

# Software Piracy : Bangladesh Scenario

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Piracy in the ICT industry is not a new phenomenon. The movie 'Pirates of Silicon Valley' dramatizes the piracy by Microsoft and Apple Computers. The film follows the subsequent development of the IBM-PC with the help of Gates and Microsoft in 1981. Meanwhile, Apple has developed the Lisa and later, the Macintosh, computers which were inspired by the Xerox Alto (a computer which the Apple team viewed during a tour of Xerox PARC during the late 1970s). Gates would later refer to this event when he tells Jobs during an argument, "You and I am both like guys who had this rich neighbor-Xerox-who left the door open all the time. And you go sneaking in to steal a TV set. Only when you get there, you realize I got there first. And you're yelling: 'That's not fair! I wanted to try and steal it first!' You're too late."

Those initial years of computers saw software companies borrowing ideas from each other works. These issues brought changes in the copyright law. Today the software are protected internationally by copyright law. As a user we pay for the purchase of the hardware but due to our ignorance we are forced into using the pirated software. The computer is fully dependent on the software such as Operating System (Microsoft Windows, Linux, Unix, Apple OS etc) and the Application Software (Microsoft Office Suite, Open Office Suite, Oracle, MySQL, Accounting etc.). Unfortunately many home users do not buy any Operating System and Application Software in many countries.

The government procurements starting from PC to complex solutions followed the Public Procurement Rule 2008. Original Software with licenses was procured in all procurements. SAP installation completed during the past one and half years in Bangladesh is over 25. The procurement of Oracle database by financial institutions, government and public/private institutions has experienced tremendous growth. The average procurement of all software and licensing in Bangladesh is about US\$ 200 million.

Business Software Alliance (BSA) in a statement released on May 12, 2011 stated - 'The commercial value of unlicensed software installed on personal computers in Bangladesh reached a record US\$137 million in 2010 as 90 percent of software deployed on PCs during the year was pirated.' This statement is based on misinformation on total market size and segmentation in Bangladesh. The government and the corporate sector being the largest procurement sector the 90% piracy cannot be reconciled with actual national procurements. Again in some cases users have shifted towards open source using Linux, Ubuntu as OS and Open Office for productivity .Licensed Windows with freely available Open Office is also a common feature. These might have also been reflected as piracy. The total piracy even assumed to be US\$137 million will not be 90% as depicted by BSA.

The major complain by the users against procuring licensed Microsoft product is no local after sales support. Users need to

call USA, Singapore or India for local support which is neither affordable nor supports Bangla language. The multinational software company cannot expect general users to buy software worth millions of US\$ having no after sales support. Interestingly the international software companies even have no advertisement or promotional activities for general users in Bangladesh but still expect the user to buy their software. The survey by BSA has not accounted large public and corporate procurements. For example, Bangladesh Computer Council (BCC) procured nearly 20,000 PCs and laptops for educational institutions and community e-centers all with genuine Microsoft Windows and Office under special contract with Microsoft in the fiscal year 2009-10. Similar procurement is ongoing in the fiscal year 2010-11. Apart from BCC all other Government Ministries, Divisions, Departments and financial institutions including Bangladesh Bank has procured personal computers not less than two thousand with genuine software. On the security software scenario Kaspersky and Norton has released genuine software at affordable price and has achieved great success in capturing large market share.

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**Vision 2021: Digital Bangladesh** has led to large software implementations projects such as - Introduction of Machine Readable Passport & Visa, Public and Private Sector Banks Automation, Central Bank Automation Project, Chittagong Port Automation, launching of 4500 Union Information Service Centers, Establishment of Computer Training Labs at schools, mobile banking, National ID, Driving License Automation Project etc. The current consumption of major brands of computers stands over 100,000 per annum with another around 200,000 local assembled computers. The current pc market growth is estimated between 35-40%. The Copyright Office and Bangladesh Computer Samity have started awareness building campaign through

TV talk shows to motivate users on using genuine software. Now it is with the software companies to come forward and start promotion campaign including special price commensurate with Bangladesh's per capita income for attracting local users.

The locally assembled computer market is now quite large. The international companies need to educate and provide special promotional prices to small computer vendors who are generally housed in handful of IT market in large cities to bring them under genuine software business. These promotions are not new it has been offered by the software companies in India and other neighbouring countries. The question is why not in a growing market of Bangladesh. Without the local support and service for genuine software there is no reason for general user to buy genuine software and we should be prepared to continue listening "You and I am both like guys who had this rich neighbor-Xerox-who left the door open all the time. And you go sneaking in to steal a TV set. Only when you get there, you realize I got there first. And you're yelling: 'That's not fair! I wanted to try and steal it first!' You're too late." ■

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