# Ethical Issues Faced by Online Content Distributors

The Relationship Between the Creator, Distributor and the Consumer

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## Introduction

Content delivery can assume the form of many identities. Postal workers deliver mail, cable companies deliver television content, and some restaurants deliver both food and an experience. Moreover, in the physical world, we find that content can be almost anything: air, books, commodities and even people can be considered a form of content. Likewise, in the abstract world, ideas, phrases, skill, and theories are also all forms of content.

With this in mind, we can assume that content is a manifestation of the creator. We can also assume that the creator (in most cases) will have a personal relationship, or an emotional tie, to the content they're creating. An example of this could be a musician who feels that a song they wrote is a representation of a personal experience. The value of the experience is represented by the art of creating the song – giving the experience value. Another example could be the baker that feels that a specific batch of cookies is more special that the rest.

Similarly, the consumer of content (in many cases) can also have a personal connection to what they are consuming. Often people will search out specific forms of content and identify with what that content represents. For example, a young man may purchase a Rolex because he feels that the object represents their persona – he identifies with the object.

The third part of this relationship, the delivery of content, can be seen as the intersection between the creator and the consumer. It is at this intersection that the

possibility for ethical, legal and moral dilemmas can arise. The transfer of something that takes on a personification of both the creator and the consumer travels on a thin line where little room for mistake is granted. This statement may seem a little extreme, but it does express a truth. There is a direct correlation between the value of the content and the quantum of pressure that is being applied by both the creator and the consumer on the delivery mechanism. For example, one trusts the postal service to keep our mail safe while its being delivered. What if a postal worker looses one's mail, or even worse, reads one's mail? What if the cable company censors the content that one has purchased? Lastly, what if the chef at a restaurant properly prepares a meal, but the waitress coughs on the food while she brings it to the table? In all these cases, the delivery of these services (or items) becomes the problem. Moreover, the problem exists because in these circumstances, the delivery mechanism doesn't value the content in as equal terms as the creator or the consumer. The delivery mechanism is disconnected from the value of the content and is usually unaffected by the aforementioned pressure.

One factor that contributes to this issue relates to advanced societies and marketplace economics. We all depend on several forms of content delivery it's possible that the populations take these services for granted. As a public we assume several rights. We assume that our mail will be delivered intact and unread, we assume that our television will display the content we pay for, and we assume that the waitresses at our favorite restaurant are taking action to not disturb the quality of our meal.

The online world runs in parallel to our physical world. Both spaces contain an economy that supports the purchase of goods and services, the ability to belong to a community, and even the opportunity to discover. Moreover, the relationships between the creator, delivery mechanism (or distributor) and the consumer are all similar to those same relationships in the physical world. However, the primary difference between the online world and the physical world relates to the consumption of information or content. In a physical environment, one is free to consume information at their own will – that is, one can take in information at their own speed without relying on another human (exceptions to this could include the blind or people with disabilities). In an online environment, the content that one consumes is always delivered. Moreover, this content is almost always the responsibility of someone else.

This fact is based on the function of computer as a tool to collect, consume, and dispense information. Because the computer is a proxy for our eyes and ears, the value of the content is often inflated. That is, the content – because it's more difficult to acquire – may be seen as more valuable than content we may get in a physical space. This value is represented by the desire and assumed need of those who use online content throughout their daily lives. In those cases, the online content supercedes content in the physical world because the online world (and the related economics) start to support human needs (e.g. revenue generation, community and a revised sense of self due to the power of anonymity).

The Internet started as a connection between two separated computers. The transmission of data and communications between these two sources was made more complex by the addition of other nodes (locations) that were geographicaly separated. The network was designed with specific protocols that allowed the addition and subtraction of other computers and networks. When the technology started to mature, the need for hosting services became a necessity. Hosting service providers, or ISPs, founded their business model on the assumption that people would like third-party support between their content and their consumers (or customers). This framework forms the most fundamental expression of the creator / distributor / consumer relationship in the online environment. Moreover, it is the aforementioned geographical separation between these three entities that provides a complication to form in the relationship – anonymity.

