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Submission by The Football Association Premier League Limited for the 2024 Review of Notorious Markets for Counterfeiting and Piracy

(Docket No. USTR-2024-0013)

Introduction

The Football Association Premier League Limited (the “**Premier League**”) is the organising body of the top-level football competition for clubs in England and Wales, which is currently known as the Premier League (the “**Competition**”). The Premier League is owned by the 20 constituent member clubs of the Competition from time to time (the “**Clubs**”). The Premier League is authorised by the Clubs to license broadcasters throughout the world to provide and offer audio-visual coverage of the 380 matches that are played in the Competition during the course of each season (“**Matches**”). The Premier League owns copyright in the audio-visual coverage of all Matches, including film works (in the footage) and artistic works (in the various logos and on-screen graphics). The Premier League is broadcast to almost 900 million households around the world (including through NBC Sports, the Premier League’s authorised broadcaster in the United States) and a high proportion of the Premier League’s revenue is generated from the sale of exclusive audio-visual broadcasting rights to the Matches. The Premier League’s recent focus in the United States has included, the opening of the Premier League’s New York office¹; the Summer Series of matches in July 2023²; and the regular Premier League Mornings Live events, the most recent of which was held in Chicago last month.

The revenue generated from broadcast rights is crucial to the quality and success of the Competition, and for the Premier League’s ability to contribute to community projects around the world. The Premier League has committed to investing £1.6 billion in community and wider football initiatives between the 2022/23 and 2024/25 Seasons and since 2007 has reached 45 markets through its community work, training over 36,000 adults and benefitting almost 2 million young people. In the United States, this has included running Premier League Primary Stars USA, a digital learning programme for elementary schools that has been active across 679 schools in 7 states with approximately 75,000 students involved.

The Premier League welcomes the opportunity to respond to the Office of the United States Trade Representative’s (“**USTR**”) 2024 Review of Notorious Markets for Counterfeiting and Piracy (the “**Notorious Markets List**”). Abuse of the Premier League’s IP rights occurs through many forms, both physical and online. However, due to the scale of infringement, the Premier League has decided to focus on the infringement of its copyright over the internet. For example, during Season 2023/24³, the Premier League detected over 750,000 infringing live online streams and over 1 million unauthorised recorded clips of Matches.

Online copyright infringement of live sport

Infringement of the Premier League’s copyright has evolved in many ways over several years. The current ecosystem for unauthorised online streaming of Matches can most simply be broken down into: (a) “Open Web Piracy” - where infringing streams of Matches are openly available for free over the internet, although generally at reduced quality; and (b) “Closed Network Piracy” - where infringing streams of Matches are made available by sophisticated operators, at a generally higher quality, to individuals that have purchased the necessary subscriptions from them, either as a one-off fee or a regular subscription.

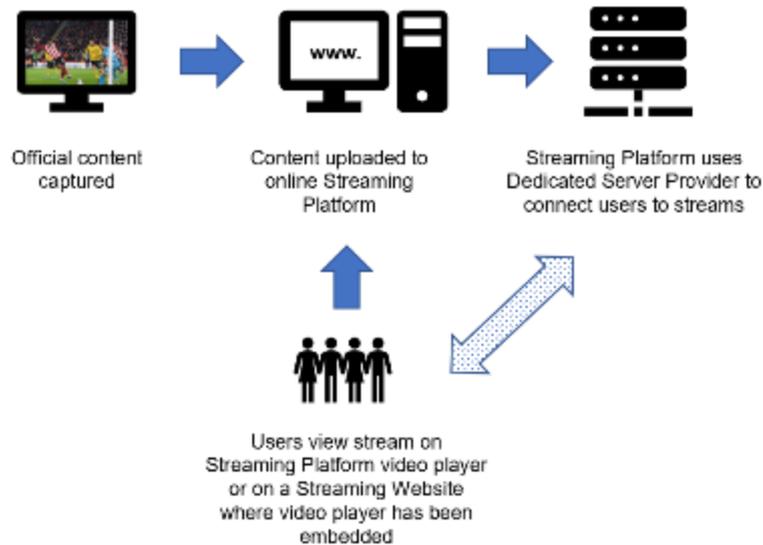
¹<https://www.premierleague.com/news/3599181>

