. These TV boxes, also known as Illicit Streaming Devices (ISDs), allow users to access hundreds of pirated television channels and video-on-demand content, usually with a low annual fee. TV boxes often come pre-loaded with pirated applications allowing 'plug-and-play' access to pirated content. The survey found that Mango TV, HD Playbox and U Play are among the most popular pirate applications amongst Thai consumers.

The survey, commissioned by the Asia Video Industry Association's (AVIA) Coalition Against Piracy (CAP), and conducted by YouGov, also highlights the detrimental effects of streaming piracy on legitimate subscription video services. Of the 45% of consumers who purchased a TV box or dongle for free streaming, more than two in three (69%) stated that they cancelled all or some of their subscription to legal pay TV services. Specifically, 24% asserted that they cancelled their subscriptions to a Thai-based online video service as a direct consequence of owning an ISD. International subscription services, which include pan-Asia online offerings, were impacted the most – nearly one in three (30%) Thai users have abandoned subscriptions in favour of ISD purchases.

Cancelling legitimate subscription services and paying less for access to pirated content is fraught with risks, as Neil Gane, the General Manager of AVIA's Coalition Against Piracy (CAP), comments, "The damage that piracy does to the creative industries is without dispute. However, the damage done to consumers themselves, because of the nexus between content piracy and malware, is only beginning to be recognised. Piracy websites and applications typically have a "click happy" user base, and, as such, are being used more and more as clickbait to distribute malware. Unfortunately the appetite for "free" or cheap subscription pirated content blinkers users from the very real risks of malware infection".

Of those consumers who own an ISD, about half of respondents (47%) claim to have purchased their ISD from two of the largest Southeast Asia-based ecommerce stores. Close to one-third (31%) of ISD owners say they acquired their devices via one of the world's most popular social media platforms.

In addition to the short-term problem of cancelled subscriptions is a longer term problem – namely, many of the people using ISDs are young. The survey found that ISDs are particularly favoured among 18-24 year-olds, with more than three in four (77%) cancelling legitimate subscription services as a result of owning ISDs, especially international online subscriptions (40%).

The Department of Intellectual Property (DIP), Ministry of Commerce, who oversees the Copyright Act, commented that “to enhance the efficiency of enforcement action, the DIP has proposed the amendment of the Copyright Act by adding provisions on the manufacture, sale, import, or traffic into the country of devices or any parts or components of a device, for the purpose of circumventing a technological measure. These amendments were approved by the Cabinet on 16 October 2018 and will shortly be presented to the State Council. The amendments are explicitly targeted at the manufacture and distribution of pirated TV boxes. This is a crucial step to address the current piracy problem”.

“This high rate of piracy is concerning for a number of reasons”, says Sompan Charumilinda, Executive Vice Chairman at True Visions. “First is the danger to consumers through the use of malware and spyware embedded in these illicit sites and applications. Second is that supporting these criminal enterprises does real damage to legitimate businesses that are struggling to survive. Third, it also undermines the Thailand 4.0 initiative and the country's aspiration to become counted among the world leaders in the new digital economy by showing Thailand to have made little progress in terms of its acceptance and tacit approval of these criminal networks. Consumers should care about piracy personally because of the harmful effects of malware and spyware, and also because of the damage that it does to our country. As a leading media company in Thailand we are happy to work with the Department of Intellectual Property, CAP and all relevant stakeholders to help continue to educate the public about these dangers.”

AVIA's Coalition Against Piracy (CAP) includes leading video content creators and distributors in Asia. Members include: beIN Sports, Discovery, The Walt Disney Company, FOX Networks Group, HBO Asia, NBCUniversal, Netflix, Premier League, Turner Asia-Pacific, A&E Networks, Astro, BBC Worldwide, CANAL+, Cignal, La Liga, Media Partners Asia, National Basketball Association, PCCW Media, Singtel, Sony Pictures Television Networks Asia, TVB, True Visions, TV5MONDE, and Viacom International Media Networks.

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About the Asia Video Industry Association

The Asia Video Industry Association (AVIA) is the trade association for the video industry and ecosystem in Asia Pacific. It serves to make the video industry stronger and healthier through promoting the common interests of its members. AVIA is the interlocutor for the industry with governments across the region, leads the fight against video piracy and provides insight into the video industry through reports and conferences aimed to support a vibrant video industry. AVIA evolved from Casbaa in 2018.

Media Contacts

For media inquiries and additional background contact:

Kay Bayliss
Manager, Marketing & Communications
Tel: +852 2854 9913 pr@asiavia.org
 cap@asiavia.org