

High Court grants orders to block access to illegal applications on TV boxes

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE – Singapore, 23 November 2018 – On Friday, November 2nd, the High Court ordered Singapore’s internet service providers to block access to popular illegal applications that are frequently sold pre-loaded on android TV boxes. Such TV boxes are also known as illicit streaming devices (ISDs). These apps, which flagrantly infringe copyright by acting as gateways to websites streaming pirated content, are preloaded on TV boxes which are overtly sold in retail outlets such as Sim Lim Square, IT exhibitions and on popular e-markets.

The application and illicit streaming device (ISD) ecosystem is impacting all businesses involved in the production and distribution of legitimate content. Configuring TV boxes with applications to stream audio-visual content from illegal streaming servers allows consumers to access unauthorised premium TV channels, live sports channels and movies for the one-off price of the TV box and (often) a yearly subscription to access the content – with the revenue going into the pockets of criminal syndicates and individuals all benefiting from the spoils of such a crime.

Louis Boswell, CEO of AVIA, commented “AVIA welcomes the court’s decision to block access to such popular ISD applications. We have always maintained that illicit streaming devices are illegal in Singapore. The ISD ecosystem is impacting all businesses involved in the production and distribution of legitimate content. Configuring TV boxes in this way allows unauthorised access to TV channels and video-on-demand content with the revenue going into the pockets of criminal syndicates and individuals who benefit from the spoils of such a crime”.

“Singapore has been considered a bastion of Intellectual Property rights across the region, and the court’s decision to block access to popular illegal applications preloaded onto ISDs and sold in Singapore reaffirms this contention” said Neil Gane, the General Manager of AVIA’s Coalition Against Piracy (CAP). “The content industry will make every effort to prevent and disrupt the illegal feeds of live sports, TV channels and VOD content which are monetised by crime syndicates. Consumers who buy ISDs are not only funding crime groups, but also wasting their money when the channels stop working. ISDs do not come with a ‘service guarantee’, no matter what the seller may claim.”

The commercial damage that such content theft does to the creative industries is without dispute. However, the damage done to consumers themselves, as a result of the nexus between online piracy and pernicious malware such as spyware and ransomware, is only beginning to be recognised. Cancelling legitimate subscription services and paying cheap application subscriptions for access to pirated content is fraught with risks.

Neil Gane, CAP's General Manager, also aired concerns about risks that consumers face when accessing pirated content. "The more mainstream the piracy ecosystem becomes, the greater the risks of malware proliferation. The appetite for free or paying cheap subscription rates for pirated applications found on ISDs, blinkers some consumers from the real risks of malicious malware infection such as spyware, ransomware and malware mining."

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, La Liga, NBCUniversal, Netflix, Premier League, Turner Asia-Pacific, A&E Networks, Astro, BBC Worldwide, CANAL+, Signal, 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.

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