² <https://www.premierleague.com/SummerSeries>

³ Data based on 38 rounds of Matches, between 11 August 2023 and 19 May 2024

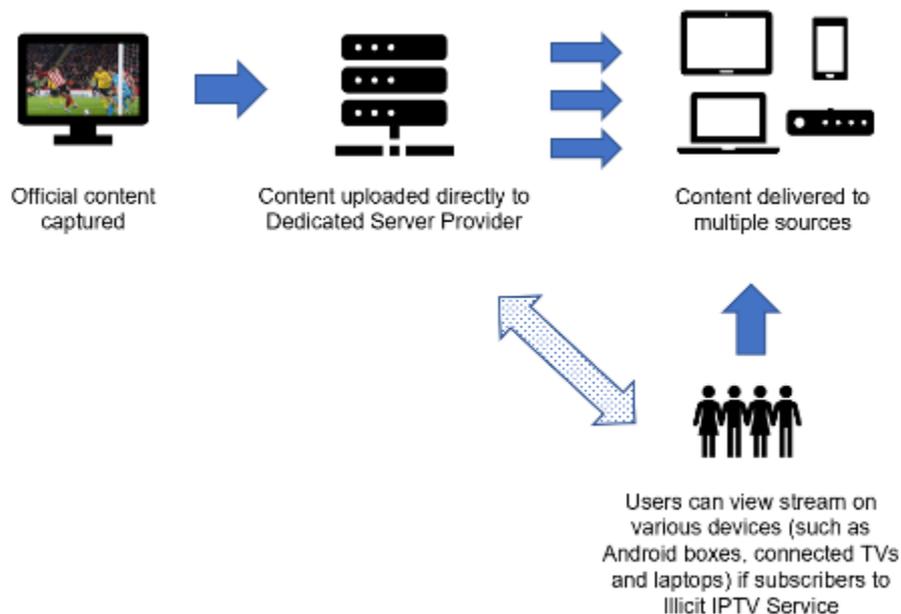
A simplified illustration of how both these forms of online piracy work are below:

Figure 1: Open Web Piracy



Open Web Piracy involves a pirate operator capturing an official broadcast signal (through various means, such as using a HDMI splitter connecting a legitimate set-top-box to a computer) and then uploading the content to a Streaming Platform. The Streaming Platform software creates a hyperlink to the content that may be played within the Streaming Platform and/or extracted and shared for viewing elsewhere on the internet, often on Streaming Websites (also known as linking or referring websites, that are generally free to access and which aggregate URLs from a range of Streaming Platforms and provide hyperlinks to live streams). However, as illustrated by the diagram above, users are unable to connect to streams made available through Streaming Platforms and Streaming Websites without the use of a Dedicated Server Provider (sometimes referred to as a Hosting Provider) to deliver the streams. Without them, users would still be able to access Streaming Platforms and Streaming Websites but would not be able to view the audio-visual content on them.

Figure 2: Closed Network Piracy



Closed Network Piracy also requires a pirate operator to initially access an official broadcast signal. However, in this more sophisticated form of piracy, the operator uploads the content straight on to a streaming server (without the need for a Streaming Platform) and makes the content directly available to certain users. This is generally how Illicit IPTV Services operate; in return for a one-off, monthly or annual fee, they provide access to an Electronic Program Guide (“EPG”), typically through illicit streaming devices such as an Android box, containing hundreds or even thousands of channels of premium content. This is termed a “Closed Network” because the content is only available to users who have paid the pirate operators the relevant subscription. However, just as in Open Web Piracy, the process cannot work without the use of a Dedicated Server Provider to enable those users to connect to the audio-visual content. The EPG would remain accessible, but no content would be played when a relevant channel was selected.

