

Dish & Sling Sue 'Pirate' IPTV Operation For Circumventing Widevine DRM

January 26, 2024 by **Ernesto Van der Sar**

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DISH Network and Sling TV have filed a lawsuit against a pirate IPTV operation that allegedly made more than \$20 million. The defendants, who allegedly worked with many resellers, stand accused of circumventing Widevine DRM and rebroadcasting channels without permission. The set-top boxes that served as gateways were sold through Amazon stores.

With more ways to stream online video than ever before, protecting video continues to be a key issue for copyright holders.

This is often achieved through Digital Rights Management, better known as DRM; an anti-piracy tool that dictates when and where digital content can be accessed.



[Widevine DRM](#) is one of the leading players in the field. The Google-owned technology is used by many of the largest streaming services including Amazon, Netflix, Disney+ and others. As such, keeping it secure is vital.

Unfortunately for rightsholders, most protection measures have their weak spots. Widevine DRM comes in different security levels and pirates have repeatedly shown that the lower specifications are not exactly watertight.

Lawsuit Against ‘DRM-Bypassing IPTV Pirates’

As a result of these and other weaknesses, pirate IPTV services are booming. This is a thorn in the side of [Sling TV](#) and parent company [Dish Network](#), which sued one of these operations in a U.S. court this week.

The complaint, filed at the federal court in Atlanta, targets “Channel Wala”, “Doordarshan,” and several related individuals and companies, all from Georgia. They stand accused of selling set-top boxes (STBs) through their websites and Amazon stores.

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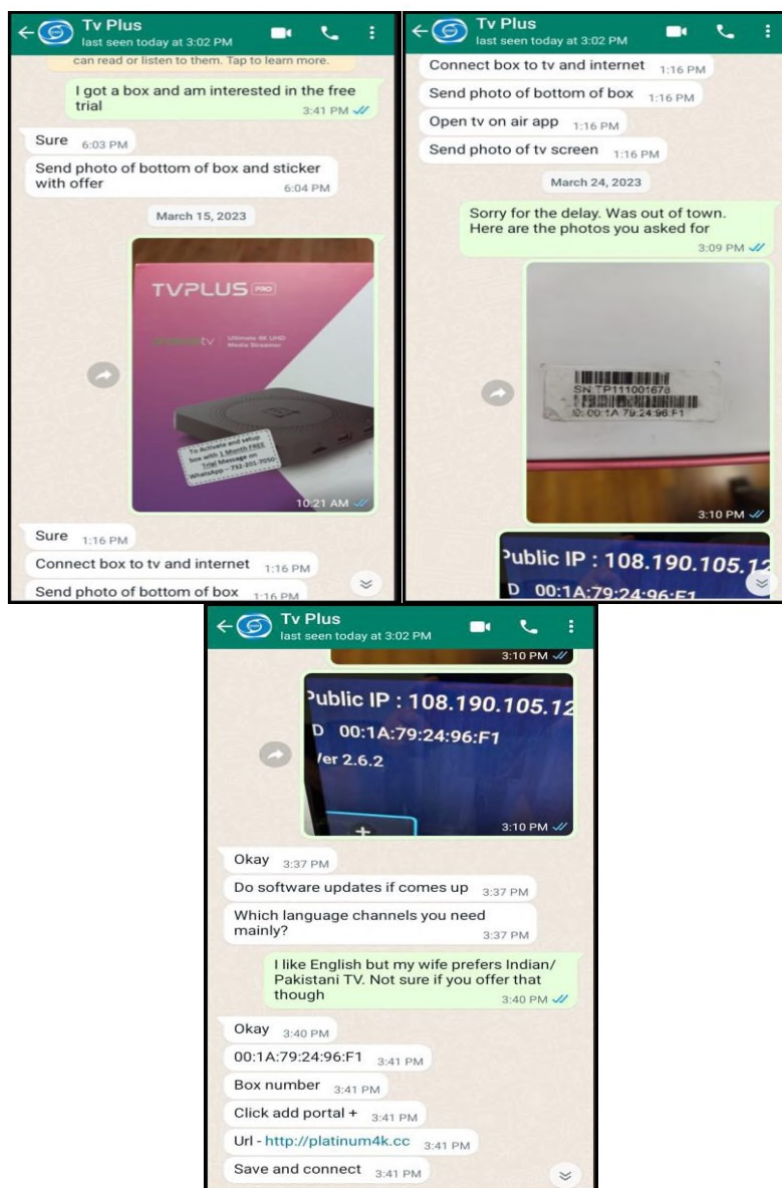
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While the hardware itself is not illegal, the sellers also promoted free trials and paid subscriptions through stickers on these streaming boxes. These were more problematic, according to the undercover agents who purchased them.