This document provides an overview of the ethical issues faced by online content delivery companies and the creators & consumers who utilize their services. To accomplish this goal, I've created three main sections in this document. First I detail the role of technology. This section provides an introductory level of detail in an effort to educate the reader while providing a structural framework. The second section provides a list of the most common ethical issues faced by online content delivery providers (also another phrase for an ISP). This section shows how humans interact with a commoditized technology. The final section brings these first two sections together in the form of a case study. This case study presents a problematic issue followed by a set of two solutions. The first solution is accomplished by using the 4-step Potter Box model approach to ethical decision-making.

The second solution is accomplished by using a longer comprehensive justification model

based on the 6 stages of moral development (Kohlberg & Gilligan).

## The Role of technology – for a basic understanding of online content delivery methods

Theoretically, the delivery of online content is the same as the delivery of mail in

the physical world. Content originates from a specific location and is sent to a place that

has an address. While in route, the parcel might travel through various 'hubs' setup to

optimize efficiency. When online content is delivered, it to is directed at a location with a

specific address (IP Address). While in route, the data travels from hub to hub, finding the

most efficient path to its final destination.

On the surface, online content delivery is a fairly easy service to understand.

However, the technology behind the service can be exceedingly complex. The complexity is

directly related to the openness and freedom of both the technology and how that

technology is used between the creator and the consumer of the content. Before detailing

the specifics, allow me to first summarize the framework used in today's distribution

model.

The ISP is essentially providing a method of delivery to the creator of the content to

his or her customers and/or the general public. The delivery technology consists of two

major components: a place to store the content and a delivery vehicle. The delivery of

content utilizes the distributed framework of the Internet, which is comprised of several

nodes whereby the information travels from its original origin to its final destination. For example, if one were to send an email from San Francisco to New York, the message may take the following route: San Francisco, San Jose, Seattle, Chicago, Philadelphia, and New York. It's also possible that the message would be broken up, part of it taking the aforementioned route while the other part detouring through Dallas and Atlanta. The distribution provides strength to the network – allowing the content to find its own way from point A to point B without being dependent on any one specific node. Unfortunately, this distribution also adds complexity and another degree of anonymity to those on the Internet with unethical intentions.

This technology is independent of they type of content that it delivers. To the server, content is just electronic data represented as 0s and 1s. This means that the data could be a picture, movie, music file or a document – the server only needs to know where the file is going. This technology has been standardized. The standardization was put in place, in part, to allow hosting services to host a wide array of different file types. That is, the hosting company can accommodate several customers, all with different needs, to reside on the same computer. This standardized framework also allows a certain degree of freedom for the imaginative creator. There is no predefined limit to the type of files that are stored. In addition, by storing this content, the creator is making these files available to anyone who finds them. As you can imagine, this is another point at which ethical, legal and moral situations can arise. Not only can the creator store any file type they want, but also they could invent file types. These files can contain just about anything (within the

constrains of digital media). The hosting company can use sophisticated software to automatically search through all the stored documents on the server(s). However, this sophisticated software just looks at the file type (usually using the 3 or 4 letter file extension – for example ".doc" marks that file as a Microsoft Word document). Some content creators have found that by renaming the file (or masking the file), that they can bypass this software. For example, they can take a MP3 file named "song.mp3" and rename it to "song.txt." The software isn't going to know that this file is an MP3. Furthermore, if someone were to create software that did recognize that file as an MP3, I'm sure the software wouldn't know if the MP3 was legal or illegal.

The example above only touches on one of the many issues than the hosting company faces. Many feel that one way the hosting company can solve this problem is by taking privileges away from the customer. That is, by not allowing MP3s on the server. Some feel that this solution would solve the problem of masking files. Unfortunately, the problem isn't tied to MP3s. Other types of files can be masked. For example, software programs, copyright protected text, copyright protected images, pornographic images, and even large databases of stolen personal information can be stored and hidden from the owners of the hosting companies.