Recommendations for the Notorious Markets List

Whilst the above is an over-simplification of the piracy ecosystem, it does illustrate the role of several key entities that are directly involved in the offering of illegal live streams of Matches. This submission therefore deliberately focuses on the following intermediaries: Dedicated Server Providers, Streaming Platforms, Streaming Websites, Illicit IPTV Services and Infringing Satellite Broadcasters (namely services that access official broadcast signals and then retransmit pirated content over their satellite networks to users who have the required satellite receivers) (“**Infringing Satellite Broadcasters**”). Any internet visit numbers included within the submission are global figures sourced from Similarweb’s traffic analysis tool.⁴

The examples provided are by no means exhaustive. The reality is that many other examples of these and other intermediaries are involved in the wide-scale infringement of live sports content around the world.

Dedicated Server Providers (“DSPs”)

Without DSPs, users would not be able to watch any infringing audio-visual content regardless of whether they are using Streaming Websites, Illicit IPTV Services or other pirate sources. DSPs are therefore in many ways best-placed to prevent both Open Web and Closed Network piracy from occurring. Several, however, instead choose to profit from such infringements by knowingly leasing their servers to pirate operators.

⁴ <https://www.similarweb.com/>



As illustrated by a decision of the District Court of the Hague in the Premier League's civil proceedings against Ecatel Ltd⁵, DSPs are able to act in real-time to remove infringing live streams passing through their networks. They should accordingly be required to (i) offer effective and appropriate takedown tools (which has proved highly effective, straightforward, proportionate and safe whenever implemented); (ii) provide customer identification verification of customers found to be making available copyrighted content without authorisation; and (iii) enforce meaningful repeat infringer policies.

Recommended DSPs for inclusion on the Notorious Markets List

When compiling its list of DSPs for inclusion on the Notorious Markets List, the Premier League has focused on those that have (i) been responsible for thousands of infringing live streams of Matches in Season 2023/24 (and often for many years); and (ii) not taken any meaningful action to prevent the infringements, either in real-time or subsequently against the infringing customer(s), despite receiving an electronic takedown notice for every infringing stream.

The DSPs referenced in this submission were, between them, responsible for over 140,000 infringing live streams of Matches during Season 2023/24. In addition, during Season 2023/24, there were a further almost 85,000 infringing live streams delivered through Cloudflare's infrastructure in order to obfuscate the true identity of the responsible DSP, a large proportion of which the Premier League suspects would be attributable to the DSPs listed below. Where possible, the Autonomous System Number ("**ASN**") is included to help identify the correct organisation. ASNs are the numbers that allow identification of each network on the internet.

1. Amarutu Technology Ltd ("Amarutu") – AS206264

Amarutu (also known as Koddos) is a DSP which claims to have office locations in Hong Kong and Seychelles and which operates data centres in the United States and the Netherlands.⁶ It consistently ignores the takedown notices it receives from the Premier League every week. Amarutu's attitude to such notices, which it has demonstrated for many years, is illustrated on the offshore dedicated sever page of its website, where it states:

*'Main rules being no childporn, malicious scripts/pages or SPAM on the network, almost all other content is allowed. Abuse and DMCA messages will be forwarded to the client for resolution but in most cases action is not required'*⁷

Amarutu was named in the USTR 2023 Review of Notorious Markets for Counterfeiting and Piracy (the "**2023 Notorious Markets List**")⁸ but has continued to allow large scale infringement of Premier League copyright through its services; during the 2023/24 Season the Premier League detected over 5,000 infringing streams already, in addition to over 5,000 last Season.

