Keeping the Web Safe for Pirates

Let no one doubt the rabble-rousing power of the Internet.

Incited largely by Google and Wikipedia’s calls to protect “free speech” online, millions of Americans last week bombarded congressional representatives to voice opposition to the House’s Stop Online Piracy Act (SOPA) and the Senate’s PROTECT Intellectual Property Act (PIPA). Both bills were destined to be vetoed by President Obama anyway, but the Netizen riot yesterday scared enough elected officials that they probably won’t even get that far.

So much for the millions of lobbying greenbacks dropped by the Motion Picture Association of America, Recording Industry Association of America, NRBUniversal, The Walt Disney Co., Viacom, Time Warner Inc. and others. Corporate media interests were shouted down by the Web mob — and the entertainment industry was caught flat-footed, without a Web 2.0 counter-campaign to make its case about why new laws are necessary.

“Year after year, millions of dollars are spent on legal fees by the entertainment companies as they try to painstakingly strike down a few online search words,” Wikipedia co-founder Jimmy Wales said Tuesday. “Google and other search engines do not and could not monitor every single search, and would not be able to remove results from their sites if they did.”

For one thing, the “right” search results are not always the ones that a company wants. And for another, Google has already allowed a number of pirated videos to reach the public — videos that, if made legitimate, would be paying legitimate creators.

Not even lawmakers have gotten into the act, however. “I don’t think Congress realizes the impact that SOPA or PIPA would have,” said Wikipedia’s Wales. “This is not just a tech issue, it’s a political issue, and a really big one.”

As it is, Web users are losing out. With SOPA and PIPA passed, “it is going to make it harder for even legitimate Web content to get off the ground,” said Wales. “This is going to be a disaster — just a disaster.”

The legislation is designed to give U.S. copyright owners a way to shut down foreign pirate sites, which aren’t subject to the Digital Millennium Copyright Act (DMCA), by blocking access to their domain names. Period.

Arguing that these laws would result in “censorship” of the Internet is akin to saying shoplifting prohibitions are a restraint of free trade. Or suggesting that criminalizing public sex acts curtails a citizen’s right to free expression.

Yes, there are parts of SOPA and PIPA that are troubling. For one thing they would allow the U.S. government to demand that even the links to rogue sites be culled from search engines, according to the Electronic Freedom Foundation — a pointless measure that seems inappropriate.

But instead of trying to find middle ground, the “information wants to be free” crowd is throwing the baby out with the bathwater. So what if a few links to pirate sites are monetized? That’s the price of freedom, bub. The Web masses have spoken. And so, for now, the pirates are still free to sail the Internet without much trouble.

Here’s a question in search of an answer:

We have a great number of women in cable and we have a great number of engineers. So why is it that we have so few women engineers?

In a field that is dedicated to finding the right solution to an equation, the lack of women engineers is a puzzle that even our best minds have been unable to work out — even as careers for women have flourished across virtually every other segment of the industry.

Despite the best efforts of many in cable, the representation of women within the engineering community remains disappointingly small: Membership in the Society of Cable Telecommunications Engineers, for example, is only 6% female, and the female-to-male ratio shows no sign of changing anytime soon.

Thus, at a time when technology is driving new business opportunities in such areas as multiplatform distribution, advanced advertising and business services, a significant source of engineering thought leadership is unavailable to cable system operators, programmers and vendors.

To be sure, the problem is not unique to cable. For one thing, women engineers can blunt the satisfaction of success in the face of conditions — too much travel, lack of advancement or low pay.

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**ACCESS**

**CATHY OAKES SCTE**

**Bolster the Ranks of Women Engineers**

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