



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Student Faces Software Charges

Year

1994

Description

An article about the indictment of LaMacchia and details about the inner-workings of the illegal file-sharing network at MIT.

Body

April 7, 1994

BOSTON (AP) -- A federal grand jury indicted an MIT student Thursday on charges he ran a computer bulletin board that allowed people to copy more than \$1 million worth of copyrighted software for free.

David LaMacchia, 20, a junior at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, was indicted on one felony count of conspiring to commit wire fraud, said U.S. Attorney Donald K. Stern. An arraignment date wasn't immediately scheduled.

LaMacchia, of Rockville, Md., used the computer aliases *John Gaunt* and *Grimjack*, to operate the bulletin board at MIT from Nov. 21 to Dec. 21, 1993, and from Jan. 3 to Jan. 5, the indictment said.

The bulletin board, named Cynosure, allowed people on MIT's computer network to copy business and entertainment software, the indictment said.

Since MIT's system is part of the Internet, a super-network using telephone lines to link educational, military and commercial computer networks around the world,

Internet users also were able to illegally copy the software, Stern said.

"The pirating of business and entertainment software through clandestine computer bulletin boards is tremendously costly to software companies, and by extension to their employees and to the economy," Stern said.

LaMacchia allegedly used MIT workstation computers to operate the bulletin board and to store the software library, the indictment said.

Many of the Cynosure users hid their identities by using an Internet address in Finland that provided an anonymous forwarding service for the pirated programs, according to the indictment.

As many as 180 people used the illegal software library over one 16-hour period, downloading hundreds of copyrighted commercial programs, the indictment said.

MIT computer specialists discovered in December that a computer in a student center was being used to distribute the software, MIT spokesman Robert C. Dilorio said.

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