

E-book Theft: What To Do When It Happens To You

By Milana Leshinsky

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Milana Leshinsky
milana@helpingfoot.com

First Business Web Site <http://www.firstbusinesswebsite.com>

Checking my e-mail one Sunday morning, I immediately noticed a message. A chill went down my spine. The subject line said, "your e-book has been stolen".

I always knew something like this could happen, but never thought it would happen to me... and so soon! I only released my e-book a few months ago, and already the "digital pirates" went to work.

E-book theft is the biggest fear authors have, especially if they are working on their very first e-book, their "baby". Most new authors take months writing their e-books, and are worried that as soon as their e-book "hits" the Web, it will be stolen, copied, illegally sold, or even given away.

I. How exactly does an e-book get stolen?

Sharing computer files between friends, family members and colleagues is not a new concept. People have been doing it for decades. But now that they can do it remotely, the number of files shared (e-books and software) has greatly increased.

This is not the authors' main concern, though.

It's the people who get their hands on your e-book and make money reselling it to others in some shape or form. An e-book may be copied, re-written, extracted from, packaged with other e-books, and illegally sold on thieves' web sites.

The worst case, though, is when a thief decides to really make a big chunk of money on your e-book and offers Resale Rights to his customers. This simply means that anybody who buys your e-book from him will also be "allowed" to resell it to others.

Now the Internet is literally flooded with your e-book, and you begin to notice a huge drop in sales AND your income. Every author's worst nightmare.

II. Why would anyone risk getting caught?

While e-books are extremely easy to publish, they are just as easy to steal. "Digital pirates" know it, and take this risk in exchange for making a few bucks (well, actually "my" thief claimed to have made over \$10,000 selling my e-books. To this day I don't know if this is accurate, but I am sure it

turned out quite profitably for him).

Most people who steal other people's digital products have no respect or appreciation for hard work and talent it takes to produce a quality product. "You put a few words together and now charging \$50 for it!", complained the thief in one of his messages to me. (How ironic - I thought it was my place to complain!)

An e-book is mostly prone to theft when 2 things are true:

- a) The topic is hot and in demand, so it will be easy to make money selling it.
- b) If you sell Master Reprint Rights to your e-book, which makes it difficult to track who resells it legally and who has not paid for the rights to sell it.

(See more about Reprint Rights at:

[">http://www.firstbusinesswebsite.com/articles/reprint_rights.html\)](http://www.firstbusinesswebsite.com/articles/reprint_rights.html)

III. What steps to take when it happens to you?

If you have just discovered that your e-book is being illegally sold on another web site, stop. Take a deep breath. Has your e-book been really stolen? Go through this list to rule each situation out:

- a) You sold Reprint Rights to this person and forgot about it
- b) This merchant simply sells a demo version of your e-book
- c) This merchant has purchased Reprint Rights from one of your authorized resellers (who holds the Master Rights to your e-book)
- d) The e-book has a similar title and content, but is not YOUR e-book
- e) The seller may be not aware that he is infringing on your rights, and is selling your e-book by mistake (this is only the case if you offer Reprint Rights to your e-book)

If you've ruled every item on this list, it's time to take action.

1) Find out the name of the person who is reselling your e-book. You can do this by doing a "Whois" search on Network Solutions web site (www.netsol.com). The search will reveal to you the name of the person who registered the domain name for the illegal site, his e-mail address, mailing address, and a phone number. There is no guarantee that this information is 100% accurate, but it's worth a try.

Your perpetrator's web site may also contain his name and e-mail address. Your first step is to send him a polite but firm message. Ask for an explanation, and wait 24 hours for his reply. If you do not get a response, or he refuses to remove your e-book from his web site, move on to the next step.

2) Find out the name of the hosting company, domain name registrar, and the Internet Service Provider (ISP). The hosting company may be listed under Technical Contact when you do the "Whois" search, or under "Domain Servers" at the bottom of the listing. It may look something like this: NS181.PAIR.COM. Enter this address into your Internet browser location bar and you will see that this site belongs to www.Pair.com.

The ISP may be located right in the person's e-mail address. For example, if the e-mail is jsmith@earthlink.com, then the ISP is Earthlink.com. If the web address is hosted by a free hosting company (e.g. www.tripod.com/members/~jsmith) then grab the phone number of their customer service or even a fraud department.

Contact as many of these agencies as possible to inform them of the situation. Firmly ask them to suspend their services for this client. Always be calm and polite in your first message.

