

Submission to the Copyright Review Committee

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I attended the Copyright Review Committee's public consultation at the start of July 2011, mainly out of curiosity to find out who was involved in the process. I found the meeting interesting, and the chair encouraged us all to make submissions. I'm afraid that I have no particularly informed or expert points to make, but I thought I would enumerate some of the areas where copyright obviously impinges on my day-to-day life. If nothing else, they these points might serve as use cases for the committee to consider.

1. Copyright seems to be complicated, to the extent that most of us aren't really sure what we may and may not do. In light of this, I think many people depend on their conscience to make decisions, rather than seeking professional help. I doubt there is much the committee can do about this, but it probably does indicate that people will make some non-technical decision about fair-use, even if it is not legislated for.
2. I was involved in running a computer system used for teaching undergraduate mathematics and science students for many years. We used to encourage students to produce and maintain a web page for themselves. This is an important part of technical training, as scientists developed the web to distribute and advertise their technical work.

To make this assignment realistic, the web pages are public and the students produce a page describing themselves and their interests. Copyright impinged on this course, because while some students might write about their love of magnetic materials, others may reproduce a chapter of their favorite novel. While we warned students about being careful with the content of these pages, it was always impractical for us to continuously police the pages. Naturally, we did our best to respond if someone found content that was illegal, immoral or fattening.
3. On the flip side of this, I'm the author of a book, published by a commercial publisher. I have occasionally stumbled over unauthorized copies of the book on the web, and haven't lost a great deal of sleep over it. The publisher seems to have some mechanism for chasing these things up.

4. When I want to publish an academic paper, at the time of submission I often have to sign copyright forms, some amounting to 4 pages of legalese. Given that my intent is fairly clear at the time of submission, this paperwork seems to be a sign of something dysfunctional — I'm not sure if that is the international copyright system or the temperament of academics.

While I doubt the Copyright Review Committee can address this issue, it would seem silly to make changes which increase the amount of legal paperwork required in the usual case.

5. I've made electronic copies of my music CDs, as the CDs themselves seem to be slowly degrading over time. The convenience of the electronic format means I rarely consult the CDs any more, though they are all still sitting on a shelf. This seems to be a pretty wide-spread practice today, though because of point (1), I'm not really sure if it is permitted.
6. I never really understood why TodayFM's 'Gift Grub' podcasts couldn't be distributed through iTunes, though they seem to be directly downloadable. Apparently that was something to do with copyright.

www.todayfm.com/shows/weekdays/ian-dempsey-breakfast-show/Podcasts.aspx

I'm afraid this is all I have to offer, and hope it might be of some use to the committee in its work. In the rather unlikely event that I can be of assistance to the committee, please feel free to contact me by e-mail.

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