“An investigator purchased a STB from Defendants through Channelwala.com. Upon receipt of the STB, the investigator messaged Defendants at the WhatsApp number on the sticker on the box and requested a free trial of the Services.”

The Whatsapp conversation below shows that the investigator did get the promised free trial. This allowed them to access Dish and Sling channels, as well as those of many other media companies. According to the complainants, this is all done without permission from rightsholders.

Undercover WhatsApp (large)



Stickers and Flyers

In addition to the free trial, the investigator also discovered boxes with other stickers through Channelwala.com and the “MAG Box store” on Amazon. These versions directed buyers to visit Tvplususa.com, where they could get setup instructions and a streaming subscription for \$6.99 per month.

All of these offers are unauthorized, Dish and Sling say. Besides the sticker promos, the plaintiffs also ran into several advertisements on Facebook and even flyers in physical stores throughout Atlanta.

“Defendants market the Services by distributing flyers and business cards in Indian grocery, liquor, and retail stores, gas stations, and other locations in the Atlanta metropolitan area,” the complaint reads.

Flyers



As shown above, these flyers advertised the IPTV streaming service as an “Authorized Retailer” for Dish and Sling, which people could “WATCH FOR \$7/mo.” This amounts to false advertising and misuse of the Dish and Sling trademarks, the complaint notes.

Circumventing Widevine DRM

Thus far, the allegations are pretty straightforward. The people and companies involved, including Channel Wala LLC and Parshva Distributor LLC, sold set-top boxes that were linked to pirate IPTV services. However, it doesn’t stop there.

The complaint adds several DMCA violations, accusing the defendants of circumventing Widevine DRM. This is not the first time that Dish and Sling have brought DRM-related claims before a court, but here they are rather specific about what happened.

“The Widevine DRM [...] is circumvented using a specially developed computer program that emulates the behavior of a reverse engineered hardware device,” the complaint explains.

“The computer program tricks Sling’s Widevine DRM server to grant access and provide a channel decryption key by making the server believe the request originated from a legitimate Widevine supported device that would keep the channel decryption key secured.”

The reverse-engineered hardware doesn’t keep Sling’s programming secure, of course, as it can easily be copied now.

“The unencrypted Channel can be uploaded to a server outside of the Sling platform and retransmitted to any number of users that can receive the Channel without purchasing a legitimate subscription from Plaintiffs,” the complaint notes.

Cease and Desist

The DRM circumvention technique is described in detail but it’s not immediately clear if the defendants had a hand in coding it. They are accused of using it, however, to pass on a variety of protected channels, also from many other rightsholders who use Widevine.

Last summer, Dish reportedly warned the defendant about their presumed illegal activities. The company sent a cease and desist notice in June, asking them to stop, but without result.

According to the complaint, some sites were taken down but the IPTV operation kept working with resellers. Defendant Abhishek Shah allegedly runs a \$20+ million business, while encouraging resellers to ignore the legal threat and keep going.

“Abhishek Shah forwarded an image of Plaintiffs’ cease and desist letter to numerous resellers that purchase the STBs and Services from Defendants stating he has made more than \$20 million, ‘continue business as usual,’ ‘DISH can’t stop us,’ ‘I am putting down my website but it does not impact you in any way,...” the complaint reads.

Injunction and Damages

Through the lawsuit, Dish and Sling hope to recoup damages, which could easily run into many millions of dollars. Besides the DMCA violations, where every subscription sold is seen as an individual offense, the rightsholders also request damages for trademark infringement.

Finally, they seek a permanent injunction to shut down the IPTV operation and have all infringing products destroyed.

At the time of writing, the Channelwala.com, Thegreatiptvsub.com, and Tvplususa.com websites are all offline. However, the resellers may still be in business, as the defendants instructed.

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A copy of the complaint Dish and Sling filed at the federal court in Atlanta, Georgia, is [available here \(pdf\)](#).