2. AS-Istqservers / Istqserveres ("Istq") – AS212042 / AS211826

Istq is an allegedly Jordan based DSP that operates multiple ASNs, seemingly in order to evade efforts by legitimate copyright owners to enforce their IP rights. Istq was included in the 2022 EU Commission Counterfeit and Piracy Watch List⁹ (the "**EU 2022 Watch List**") but was still responsible for over 12,000 infringing live

⁵ The Football Association Premier League v Ecatel Ltd, C/09/485400/ HA ZA 15-367 (2018)

⁶ <https://koddos.net/contact.html>

⁷ <https://koddos.net/offshore-dedicated-servers.html>

⁸ <https://ustr.gov/about-us/policy-offices/press-office/press-releases/2024/january/ustr-releases-2023-review-notorious-markets-counterfeiting-and-piracy>

⁹ <https://circabc.europa.eu/ui/group/d0803128-7d62-40ee-8349-c43ee92745aa/library/b36f701d-2850-4768-9b3e-e487140e11e5/details?download=true>



streams during Season 2023/24 (including 40% of those at high quality¹⁰) and failed to take any meaningful action upon receipt of takedown notices.

3. Best DC – AS216014

The Premier League understands that PEENQ.NL (AS212370) has recently been dissolved and its IP addresses were transferred to Best DC. However, investigations have shown the same operator to be responsible for both. PEENQ.NL was responsible for 14,000 infringing streams during Season 2023/24.

4. HostPalace Web Solution PVT LTD (“Host Palace”) - AS134512

Host Palace is an India based DSP with data centres located in the USA, Europe and India. The company also runs a second DSP (AS60064) apparently based in the UK. Host Palace takes no action whatsoever to cease the copyright infringement that it is well aware occurs across its network every week. Host Palace was included in the EU 2022 Watch List but has since continued to be responsible for high volumes of infringing live streams of Matches every week, including over 20,000 streams during Season 2023/24.

5. NetSolutions – AS47674

NetSolutions is a DSP allegedly based in Macau but with data centres located around the world, including in the Netherlands. It trades under the brand name ‘BlazingFast’ and was responsible for over 16,000 infringing live streams during Season 2023/24 (with 44% of these in high quality). It does not act upon the thousands of notices the Premier League has sent in relation to these infringements.

6. Pulsarnet – AS400409

This DSP is completely non-responsive and non-compliant with takedown requests that it is delivering infringing streams. It is also registered with ARIN using a US based address. This DSP was responsible for over 15,000 infringing streams during Season 2023/24.

7. Squitter-Networks (“Squitter”) – AS213371

Squitter (also sometimes referred to as ABC Consultancy) is a DSP registered with a location of India, despite claiming to have an office in Russia (<https://squitter.eu/>). During Season 2023/24 over 8,000 infringing streams of Matches were detected on the Squitter network. Takedown notices are sent for each infringing stream traced to a Squitter server, but the Premier League has not received any responses or seen any action being taken to end the ongoing infringements. The website domain associated with Squitter’s abuse address (‘abuse@firki.io’) even advertises ‘DMCA ignored’ hosting as a service. Squitter was also named in the 2023 Notorious Markets List.

8. AS27161

Previously known as ‘Litnics’, this operation is now ‘unreserved’¹¹ but is still announcing IPs that infringe copyright. The service was previously registered with ARIN using a US address. In spite of seemingly being unregistered, the fact that its IPs continue to operate from the ASN and deliver infringing streams is concerning.

9. Virtual Systems LLC (“Virtual Systems”) - AS30860 and AS6698

¹⁰ High quality is defined as anything at 1080p or above

¹¹ The relevant regional internet registry (RIR) for this DSP, known as ARIN, no longer holds a record for this DSP yet it continues to operate



Virtual Systems is a Ukraine based DSP that ignores all takedown notices sent in relation to the thousands of infringing live streams of Matches that have been delivered from its servers over multiple years. Virtual Systems is responsible for high volumes of infringements every week, including over 38,000 infringing streams during Season 2023/24.