This problem becomes even more complex when one takes into consideration that many forms of content can be legal, but harm the reputation of, or create problems for, the hosting company. For example, some forms of pornography are protected under free speech laws and some forms of pornography are considered an obscenity and are not

covered by any free speech laws. A Supreme Court Judge once said about pornography,

you can't really define objectionable content, but you know it when you see it. This factor

alone can create ethical, legal and moral situations that would be difficult for the hosting

company to solve. Also, the ambiguity of the problems and situations that can arise are not

easily definable – making it very difficult to document rules that would help prevent

specific actions or behaviors.

The customers and the public visitors are not the only ones who create issues for

the ISP. The U.S. Government has installed technology only known by its codename,

"Carnivore." This technology is similar to a telephone wiretap. It records the

communications traveling along the paths of a network. It can record (and capture) email

messages, what sites a specific person visited, what technologies they used online, and can

even track everyone who visits a specific web site. The FBI claims that they only use this

technology 10% of the time when a court order is provided to obtain information. Usually

the ISP will hand over any information that is requested by the FBI. Often, the ISP doesn't

need to notify the customer of this transaction. Furthermore, the FBI has yet to discuss or

explain how this technology works.[1] This relationship (between the ISP and the FBI) and the

expectations put on the ISP from the creator create a situation where the ISP cannot win.

Either the ISP submits to the Government or the ISP potentially looses a customer. Either

way, the reputation of the ISP is changed. In addition, no matter what choice the ISP

makes, the cost of the decision is not reconciled. If the customer leaves, the ISP loses

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[1] http://www.totse.com/en/privacy/privacy/161818.html

business. If the FBI wants information, there are labor costs associated with the research and archiving that are not reimbursed by the government.

## Ethical Issues – a list of issues commonly faced by hosting companies

As I stated in the last section, the technology that an ISP uses is independent of the type of content (generally speaking) that's stored and delivered. This simple fact makes it economically beneficial to provide hosting solutions, but at the same time creates problems that are hard to prepare for and solve. This standardized framework allows for specific forms of behavior that can be harmful, objectionable and problematic for the ISP.

Over the course of the last 10 years, the practice of web hosting was founded and as grown into a profitable industry. Like any new business, customers challenge possibilities. Customers test the limits of the technology in an attempt to discover how they can improve their online experiences. This testing has given birth to many profitable advancements in search technology, online purchasing and digital data organization (to name a few). This section provides a descriptive list of common ethical issues faced by companies that provide content distribution services.

1. Customer stores and/or distributes copyright protected content:

   In this situation, the customer uses the rented storage space to store copyright protected content. That is, the customer is housing content that he or she does not own. This content can take the form of software applications, personal information about others, music, movies, and text. In many circumstances, it is usually not a problem to store the information. That's because it is highly possible that the customer has actually purchased that content. The problem arises when the

content is distributed. The basic nature of a web server is to distribute content to several people. Using the server as an online hard drive puts both the customer and the hosting provider at risk.

2. Customer stores objectionable/pornographic material on server:

   Like number one above, this issue involves storage (and sharing) of content that may or may not be appropriate or legal. Not only could the content be copyright protected, but the model used in the content could be underage, unknowing of the recording, or the material may be illegal in some other way.

3. Customer hosts domain names that create problems – domain squatting:

   This problem is uncommon but can create a massive issue if not properly prevented. Domain squatting happens when a person purchases a domain that uses some form of word or phrase that could be considered a copyright and/or trademark violation. One of the most popular instances of this happened a few years ago when a Madonna fan purchased madonna.com and then created a store where they could sell Madonna merchandise. The sale of the Madonna merchandise was legal. It was the use of madonna.com that created a problem. It seems as though Madonna herself thought that this site was a misrepresentation of herself and her brand. Many celebrities have faced this issue – and most win. In another case – that couldn't be solved as easily – Mike Rowe of Vancouver, B.C. started his own software company. His website address is mikerowesoft.com. As you might see, Microsoft had a very difficult time with this and decided to fight the issue in the courts. Moreover, this issue was made more complex because Mike Rowe was from Canada, making the case international by nature.

## Case Study & Possible Solution

### *Case Study – MP3's for my friends*

Joan is a real estate agent. She's recently had a web site built to show and organize her listings. She's confident that her investment will pay off with increased exposure and sales volume.

