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The Dangers of P2P File Sharing

What is P2P file sharing?

The strict definition of P2P is Peer-to-Peer. In current use it means the sharing of files between two users on the Internet.

What are Gnutella, BearShare, LimeWire, KaZaA, etc.?

These are some of the more popular programs that are used for P2P file sharing. Gnutella, KaZaA, iMesh, LimeWire, Morpheus, SwapNut, WinMX, AudioGalaxy, Blubster, eDonkey and BearShare each allow users to specify files located on their computers that can be freely shared with other users. These P2P programs are most often used to share music and videos over the Internet. Sharing by creating multiple copies of a copyrighted work is illegal.

What Are The Legal Ramifications of Sharing Copyrighted Material?

As the music industry is fond of saying, "The vast majority of [people] would never shoplift a CD at a record store but think nothing of accessing the same CD for free online." The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) has started lawsuits against individuals and businesses over this "sharing" of copyrighted material; Federal statute, titles 17 and 18 of the U.S. Code, provide criminal penalties for infringing on copyrighted material.

Other Risks From P2P Programs

- Some P2P programs will share everything on your computer with anyone by default. Searches that we have done have provided us with patent applications, medical information, financial and other personal and corporate information.
- Viruses, Worms and Trojans are being distributed.
- Much of the P2P activity is automatic, and its use is unmonitored. Computers running this software will be busy exchanging files whenever the machine is turned on.
- Some of the P2P programs themselves contain "spyware". This allows the author of the program, and other network users, to see what you're doing, where you're going on the Internet, and even use your computer's resources without your knowledge.
- Once installed, these applications can be hard to remove. In some cases a user has to know which files to remove, which registry entries to edit, and which configuration files need modification.
- Since the computers running the P2P programs are usually connected to a network, they can be used to spread malware, share private documents, or use your file server for store-and-forward.
- Various types of illegal files can be covertly embedded or disguised as legitimate file and downloaded and re-shared over these P2P networks by mistake. This can include, but not limited to, child pornography, which brings the owner of the computer and network under severe criminal penalties.

It should be noted that this posting is not an attempt by Bright House Networks nor Road Runner to limit or dictate how you use your Internet connection. However, it is very important to understand that by choosing to use P2P file sharing software and this method of sharing files, may not be free after all and end-up costing you more than just the price of a song, album, or movie.