10. ZETNET RO – AS25198

Zetnet RO were responsible for over 15,000 infringing streams during Season 2023/24. Despite receiving takedown requests from the Premier League, it has refused to take action. Zetnet RO has data centres all over Europe, but is registered as a Romanian company.



Streaming Platforms

Streaming Platforms can play an integral role in preventing Open Web Piracy as the removal of infringing content at source results in the content becoming inaccessible on all third-party locations that are embedding or linking to the content.

The below is one example of a particularly problematic and popular Streaming Platform whose streams are often embedded into the most popular Streaming Websites.

1. Aliez

Aliez¹² is a hybrid site that operates as both a Streaming Platform and a user generated upload site, where users can start and stream their own content. The Premier League also understands that this website has close ties with the linking site, livetv.sx, where the Premier League frequently sees Aliez streams being shared. Over 3,000 infringing streams of Matches were detected on Aliez over Season 2023/24. A large percentage of the streams were delivered primarily by Squitter (see above).

¹² Accessible through aliez.tv



Streaming Websites

Streaming Websites offer consumers free access to live streams of Matches and other live events and, according to the Premier League's extensive consumer research, remain the preferred method of pirate consumption in many markets around the world. The following is a non-exhaustive list of Streaming Websites that have ignored all takedown notices sent by the Premier League and are globally popular. All the below sites carry content from US based sports and/or broadcasters.

1. Freestreams-live1-

A site that was previously operating under the domain 'freestreams-live1.com'. After this domain was seized by Homeland Security Investigations (HSI), a new domain 'freestreams-live1.tv' was setup. The domain continues to be a major source of live piracy, with live content (including Matches) directly embedded onto the site. The service received over 4 million visits in Season 2023/24.

2. Footybite-

Footybite¹³ encompasses a large network of free-to-access websites that the Premier League believes all fall under the same operator. The sites are some of the most popular globally, with nearly 550 million visits in Season 2023/24 to the footybite.to domain alone. The sites carry a wide range of sports content, with content belonging to US based sports rights owners, such as the NBA, featuring heavily.

3. Livetv

Livetv¹⁴ is one of the most notorious Streaming Websites in the world, with a long history of infringement. It has historically operated through multiple domains to provide an index of links to live streams of a very broad range of sports events, including live Matches. Users can simply select the event they wish to view, click on the relevant link and watch the live stream within the framework of the site. It is available in 12 different languages and received over 100 million global online visits during Season 2023/24. The site is currently the subject of blocking injunctions obtained by the Premier League for copyright infringement in multiple jurisdictions but remains accessible in the vast majority of countries worldwide.

4. Pirlo TV

Pirlo TV¹⁵ refers to a significant network of pirate websites that saw 146 million visits during Season 2023/24, tending to target Spanish language users.

5. Sportshub

Sportshub¹⁶ is an extremely popular family of free-to-access websites that is operated from Turkey. During Season 2023/24 it received 485 million visits to its domains, with the US as its most popular territory for visits. The website has been found to be copyright infringing in a blocking injunction obtained by the Premier League.

6. Sportsurge.club

Sportsurge.club provides links to a wide range of unauthorised live sporting content. The site does not post links until approximately an hour before each respective event. During the Season 2023/24 just over 55 million visits were recorded to the site globally with the US as its most popular territory for visits.

7. Streameast.app

¹³ Accessible through a range of domains including footybite.to

¹⁴ Accessible through a range of domains including livetv.sx

¹⁵ Accessible through a range of domains including pirlotv.fr

¹⁶ Accessible through a range of domains including sportshub.stream



The Streameast.app¹⁷ family of sites, is one of the most popular globally for watching infringing broadcasts of live sport, and carries a number of US based broadcasters without authorisation. During Season 2023/24, 264 million visits were recorded to the site globally. with the US as its most popular territory for visits.