Tom, Joan's son, is a high school student who also plays drums for his band. His three friends usually gather after school in Joan's garage and play for a few hours. They record their songs with a laptop and then distribute the songs to various MP3 players so the band can listen to the songs the next day. Tom's passion is his music and he depends on the technology that allows him to share his recordings.

After discussing Joan's website, Tom realizes that he could share his MP3's with the world via his mother's hosting account. Joan gives her son a folder on the server and tells him that he can store his music there. Tom teaches himself how to create a simple website and his music is immediately available to his band mates and friends at school. Tom too feels that his heightened exposure will someday bring him success.

The hosting company noticed the large increase in bandwidth used by Joan's account. They know that her site consists of static HTML and there was a discrepancy between the size of her files and the number of hits she was showing. This factor lead the hosting company to investigate what types of files were being downloaded. After a short search they found that Joan was providing hosting space for her son's band. The hosting company was confident that the material was not violating copyright laws.

After an initial surge of downloads from Tom's band mates and friends, the number of downloads of Tom's music started to dwindle. Tom had been focusing his after school efforts on his website and had not had the chance to record new music. In an effort to stay popular, Tom decides to post a few MP3's of his favorite band while he and his own band record some new material. Unfortunately, the new MP3s are protected by copyright law.

On the server, the MP3 files of Tom's original music were mixed together with the MP3s of popular musicians. Again, the hosting company noticed a large increase in traffic – this time from a much larger group of people. Moreover, the number of downloads was increasing each day. The hosting company started a second investigation. They quickly found that copyright protected MP3's were being downloaded from people all over the world.

## The Ethical Issue:

The Ethical Issues relate to the sharing of copyright protected content. This issue is made more difficult because the person responsible for the wrongdoing is a minor and the son of a good customer.

## The Solution – Potter Box

Dr. Ralph Potter of the Harvard Divinity School developed the Potter Box method

for ethical decision-making. The Potter Box method is essentially an ethical framework

used to make decisions. The process uses four categories with Potter identifies as

"universal to all ethical dilemmas." These four categories include Facts, Values, Principles

and Loyalties.

Definitions (or Facts) provide the framework for the problem or issue.

Loyalties concern who the decision-maker has allegiances or loyalties to.



Values generally refer to the specific concerns of a person or group. For example, journalists may have concerns different from that of an advertising executive.

Principles are ethical philosophies or modes of ethical reasoning that may be applicable to the situation. By considering a viewpoint from several ethical philosophies, the decision maker is better equipped to understand the situation.

## Potter Box Step 1 – Define the Situation

The factors at play in this circumstance:

1. Copyright protected content was made available to the general public via the Internet by someone other than the owner of the copyright
2. The person who made this content available is a minor and the son of a good customer
3. The number of downloads was so great that the bandwidth meter for Joan's account exceeded her monthly allotment and her account was shut down. The hosting company's service agreement calls for a steep fee to reopen the account.

Factors that might arise from this situation:

1. The copyright owner can sue both the hosting company and the customer
2. Government authorities can confiscate the hosting equipment – leaving the hosting company without a method to operate.
3. News about the incident can spread and damage the reputation of the hosting company
4. News about the customer and her son can spread – possibly damaging their reputation.

## Potter Box Step 2 – Identify Values

Values are what we choose as worthwhile or believe to have merit, in a general or broad sense. Because values are subjective, they should be freely and thoughtfully chosen. As the author of this document and an owner of a small web hosting company, the values I hold for myself and for this situation may differ from someone who is a customer of a web hosting company. My value system has trouble with the fact that Tom posted someone else's material online. I wouldn't call this stealing – but it is a lot like giving someone else's car keys to a thief. There's a lack of thought that was put into the situation – almost like he doesn't care of another human's artwork. A second issue I have with this situation is that Joan allowed her son to use her hosting account.