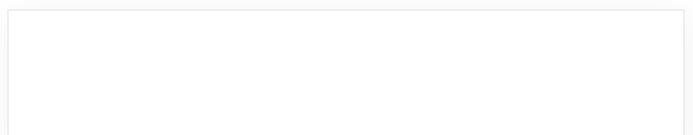
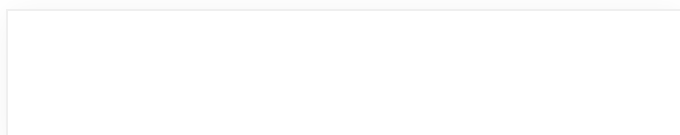
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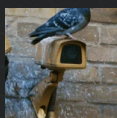
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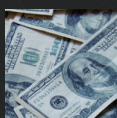
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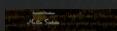
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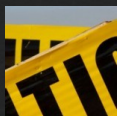
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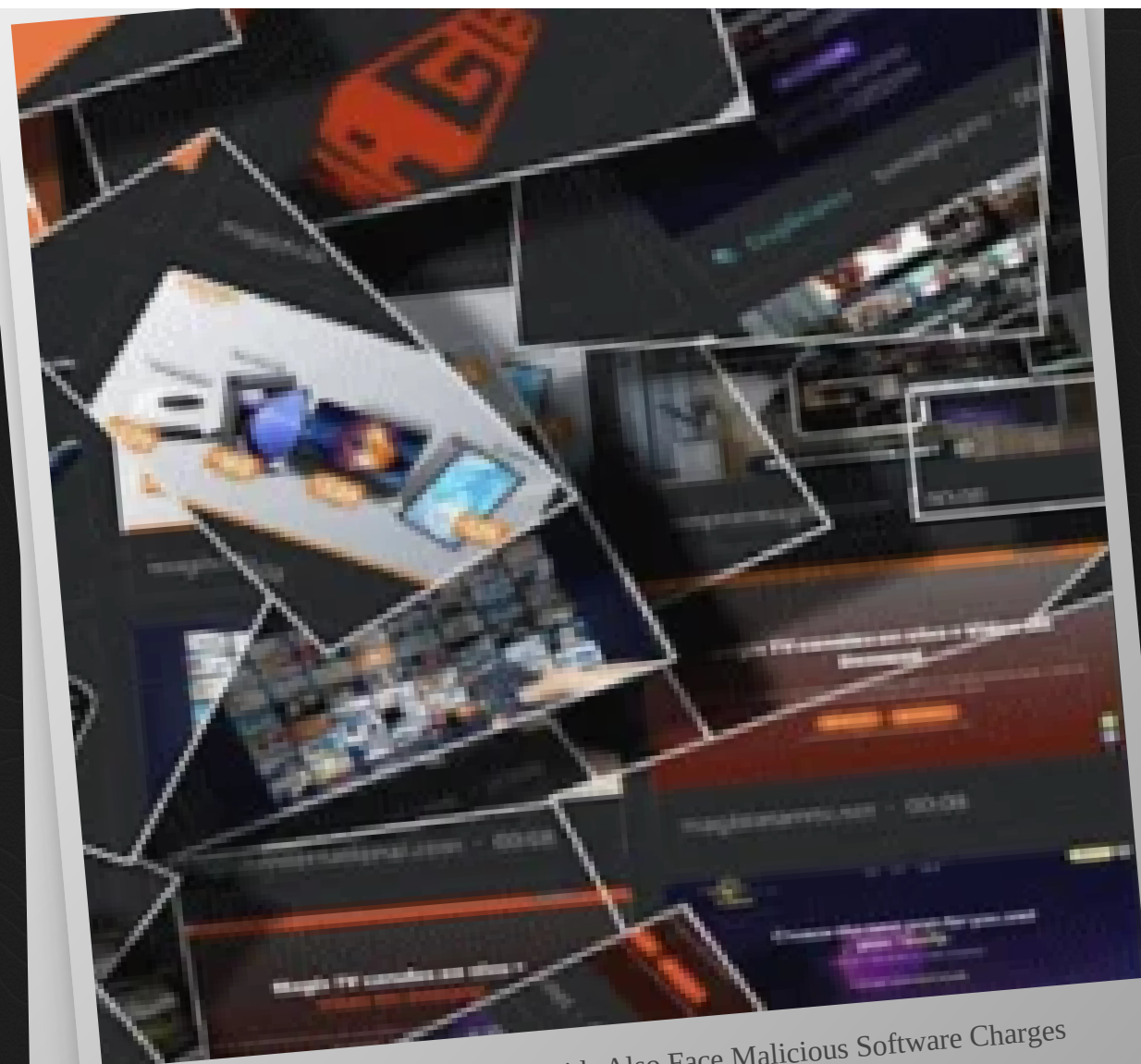


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