

Freenet releases pre alpha version of 'anonymous' p2p

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Created 05/08/2005 - 11:48pm

Submitted by srlinuxx on Friday 5th of August 2005 11:48:48 PM Filed under [Software](#) [1]

Despite the recent court victories by the MPAA (Motion Picture Association of America) and others against Grokster and the targeting of users who distribute music files, it seems the peer-to-peer (p2p) business is not about to give up without a fight yet.

A group of developers say they are on target to produce a system of anonymous file sharing by the end of the year.

If true, this will severely limit the efforts of the authorities in their attempts to stamp out illegal file sharing by prosecuting offenders. Organisations like the RIAA (Recording Industry Association of America's) and MPAA and our own BPI (British Phonographic Institution) rely on ISPs handing over the names of the file sharers.

The Freenet project aims to make p2p file sharing and communication more secure by making the parties involved in the communication totally anonymous. Freenet's stated aim is to allow two or more people who wish to share information, to do so.

The group says it wants to promote free speech throughout the world, particularly in those areas such as China and the Middle East where Internet communications are regularly intercepted and monitored.

Of course, if successful, the technology will be leapt upon by a new generation of file sharing networks hoping to evade the authorities now that the US Supreme Court has deemed p2p file sharing illegal. While acknowledging that Freenet could be put to illegal use, the group maintains that 'you cannot guarantee freedom of speech and enforce copyright law'.

Freenet developed out of an anonymous publication system created by Ian Clarke while a student at the University of Edinburgh, Scotland. The project already has a basic p2p system working although it is not yet searchable in the same way that traditional p2p files sharing networks usually are.

The developers are currently working on making a globally scalable peer-to-peer 'darknet'. Typically, a darknet is a private closed p2p network of no more than ten or so trusted individuals. The Freenet plan is to develop a global darknet of small networks linked together in much the same way that the Internet itself is linked.

The group has now announced it has a pre-alpha version [ready](#) [2] to test although it warns that the software is not for the faint hearted as the routing algorithm 'is neither user-friendly nor secure at this point'.

By Steve Malone

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