

Pirates plunder computer software

Despite global efforts to raise awareness of intellectual property rights and the pitfalls of using computer software illegally, South Africa's piracy rate stands at 37%, with African countries topping 90%.

That was the key message from the local arm of the Business Software Alliance (BSA), an industry body that represents commercial software developers and its hardware partners, which released the results of the IDC's Global Software Piracy Study this week.

The report, which covers 87 countries, points to a global software piracy average of 35% - down one per cent on last year's figures but still showing that over a third of the world's software is used illegally.

In Europe, the Middle East and Africa (EMEA) the rate stands at 39%, down two percentage points from last year. However, illegal software still costs software companies and countries' economies more than \$15.5 billion in EMEA and almost \$33 billion worldwide.

In local terms, the results are something of a mixed bag. South Africa's 37% is up one per cent from last year but still close to the global average. The country has an established technology market and a sophisticated infrastructure - something the IDC believes is leading the local IT community to recognise the value of legitimate software in comparison to the rest of Africa.

However, the rest of the continent has an average piracy rate of 80%. Algeria, Kenya, Nigeria and Tunisia all rank in the mid-to-high 80's; Zimbabwe posts the highest figure of 90%. The IDC says that Africa's economy is suffering to the tune of more than \$1-bn as a result.

Stephan le Roux, chairman of the BSA, says: "Piracy remains a major obstacle in realising the potential of the information economy here and abroad. It's seen as a quick fix, an easy way to benefit from technology without investing too much. People rarely think of the ethical or economic consequences of pirating software."

Neil Dundas, a legal advisors to the BSA and a director at Bowman Gilfillan attorneys in Johannesburg, says: "Unfortunately, the value of pirated software increased. Last year, the world spent over \$59 billion on PC software but installed more than \$90 billion. For every two dollars worth of software purchased legitimately, one was obtained illegally."

The BSA works with multiple government arms to raise local awareness around the issue of piracy. The department of trade and industry is one such arm.

Lana van Zyl, director in charge of company and intellectual property investigations at the dti, is vocal on issues of software

piracy: "Counterfeiting is a major problem for the manufacturers and distributors of well- known merchandise. It creates real dangers for the individual purchaser, manufacturer, distributor and the national economy.

"If a customer buys counterfeit goods, the brand owner or importer loses more than just sales. This costs local business and industry millions of Rands and adversely affects our economy. Our core message? Piracy is illegal and the counterfeiting of goods is prohibited and an offence."

The BSA plans to continue working with the South African government to improve intellectual property enforcement rules. Le Roux says that the IDC study demonstrates that attention is urgently needed to help reduce piracy rates and to enjoy the economic benefits that lower piracy rates bring.

The BSA's web site, www.bsa.co.za provides free SAM tools. The BSA is encouraging companies to make use of these to help ensure that they are complying to licensing agreements and to also inform the BSA of piracy activities on the local hotline - 0800 110 447.

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