

Greater disclosure of Digital Rights Management (DRM) limitations isn't what is needed. There are many reasons for this. I'll highlight two reasons in the realm of video game DRM.

First, creating some kind of bulletproof DRM is impossible. Hackers not only have plenty of time on their hands, but there may be tens or hundreds of them working on one project. A corporation's response to hackers' work may be hampered by bureaucracy, tiered development and patching processes, and having work besides responding to hackers--in short, hackers are much more agile than businesses.

Thus, software hackers will always find a way around schemes that attempt to control their access to and use of a product, and they will be particularly motivated to do so if they have spent money on a product. (Not all hackers refuse to purchase 100% of products 100% of the time, after all.)

Second, because of the facts above, DRM always punishes the legitimate consumer. A hacker uses a computer like any legitimate consumer does--the difference is (typically) that the hacker is an expert computer user, whereas the legitimate consumer's skill with computers varies. Thus, if a DRM program designed to stop a hacker happens to cause a problem for a legitimate consumer--a common occurrence--the legitimate consumer may be left without recourse, depending on his or her level of computer expertise. (Remember that the hacker will never be stymied for long.) And whether the legitimate consumer eventually solves the problem or not, he or she has had to jump through more hoops than someone adhering to the law should have to. Legitimate users should be respected and given an easy-street, red-carpet path to the use of the software (or music, movies, etc.) that they paid money for.

Again, the answer to today's DRM problems isn't better disclosure of limitations. The answer is for companies to produce fewer, higher-quality products that are worth buying and that incorporate features that an illegitimate user will not have access to--for example, online scoreboards that are tied to legitimate users' CD keys or product serial numbers.

If game companies must have DRM, it should be server-based--Valve's Steam digital distribution platform is an excellent example of DRM done mostly right.

Most importantly, DRM should not interfere with normal operation of a legitimate user's computer--for example, I should not receive error messages indicating that I am not allowed to run a process monitor and a certain piece of software at once. It is my prerogative to know what is running on my processor at any time. No corporation should attempt to take that from me as a result of my legitimate purchase of their product.