

Exeem opens new file-swapping doors

By John Borland

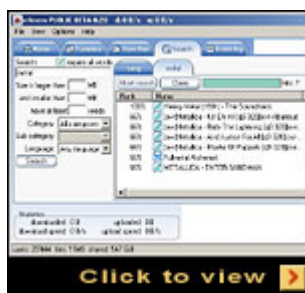
http://news.com.com/Exeem+opens+new+file-swapping+doors/2100-1032_3-5545730.html

Story last modified Fri Jan 21 14:19:00 PST 2005

Underground programmers hoping to capitalize on the BitTorrent file-swapping community on Friday unveiled highly anticipated software that some peer-to-peer advocates believe could blunt recent legal attacks from Hollywood.

Called [Exeem](#), the software aims to merge the speedy downloads of BitTorrent with the powerful global search capabilities of Kazaa or eDonkey. The first public version of the program was released by a company called Swarm Systems but has been [associated with SuprNova](#), a Web site that, until recently, drew millions of people seeking free content online through the popular BitTorrent software.

BitTorrent has been the focus of [an aggressive legal attack](#) by movie studio attorneys and their allies in recent weeks, leading to the disappearance of several of the most critical hubs for online file swapping around the world.



Some of the software's advocates have looked to the release of Exeem to bolster a community that had temporarily contributed to more Net traffic than any other application online. The developers may have more muted, short-term ambitions, however.

"We have not created BitTorrent, but a totally new P2P, which is a lot different from BitTorrent," said Andrej "Sloncek" Preston, who represents Swarm Systems and operated the now-defunct SuprNova site. "I think it's a fresh approach. Only time will tell if it's going to work."

The software's release is part of a broader maturation of one of the Net's most popular file-swapping communities. Once focused solely on fast downloads, with little capacity for searching or more advanced features, BitTorrent is being reborn as an updated version of Kazaa, as a rival to TiVo and as a grassroots media tool.

Written by independent developer Bram Cohen, BitTorrent has been an extraordinarily popular tool because it allows large files such as movies, TV shows or software to be downloaded relatively quickly. The technology downloads bits of a file at a time, and each downloader then makes those pieces available to other people trying to find the file.

The result, called "swarming," is the opposite of traditional Web traffic jams; more people trying to find the file typically means easier downloads, not long waits. Some software companies, including Linux developers, have used the software to distribute their products, lessening the load on their own download Web sites.

However, BitTorrent has required links to files to be posted on Web sites or distributed through chat networks like Internet Relay Chat. A few sites, such as SuprNova and LokiTorrent, emerged as hubs for the swapping community, posting hundreds or even thousands of links to pirated versions of movies, albums, TV programs and software.

Last month, the Motion Picture Association of America launched an all-out legal attack on these sites, succeeding in removing many of them from the Web. SuprNova was the most popular of these, but its operators said they were withdrawing, in part, to focus instead on the Exeem software.

BitTorrent, the second generation

Although Exeem is likely to spark the most interest among inveterate file swappers, a handful of other software applications are also dramatically extending BitTorrent's capabilities.



Canadian engineering student Sajeeth Cherian recently released a program called [Videora](#), which aims to merge BitTorrent and the blogging world's Really Simple Syndication (RSS) tool. Other bloggers have experimented with this notion before, but Videora may be the first to package the idea into a commercial, simple-to-use interface.

The program allows its users to "subscribe" to specific types of content--largely focused on TV programming--and then download it as links to it appear on various Web sites. Cherian sees it as an online version of TiVo; it has similar built-in tools, such as a "want list" and a "season ticket," which allow users to set the software automatically to download all episodes of a show, whenever they appear.

"Instead of just searching, this lets you personalize it and have it brought to you."

--Sajeeth Cherian, engineering student

Cherian said his software, which he's selling for \$23, makes finding content even easier than using a search tool.

"Anybody can use this tool to get their content to people," he said. "Instead of just searching, this lets you personalize it and have it brought to you."

For now, the tool is filled both with online videos and a smattering of TV shows and Japanese anime cartoons, many of which are technically illegal to distribute. Another new BitTorrent tool, called [Torrentocracy](#), is aimed at letting independent media producers distribute video online legally and watch it on their televisions.

"By running Torrentocracy on a computer connected to your television, you not only become a viewer of any available content from the Internet, but you also become a part of a vast grassroots media distribution network," the developers' site reads. "This is not about the illegal distribution of media, but rather, it's about enabling an entirely new way to receive the video which you watch on your TV."

The shadowy Swarm

Little is known about Exeem developer Swarm Systems to date. The software and Web site point to an address on the Caribbean island of Nevis and a company called [IFG Trust Services](#), which helps set up and administer offshore companies.

Preston confirmed that the company is based in St. Kitts and Nevis, and said its developers are scattered around the world but declined to provide any more information about the firm.

The software itself will be familiar to anyone who has used Kazaa or other file-swapping tools. It has a simple search page, allowing people to "publish" files to the network though a several-step point-and-click process. Once published, files can be downloaded by other people on the network.

According to Preston, the network works similarly to the FastTrack technology underlying Kazaa. A small number of people running the software are randomly selected as "nodes" and then provide a traffic cop function in the network, connecting people who are seeking or providing pieces of the same file.

"I don't see people who have grown accustomed to BitTorrent, which is different than a traditional peer-to-peer network, going to use this."

--Thomas Mennecke, editor and operator, [Slyck.com](#)

Like many other file-swapping programs, Exeem comes bundled with several pieces of advertising software, including the Cydoor Technologies adware utility and the LookSmart toolbar, which plugs into Internet Explorer.

The software isn't meeting with universally good reviews around the Net. Some users have already complained about the addition of the advertising software. Thomas Mennecke, who runs the file-swapping news site [Slyck.com](#), said he thinks BitTorrent aficionados will instead stick with the familiar Web-based community sites.

"I don't see people who have grown accustomed to BitTorrent, which is different than a traditional peer-to-peer network, going to use this," Mennecke said.

Peer-to-peer adversaries say the new software will do no more than any previous offering to hide the identity of people trading copyrighted works, such as movies or music, however.

A company called [BayTSP](#), which tracks trading on peer-to-peer networks for movie studios and record labels, has said it has long provided information on BitTorrent users, including specific files shared and IP

addresses, to its clients. It will likely do the same with Exeem, its executives said.

"We can still identify all the BitTorrent users," BayTSP Chief Executive Mark Ishikawa said. "Everyone who uses it still has the same issues of getting caught that they've always had."

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