

Norwegian Hacker Cracks Google Software

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Created 29/06/2005 - 4:06pm

Submitted by srlinuxx on Wednesday 29th of June 2005 04:06:33 PM Filed under [Software](#) [1]

The Norwegian who became a hacker hero for developing software to unlock copy-protection codes on DVD movies said he needed only one day to crack Google Inc.'s new video viewer.

Jon Lech Johansen, also known as DVD Jon, posted software on his "So Sue Me" Web site that he says modifies the viewer so that it plays videos hosted on any server. The company's Google Video Viewer, in turn, was modified from the free VLC media player to restrict it to playing video hosted on Google's own servers.

Google officials did not immediately return e-mail and phone messages left early Wednesday at its Mountain View, Calif., headquarters.

Johansen, 21, became a hero to hackers at age 15, when he posted software called to unlock the Content Scrambling System, or CSS, the film industry used on DVD movies to prevent illegal copying. The act made Johansen a folk hero among hackers.

After the film industry complained, Norwegian authorities charged him with data break-in, but Johansen was acquitted at trial and on appeal.

Johansen, an advocate of the open-source philosophy of making software code freely available for inspection and sharing, has also repeatedly posted programs that circumvent the copy-protection technologies on Apple Computer Inc.'s iTunes software.

Google's shares have more than tripled to more than \$300 in the 10 months since their debut. Most of the company's income is from online advertising, although it could boost revenues by charging for some videos in the future. The company has been stockpiling amateur and professional videos since April, when it asked users to submit their images, and the new viewer allows them to sample the collection for free.

The Google Video Viewer, consisting of about 1 megabyte and still officially in a "beta" test phase, was designed to do nothing but stream Google's videos through the Internet Explorer or Firefox Web browsers. Its limited scope meant it wouldn't be competing with the popular multimedia players made by Microsoft Corp. and RealNetworks Inc.

Associated Press

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