

## Software Piracy— Are You Guilty?

"Your Honor, the prosecution will show that the defendant did knowingly and willfully steal with intent to permanently deprive my client of his means of livelihood. The prosecution will further show that the defendant—not content to steal for his own use—did knowingly and willfully conspire to systematically deprive my client of his sole source of income by bartering unauthorized copies of my client's work to those who would otherwise have had to pay him for the use of his programs."

Court language has a way of cutting through personal rationalizations and focusing in on the crux of the matter. It makes copying a disk sound like a crime. It makes the copier sound like a criminal.

"But what's the harm if . . ." "It's for a good cause." "No one will care if I . . ." "No way is that program worth what they're charging." "They know a certain number of copies will be made." "But I'm using this for educational purposes." Do you ever catch yourself using these rationalizations?

Perhaps the most provocative aspect of this discussion is the fact that you most certainly *can* get away with it. Who's going to catch you? Who's going to turn you in? To whom? "Officer, I just apprehended this professor in the act of illegally copying WordStar—arrest the man!" It's the perfect crime—one you can commit every day—virtually with impunity.

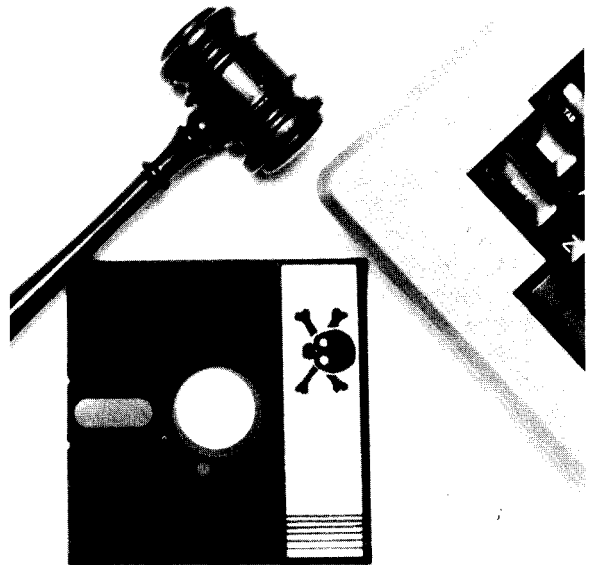
You *could* get caught, fined, sued (possibly for millions of dollars), and jailed for bootlegging bogus copies. Because you probably *won't* get caught, it's the perfect test of your integrity.

Ethics and penalties are two separate issues. If you don't rob a bank because you don't want to go to jail, does that say anything for your integrity?

The reason you shouldn't make copies of programs without paying for them is as fundamental as the golden rule. Supposing you had worked for months early mornings and late evenings perfecting a program that would convert computerized paper weights into useful tools.

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*Perhaps computer disks should be marked with a skull and crossbones to remind users not to infringe on copyrights by illegal copying.*

How would you feel if your efforts were literally being pirated away by unscrupulous people who were too cheap to buy copies for their own use? They liked what you did, and used it, but because they possessed technology that made it easy to duplicate your ideas, they chose to steal them rather than pay you for your work.

Even stated that way, some people will still rationalize their unauthorized copying by saying, "Well, at least they know we liked their stuff, and it is being used for the purpose they intended!"

If you wouldn't like someone treating you that way, don't treat someone else that way—it's as simple as that. There *are* laws and courts and fines and imprisonment. But certainly in the setting of Adventist educational institutions it should never come to that. Enough said.—  
Dave Ruskjer. □