Charles Petit, an attorney and the webmaster of authorslawyer.com says that "Some ISPs... claim that they will not take any action without seeing the certificate of copyright registration. Don't believe them. This is really just lawyerese for "we won't resolve disputed copyrights." The United States Copyright Law (17 U.S.C. section 512) makes the ISP responsible once notified of the infringement in writing, and is signed "under penalty of perjury." The copyright need not have been registered at all, mentions Mr.Petit. "It is required only for a lawsuit, and late registration only limits the remedies available in court."

Be sure to "immediately print the outgoing message and sign and date the printout", mentions Mr.Petit. Mr. Petit's more-detailed discussion, including sample letters, is at <http://www.authorslawyer.com/c-pir0.shtml>

3) Be sure to also contact the payment processor. Most thieves use a third party processor such as PayPal or ClickBank. Contact them immediately asking them to close their client's account.

4) In most cases, by this time your problem will be solved. The hosting company will suspend their services, the payment processor will stop processing payments, or the ISP will stop the thief's Internet Service.

If not, you may need an attorney who handles intellectual property disputes such as an e-book theft. It may take just a letter from him or her to resolve this situation.

You may think, "I will let it go - it's only one person, how much harm can he possibly do?". One illegal reseller is most likely not going to hurt your business. But if you don't take measures to stop your thieves, you may slowly notice a drop in sales, as the Internet becomes saturated with your product.

Do take basic measures outlined in the steps above. It won't take you more than a couple of hours, but will save your business cash flow in the long run.

IV. How can you prevent e-book theft?

Catching and pursuing your thieves is not easy and time-consuming. Many e-book authors choose to prevent such situations before they even write their e-books. Here are some ways that you can stop theft before it happens.

1) Use an e-book compiler that makes your e-book 100% theft-proof. "E-book Pro" offers you such protection. With it you can remotely cut off access to anyone who stole, illegally redistributes, or otherwise loses their right to your ebook. Developed by the Internet Marketing guru, Cory Rudl, this is the ONLY software on the market that offers such protection for your e-books. You can check it out at: <http://www.helpingfoot.com/ebook-security.html>

2) Always hide the contents of a directory where your e-book file is located. There is not much you

can do if one of your customers decides to resell your e-book, but for those who are looking for easy-to-steal files, be sure to place

"index.html" in that directory. This will insure that your files are invisible to Internet users.

3) Give your e-book a creative file name. I noticed that at least once a day someone tries to "guess" my e-book file name by typing different ones in. Don't name your e-book file close to its title.

4) Password protect your e-books, and change your password at least once a month. This can be easily done through your hosting company control panel, or via a CGI script.

5) Do a search on your e-book title (and your name) at least once a month to see if anyone is selling your e-book without your knowledge. When you start selling Reprint Rights, be sure to save all the names of your resellers. This way you will always know whether this person is authorized to resell your e-book or not.

IV. How can you take advantage of e-book theft?

Yes, you read it right. Some authors actually take advantage of their e-books being stolen, especially those writers who have been in such situations before.

Here is the thinking behind this concept. If a thief truly wants your e-book, he will find a way to copy it. Even if it means typing it up manually!

Instead of doing everything possible to stop theft, authors take it into consideration BEFORE writing their e-books. Here is how you can do it, too.

1) Promote yourself, other e-books, your services, your newsletter, and your web sites throughout the e-book. If you're giving examples, try to use your own web sites and your own experiences to illustrate.

2) Always have at least one more product for sale as your back-end product. Mention it throughout your e-book and link to it where needed.

3) Be sure to offer an incentive to your readers (whether they come from you or your thieves) to join your mailing list. Give away a free report, a free e-book, a free newsletter, a free pen, etc. just to capture their e-mails. You will then be able to send them follow-up messages and special promotions.

4) Create more and more e-books of interest to the same audience. Since they can't get more from the thief, they will get it from you!

5) Put a lot of personality in your e-book. It will make it harder to steal and claim as somebody else's, will make you develop close relationships with your customers, and will make your e-book more interesting to the reader.

In my own e-book development, I try to combine all of the above - prevention, pursuing, and promotion. But here is to your e-books never to be stolen! :-)

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Milana Leshinsky is a full-time Internet Entrepreneur, and the author of a web design manual for beginners, "Create Your First Business Web Site in 10 days".

[">http://www.firstbusinesswebsite.com/?ebookthft](http://www.firstbusinesswebsite.com/?ebookthft)

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