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Facebook faces shutdown over 'stolen code' claim

Facebook, the popular social-networking website will face shutdown if it fails to win a US court battle next week.

A hearing to be held in a US court on 25th July 2007 marks the latest battle in a three-year spat between Facebook and rival website ConnectU.

Cameron and Tyler Winklevoss and Divya Narendra, former fellow Harvard students of Facebook founder Mark Zuckerberg, allege that Zuckerberg copied code and a business plan from their site while he was still working for them as a programmer. At the time, the site was known as harvardconnect.com. It later changed its name to ConnectU.

The dispute started when Zuckerberg launched his website in February 2004, a month after promising to finish the plaintiff's website.

The plaintiffs have demanded that Facebook be shut down and full control of the site and all assets be passed to them. Facebook is suing ConnectU for alleged business torts and unfair business practices.

Since branching out its network from just students to everyone last September, Facebook has grown from 14 million to 26 million visitors per month, according to comScore figures. Facebook is also rumoured to be seeking a possible IPO.



HP recycles half a billion kilos of electronics

Computer and electronics giant HP has announced that it has recycled half a billion kilos of old equipment in the last three years and plans to recycle another half a billion by year 2010.

The firm said it had reached its original target of recycling half a billion kilograms of waste - set at the beginning of 2004 - six months early. And HP criticised its competitor IBM for lagging behind in the recycling stakes.

In 2006 HP said it had recycled 85 million kilograms of electronics compared to just 50 million kilograms by IBM. That figure represents 10 per cent of HP's overall "relevant" product output.

"Environmental responsibility is good business ... we've reached the tipping point where the price and performance IT are no longer compromised by being green, but are now enhanced by it," said Mark Hurd, HP's chairman and chief executive.

HP's efforts in recycling were recognised earlier this year by inclusion in Fortune Magazine's "Ten Green Giants" in April 2007.

Fortune wrote: "HP owns massive e-waste recycling plants, where enormous shredders and granulators reduce four million pounds of computer detritus each month to bite-sized chunks - the first step in reclaiming not just steel and plastic but also toxic chemicals like mercury and even some precious metals. HP will take back any brand of equipment; its own machines are 100 percent recyclable."

Putting out absolute figures and comparing them to other companies figures may be misleading, however. HP, for example, includes both electronics and printer cartridges in its figures. IBM's figures do not, which might go some way towards explaining the disparity between the two companies.



Windows Media DRM cracked again

Hackers have again broken Microsoft's Windows Media DRM technology. A new version of the FairUse4WM program provides a simple drag-and-drop interface for converting restricted music files into the open MP3 format. That includes files purchased from online music stores that rely on Windows DRM, notably Napster.

Microsoft said that the technology was designed to be easily modified when cracked but would not say when it expects to have closed this particular hole. However it will be hoping that a solution can be found quickly to avoid a repeat of the embarrassment last year, when BSKyB suspended film downloads and web access to sports clips after a similar breach.

Following that event, Microsoft filed a lawsuit against FairUse4WM's authors, but dropped the action when it failed to establish their identities.



Intel launches first Extreme edition mobile processor

Intel has officially unveiled the first Extreme version of its mobile dual-core processor, adopting the same branding as the firm's high-end desktop processors.

And the company said that it expected to announce quad-core versions of its mobile processors next year.

The new flagship mobile chip - the Intel Core 2 Extreme X7800 - will run at 2.6GHz per core, has 4MB of L2 cache and an 800MHz front-side bus. Intel has also removed the overspeed protection from the new processor, a feature that should have performance enthusiasts dribbling into their breakfasts.

This means end users and manufacturers will be able to tweak the new processor to make it run faster, though exactly how fast it will go is yet to be seen.

Intel is, however, playing it safe over the new capability, the list of caveats in its press release stressing that overclocking isn't really something it recommends: "Altering clock frequency and/or voltage may (i) reduce system stability and useful life of the system and processor; (ii) cause the processor and other system components to fail; (iii) cause reductions in system performance; (iv) cause additional damage; and (v) affect system data integrity. Intel has not tested, and does not warranty, the operation of the processor beyond its specifications."

Intel expects laptops with the Core 2 Extreme X7800 to appear in the next two weeks, although with an OEM cost (the cost to the laptop builder) of \$851 per chip (around £418), don't expect them to be cheap.

In the same announcement, Intel also said it would "definitely" be bringing a "battery-friendly" quad-core version of its mobile processor to market, and announced a set of new desktop processors at the same time.

The new desktop processors include the firm's flagship QX6850 quad-core processor, clocked at 3.0GHz with the a new, faster, 1333MHz bus speed and 8MB of L2 cache, plus another quad core processor (the 2.66GHz Q6700, 1066MHz FSB, 8MB L2 cache), and three new Core 2 Duo processors.



Anti-Microsoft Office campaign gathers pace

More than 20,000 people have put their names to a web petition opposing Microsoft's attempts to have its new Office file format accepted as an international standard.

The NoOOXML.org petition calls on members of the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) to vote against accepting Open XML, which it says Microsoft is trying to fast-track through the approval process

"People are outraged by what's going on," said petition author Benjamin Henrion. "Not since the software patents fight have we seen such a reaction from the online community. And it's gone global. Users are happy with the existing international standard for documents, and can't see why Microsoft is forcing its own standard except in pure self-interest."

Henrion says that Microsoft's specification is closed, protected by patents and secrets. The petition lists eight objections. Others have pointed to serious bugs, such as the format's inability to handle dates before 1900.

The Foundation for a Free Information Infrastructure (FFII), which set up the No OOXML campaign, insists that Microsoft has not answered its accusations that OOXML is what FFII president Pieter Hintjens describes as a low-quality closed specification.

"Instead it lobbies to subvert the term 'open standard' to include non-open patented formats like OOXML," Hintjens said. "It justifies its cynical violation of ISO by claiming that 'users demand multiple standards', that more standards means more choice. It's ironic that Microsoft's business in fact depends on taking real choice away from its customers. Let me be clear: an open standard is unpatented and is free to all. Email is an open standard. HTTP is an open standard. OOXML is not."

Microsoft insists that opposition to OOXML is "a blatant attempt to use the standards process to limit choice in the marketplace" and rejects the argument that because the ODF format has already been accepted as a standard, that precludes any alternative. Tom Robertson, Microsoft's GM for Interoperability & Standards says that it's important to recognise that ODF and Open XML were created with very different design goals: ODF is closely tied to OpenOffice and reflects the functionality in that product.

"If successful, the campaign to block consideration of Open XML could create a dynamic where the first technology to the standards body, regardless of technical merit, gets to preclude other related ones from being considered," said Robertson. "In XML-based file formats, which can easily interoperate through translators and be implemented side by side in productivity software, this exclusivity makes no sense - except to those who lack confidence in their ability to compete in the marketplace on the technical merits of their alternative standard. This campaign to limit choice and force their single standard on consumers should be resisted."