8. Totalsportek

Totalsportek (previously totalsportek.com and now totalsportek.pro) is a major pirate sports Streaming Website that provides links to multiple live sporting events. The site does not post links until about an hour before each live football match starts and when it does, it provides an index of up to 40 links. The site had just under 80 million visits in Season 2023/24.

9. VIPBox

VIPBox (VIPBox.lc and associated domains) is another example of a Streaming Website that provides links to a range of live sporting events from around the world. The Streaming Website further makes content available in multiple languages, including English, Spanish, German and Italian. There are numerous domains operating under the “VIP” brand, and the .lc domain alone received over 100 million visits last Season.

10. Xoilac

The Xoilac¹⁸ family of websites targets a Vietnamese audience and provides links to a wide range of live sporting content. The websites egregiously continue to infringe despite Vietnamese authorities attempting to block access to domains associated with the service, and widespread news coverage highlighting that the sites are infringing¹⁹. In total, the operators have created over 300 domains within the Xoilac family to try and avoid disruption efforts. The Premier League estimates that in Season 2023/24, the Xoilac family of sites received around 23 million visits.

Closed Network Illicit IPTV and Subscription Services

The following is a non-exhaustive list of sophisticated Illicit IPTV Services and Subscription Services that are brazenly operating in such a way to offer live streams of Matches every week, as well as access to US sporting events and TV channels:

1. BingSport

The BingSport²⁰ family of websites (including also the notorious AMZFootball²¹ brand, as well as 247sport and streamshubs) offers globally popular paid-for subscription services that provides access to Matches through a variety of packages. The service appears to be run through a group of individuals and companies based in Vietnam. In 2022, HSI Baltimore seized the amzfootball.com domain but the service has continued to operate uninterrupted.

2. EVPad

EVPad²² is an illicit IPTV streaming service that operates through a network of online and physical resellers around the world. It offers content through multiple hardware models that are loaded with apps capable of

¹⁷ Accessible through <https://the.streameast.app/v78>

¹⁸ Accessible through a range of domains including Xoilac24.org

¹⁹ <https://e.vnexpress.net/news/sports/pirated-sports-streaming-site-part-of-organized-crime-official-4665452.html>

²⁰ Accessible through bingsport.com

²¹ Accessible through amzlive.tv

²² <https://www.evpadpro.com/>



providing access to thousands of channels. The business is extremely sophisticated and regularly launches new product lines; just one such product purchased on behalf of the Premier League was found to provide access to around 2,000 channels, including 75 offering live sports broadcasts. The operators have been very careful to hide their location and identities, although the Premier League's investigations have linked them to a presence in Hong Kong and China. The service has also been found to infringe copyright in a blocking injunction obtained against it by the Premier League.

3. Family Box

The Premier League has detected Family Box²³ streams through its role as an Illicit IPTV service with global coverage, but is also aware that it has a terrestrial pirate operation covering Kurdistan. The offices are apparently Iraq based. The Illicit IPTV service makes available a wide range of sports content, including that of US rights holders. It uses Telegram as a way of promoting the wide range of available channels.

4. Gazal

The Premier League understands that Gazal²⁴, based in Jordan, distributes branded devices across the MENA region and Europe both through online sales²⁵ and physical stores. The receivers are widely available at satellite shops in Jordan, which function as resellers for the company.

5. Globe IPTV

Globe IPTV is one of the most prominent wholesalers²⁶ of content to pirate services around the world, offering access to live sports, movies and television content through over 1,500 channels. It is known to have supplied multiple pirate services that have been the subject of historical and ongoing legal action pursued by the Premier League. Investigations carried out by the Premier League and several other content owners have identified the operator in Lebanon, with assistance from individuals in other locations.

6. Lemo IPTV/ IPTV Trends

Lemo IPTV and IPTV Trends are a family of popular subscription based Illicit IPTV services that offer 24/7 access to a multitude of TV channels, including those carrying live coverage of Matches. The services are advertised through a variety of websites,²⁷ which appear to be targeting users in the United States.

