



## Safety Tips for Peer-to-Peer (P2P) File-sharing Services

Peer-to-peer (P2P) file-sharing services are a popular tool that enables people to share media files such as music, movies, or video games with their peers. The power and popularity of these free services lie in the ease with which this type of sharing is done -- by enabling users to connect to a network where they can access shared files residing on the computers that are part of the network. Peer to peer networks are a revolutionary way of distributing your own personal files like photos or songs. But while there are legal and safe ways to use P2P networks, you may want to consider the following risks before using them.

**Know the Risks** - There are two categories of risks to consider when using P2P services: the content that can be accessed and the security of the service itself.

**Content Issues** - Most of the public discussion and concerns about P2P services are centered on the legal issues, namely copyright infringement and the age-appropriateness of the media being shared (pornography or violent games). The files people share may be pirated material and the distribution of these files may be illegal. A person may or may not be knowingly engaging in illegal behavior. Regardless, they may put themselves or others at risk of breaking the law.

Following are questions to consider when using a file-sharing service:

**Is the file I want to access really what its name indicates?**

Sometimes files available through P2P sharing sites have names that are deceptive and even files named 'Winnie the Pooh' or 'Pokemon' have been found to contain pornography.

**Is the file a legal copy of a CD, DVD, or video game?**

While it may not be easy to determine whether a file has been pirated, members may be sharing files they know have been illegally copied.

**Does the file have limits on distribution?**

e.g. You can make a copy of it, but only for yourself; you cannot make a copy for someone else.

If you are uncertain about the answers to any of the above questions, it is best not to download or share the file.

**Security Issues** - File-sharing services have also increasingly become a destination for cybercriminals to fool people into downloading fake or malicious software, using both overt and covert techniques. Be aware of offers for discounted security software or links to third-party sites with "deals" as these may be techniques designed to trick you into downloading bad things that can cause harm later, a tactic known as "social engineering".

Likewise, you may leave your computer vulnerable due to the openness of P2P networks. Cybercriminals drop copies of malicious software into shared folders of popular P2P file-sharing applications, using enticing names for the software so that as many people as possible will download it. Once a computer has been infected with this kind of software, any number of things can happen to it. Depending on the intent of the cybercriminal, they can steal information using

methods such as capturing screenshots while the computer is in use (which may contain personal information) and sending that information back to the criminal.

**Be Prepared** - A combination of awareness of what is legal and what isn't and proper use of the file-sharing service and security technology can help you safely and securely enjoy sharing your favorite forms of media, such as movies, music or video games with your friends or family using P2P services.

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