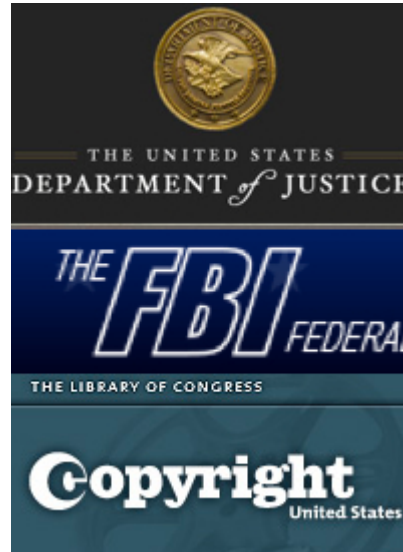




Written by [Alex Newman](#) on January 20, 2012

Hackers Take Down DOJ and FBI Sites After Piracy Arrests

A coalition of hacker activists known as "Anonymous" — styling itself a "hacktivist" collective that fights for Internet freedom — took credit for bringing down websites belonging to the Department of Justice (DOJ), the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), the U.S. Copyright Office, and multiple heavy-hitting industry association sites. Most of the websites were back online by Friday morning.



The attack followed a major international piracy crackdown against the file-sharing firm Megaupload.com. American officials shut down the site — among the most trafficked in the world — and helped arrest at least four people in New Zealand accused of operating what the U.S. government called "an international organized criminal enterprise." MegaUpload executives, none of whom are U.S. citizens, rejected the charges but remain in custody.

Internet activists and hackers, meanwhile, immediately sprang into action following news of the arrests. Anonymous used what is known as a "distributed denial of service" (DDoS) attack to target the U.S. government — including the White House — as well as top lobbying groups for Hollywood and the music industry. The well-known technique essentially floods a website with online traffic and eventually overloads its servers, causing it to temporarily shut down.

"We Anonymous are launching our largest attack ever on government and music industry sites," the hacker group announced on Twitter shortly before about a dozen websites went down Thursday afternoon. "The FBI didn't think they would get away with this did they? They should have expected us."

Among the private-sector organizations targeted for attack in the so-called "Operation MegaUpload" were the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA), Universal Music, the Belgian Anti-Piracy Federation, the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), Warner Music Group, Vivendi, and others. Several foreign websites were also taken down.

"The fact that a couple of sites might have been taken down is really ancillary to the significant news today that the Justice Department brought down one of the world's most notorious file-sharing hubs," a spokesman for the RIAA was quoted as saying by [CNN](#), downplaying the attack.

Former Sen. Christopher Dodd, now the chairman of the Motion Picture Association of America, was targeted in the massive hacker operation as well. Some of his personal information was even stolen and posted online.

"Our website and many others, including the Department of Justice, were attacked today and the hacker



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group Anonymous is taking responsibility for the attacks," noted a statement [released](#) by the MPAA. "The motion picture and television industry has always been a strong supporter of free speech. We strongly condemn any attempts to silence any groups or individuals."

The Utah Chiefs of Police Association site was hacked, too. The group's website was taken down and replaced with the MegaUpload logo before being shut down for "maintenance." It was not immediately clear why the association was targeted, but the site was still offline by Friday morning.

Federal authorities are investigating the operation, according to news reports. But a statement released by the DOJ appeared to minimize the extent of what was truly going on.

"The Department of Justice web server hosting justice.gov is currently experiencing a significant increase in activity, resulting in a degradation in service," it said. "The Department is working to ensure the website is available while we investigate the origins of this activity, which is being treated as a malicious act until we can fully identify the root cause of the disruption."

The international operation to [shut down MegaUpload](#) — which saw seven people indicted and some \$50 million in assets frozen — came as a debate surrounding controversial intellectual-property legislation [reached a crescendo](#) this week. Critics say the "Stop Online Piracy Act" (SOPA) and its Senate companion bill, the "Protect Intellectual Property Act" (PIPA), represent a stealth effort to impose government regulation and possibly even censorship on the relatively free world of the Internet.

Major sites including Wikipedia and Google participated in a [massive protest](#) against the legislation on Thursday, and millions of citizens signed petitions urging Congress to kill the bills. But Anonymous-affiliated activists chose a different route of attack — and recently announced that further measures would be taken against lawmakers who support the bill.

"Many members of Congress have just changed their stance on the controversial Stop Online Piracy Act, or SOPA," Anonymous said in a blog post. "The raid on Megaupload Thursday proved that the feds don't need SOPA or its sister legislation, PIPA, in order to pose a blow to the Web."

Barrett Brown, an operative associated with the hacker group, [told](#) RT that an "experimental campaign" dubbed "Operation Donkey Kong" would soon be unleashed against members of Congress still backing the bill. "More is coming," he said, noting that the upcoming operation would target SOPA-supporting Democrats' ability to raise funds while using search engine optimization tactics to "forever saddle some of these congressmen with their record on this issue."

Anonymous has become notorious in recent years for taking down or hacking websites belonging to top financial institutions opposed to WikiLeaks, American police departments, [oppressive regimes](#) such as the former dictatorships ruling Egypt and Yemen, security firms, and more. But analysts say the response to the federal takedown of MegaUpload, which included over 5,500 participating activists, has been the biggest and boldest to date.

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