7. Redline

Redline²⁸ is a supplier of illicit streaming services which, although headquartered in Istanbul (through the company DTS Elektronik Sanayi Ticaret Limited Sirketi), has been operating through a network of online marketplaces, physical distributors and warehouses across Europe, the Middle East and Africa for over 10 years. One of its "Red360 TV" products for example, purchased on behalf of the Premier League, was provided with a list of almost 5,000 available channels.

8. Spider

The Premier League is aware that Spider-branded devices are sold across MENA and Europe, via a website²⁹ and physical shops, by a company based in Jordan. The devices make available a wide range of content,

²³ <https://family4k.store>

²⁴ <https://gazal-store.com/%D8%B1%D9%8A%D8%B3%D9%8A%D9%81%D8%B1%D8%A7%D8%AA>

²⁵ <https://gazalsat.com>

²⁶ A wholesaler usually operates higher up the IPTV ecosystem, selling content and services to resellers who then ultimately make the content available to the public.

²⁷ Primarily through <https://lemotv.com> and <https://iptvtrends.com/>

²⁸ <https://redline.com.tr/en/>

²⁹ <http://spiderreceiver.com>



including channels that offer live broadcasts of Matches, and the website also sells subscriptions to unauthorised IPTV services. Spider was included in the USTR's 2023 Notorious Markets List³⁰.

9. SVI Cloud

SVI Cloud is an illicit streaming device that is very popular in South-East Asia. It operates both online and through an extensive list of resellers with over 70 physical locations listed as selling the device on their official website.³¹ The devices have also been sold brazenly on popular e-commerce marketplaces. The devices offer content through multiple hardware models that are loaded with apps such as “Luca TV” or “Yoghurt TV”, which are capable of providing access to over 1,000 live TV channels. The operators have taken steps to conceal their identities, but the Premier League’s investigations have linked them to a presence in Hong Kong and China.

10. Yacine TV

Yacine TV provides infringing content through an app popular in the MENA region³². The Premier League understands that the service is likely operated from Algeria, and appears to be particularly popular in North Africa. It makes available a range of TV channels that carry live broadcasts of Matches.

Infringing Satellite Broadcasters

The service below broadcasts infringing content of Matches via satellite footprints that span beyond the originating territory, creating multi-jurisdictional issues. For satellite broadcasters, identifying the source of the piracy is generally easier than with online operators because of the commercial relationships required with satellite operators (who are generally legitimate businesses willing to provide relevant customer details in cases of infringement), however these services nevertheless continue to operate openly.

1. Satcon

Satcon’s main presence has been identified in Gabon, Guinea and Liberia, but it is suspected to also operate in a number of other territories in the region. The service provides access to a range of broadcasters and content from around the world.

Despite sanctions being imposed by the audiovisual regulator in Gabon, and the service being named in media as infringing³³, Satcon has continued to broadcast pirated content.

Conclusion

As demonstrated throughout this submission, IP infringement through online piracy is a complex issue that involves many different intermediaries and forms of technology. The entities identified above, however, are all playing an integral role in the direct offering of high volumes of infringing live streams of Matches (as well as, in many cases, other copyright protected content) and are therefore recommended for inclusion on the Notorious Market List.

³⁰

https://ustr.gov/sites/default/files/2023_Review_of_Notorious_Markets_for_Counterfeiting_and_Piracy_Notorious_Markets_List_final.pdf

³¹ <https://www.svicloud.net>

³² <http://download.yacineapp.tv/>

³³ <https://www.agenceecofin.com/audiovisuel/0707-89875-bein-sports-canal-gabon-television-l-uefa-et-d-autres-condamnent-les-diffusions-illegales-par-satcon-au-gabon>



The Premier League would be happy to assist the USTR with more detailed commentary on any of the countries covered within this submission.