

Getting Revenge On Bandwidth Stealers

By Richard Lowe

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Well, you've discovered that someone is stealing your bandwidth. You've sent them a polite email (if you can figure out an email address) and perhaps even a less than polite message. They keep stealing your images, your sound files, your videos and even your zip files. What do you do now?

One thing that is very common is to replace the graphics image with something else, something which boldly says "stop doing this". I've known some people who use pornographic images or include swear words. I would not recommend these actions, as they are unprofessional. A simple "This person is a thief" or "this website is stealing bandwidth" or something to that effect is fine.

Don't worry about how big you make the graphic - it will show up just fine on the offender's web page. If they did not include high and width tags, the graphic will show as is, otherwise it will be distorted - but who cares?

Remember to fully optimize the graphic image. A GIF with eight colors is perfect, and a JPEG image compress by 50% to even 80% is great. This reduces the effect of the bandwidth stealing by lowering the size of the image that's being stolen.

Let's say you have an image that's 50k in size and it's being stolen. The web site that's using the image is displaying it 100 times a day. That's 5 megabytes of stolen bandwidth per day! If you can create a new graphic and optimize the image to, say, 5k, you reduce the effect to 500k of bandwidth instead of 5mb. In addition, of course, since the person stealing the bandwidth will hopefully stop doing it, then you may eliminate the problem all together.

You can even reduce the graphic to a simple 2 color 1X1 pixel image if you want (although that will not display the rude message). This may be your only option if the webmaster still does not remove the link to your images.

Oh yes, there is another important piece to remember. You have to change the name of the graphic that your own pages are using. Otherwise, of course, your pages will show that you are a thief, and that's not what you want.

Let's say you are using a graphic called "mine.jpg" and it is 127k in size. Several sites link to that graphic. You go to each of those sites, get the webmaster email address from each, and send a polite letter asking them to remove the link. You are ignored (which is often the case). A harsher email is not only ignored but one of the webmasters responds with a nasty email.

So you go ahead and rename "mine.jpg" to something like "mine2.jpg", then create a new image which is only 2k in size (just 4 colors) which says "This webmaster is stealing graphics. Please ask him to stop".

I'll bet that graphic comes down very fast.

I had a similar problem some time ago. I run several webring and one of the problems that constantly occurs is ring member sites link directly to the graphics on my own host. They do this even though the rules of the ring clearly state this is not allowed.

This left me with a dilemma. I didn't want to damage the beauty of the ring by putting out a "stop stealing" graphic, but since I am paying for my own bandwidth I wanted to reduce the load. I also didn't want to remove the image as I don't like 404 errors (I get an email for each and every one).

After repeated emails to the ring member site didn't work I was left with the choice of removing the images or removing the site from the ring. The later option would still have left the bandwidth being stolen (since the ring member probably would not remove the graphic).

What I wound up doing is creating a very optimal graphic with just 2 colors. The barest minimum graphic. It still looked okay, but was clearly not the best graphic for the ring. The file size of the image was less than 1k which removed over 1mb a month from my bandwidth usage.

I know none of this is the ideal solution. It can be a royal pain to examine server logs, send email and change image names. However, if you've got a big offender it can significantly reduce your bandwidth utilization.

Additional Information

Bandwidth stealing

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Legal/Bandwidth.htm>

Bandwidth stealing is the linking to images or scripts from another site without permission, thus using that sites bandwidth without compensation.

How to tell if your bandwidth is being stolen

<http://www.internet-tips.net/Legal/Bandwidthhow.htm>

Want to find out if someone is stealing your bandwidth? Here are some ways you can tell.

Sins of the internet- Bandwidth Stealing

http://www.internet-tips.net/Legal/sins_bandwidth.htm

This sin costs hosts millions of dollars a year - and often you don't even know that you did it!

Htaccess file - Redirect

http://www.internet-tips.net/Webmaster/htaccess_redirect.htm

You can redirect visitors to other pages using the redirect function of htaccess.

HTML tag reference guide - META http-equiv refresh

http://www.internet-tips.net/HTML/META_httpequiv_refresh.htm

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