Here are the values at play in this circumstance:

1. Accountability – The customer in this case needs to be accountable for her son's actions. And the Son needs to be accountable for his own actions.
2. Consistency – The hosting company needs to treat this customer the same way they would treat any other customer who committed the same foul.
3. Fairness – The owner of the copyright should be fair. Although this is unlikely, it's what should happen (in my opinion of course)
4. Honesty – This value is closely tied to number 1 above.
5. Impartiality – This principle forbids us from treating one person different than another when there is not a good reason to do so. We set aside our personal interests.
6. Rationality – This relates to 2 above. It's important to be rational, but consistent with how the business is run.
7. Responsibility – All parties need to be responsible.

## Potter Box Step 3 – Select Principles

A principle is a rule or a norm that is part of the basis for something else. For

example, the ethics of someone may be seen as a set of principles that the individual

obeys. The principles at play in this circumstance include the following:

1. Plato's "To know the good is to do the good"
    a. This principle essentially states that if people fully understand, that they'll usually do the right thing. Or, in other words, those behave wrongly do so out of ignorance. It is possible that if Tom and his Mother new of the consequences of Tom's actions, different behavior would've taken place.
2. The Golden Rule – "Do unto others as you would have them do unto you"
    a. This is fairly self-explanatory. If a musician doesn't want people to steal his music, he doesn't give other's music away.
3. Locke's views on property rights
    a. In order to preserve the public good, the central function of government must be the protection of private property. This theory almost completely supports the laws behind copyright protection.
4. Kant's Categorical Imperative
    a. This theory essentially states that one should do only what they believe should be the rule for everyone. It's possible that a young man would think

that all music should be free. However, I would hazard a guess that if that same young man were to get a record contract and the chance to earn a lot of money, he would change his mind.

5. Confucius' Golden Mean
    a. More commonly known as the compromise principle – moral virtue is the appropriate location between two extremes
6. Mill's Principle of Utility
    a. To seek the greatest good for the greatest number of people. This ties closely with consistency (#2 in the Values section)
7. Rawl's Veil of Ignorance
    a. John Rawl's viel of ignorance asks us to place ourselves in the role of the people our decisions may influence
8. Agape Principle
    a. This principle, involves the idea of love to our fellow humans and the golden rule (I believe that it is also known as the Judeo-Christian Persons as Ends principle)

## Potter Box Step 4 – Choose Loyalties

The solution to this case study, or at least the next step, can take many forms. The form of the solution will be directly related to the actions of the hosting company. The solution to this problem is to move the responsibility away from the hosting company to the customer. Although this does create some friction between the single customer and the company, it should help the company maintain its reputation among its other customers. This decision forces the sacrifice of one customer for the greater good of the company. In summary, this solution assumes that the hosting company wants to protect its business and reputation.

In this case, the company should first notify the customer that the account will not be reinstated unless the illegal files are removed from the system. I would also suggest that the hosting company obtain a written document from Joan, assuming legal responsibility of

the actions of her son. This is implied in most law because he's a minor, but obtaining the documentation would be a nice thing to if a record company were to take legal action.

## The Solution – Comprehensive Justification Model

The Comprehensive Justification Model was published by Dr. Kristen Alley Swain her presentation "Beyond the Potter Box: A Decision Model Based on Moral Development Theory. It is based on the work of Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan. Kohlberg is famous for his work n moral education, reasoning and development. He was a close follower of Jean Piaget's theory of cognitive development – many feel that Kohlberg's work is an extension of Piaget's theories. Carol Gilligan worked with Kohlberg on both ethical community and ethical relationships. Gilligan extended the Kohlberg's work – developing more comprehensive and detailed examination of ethical and moral development among children. Her work formed the basis for what has become known as the ethics of care, a theory of ethics that contrasts ethics of care to so-called ethics of justice.

The Comprehensive Justification Model represents a proposed way to make a decision. The model is longer and more useful when: 1. One's confronted with a difficult dilemma or when there's a situation where the stakes are high, and 2, when there's a need to evaluate the morality of all known alternatives for all known stakeholders. Dr. Alley states that, "the best alternative is not necessarily the on that passes the greatest number of moral tests; rather, it's the one that best satisfies higher-stage criteria.
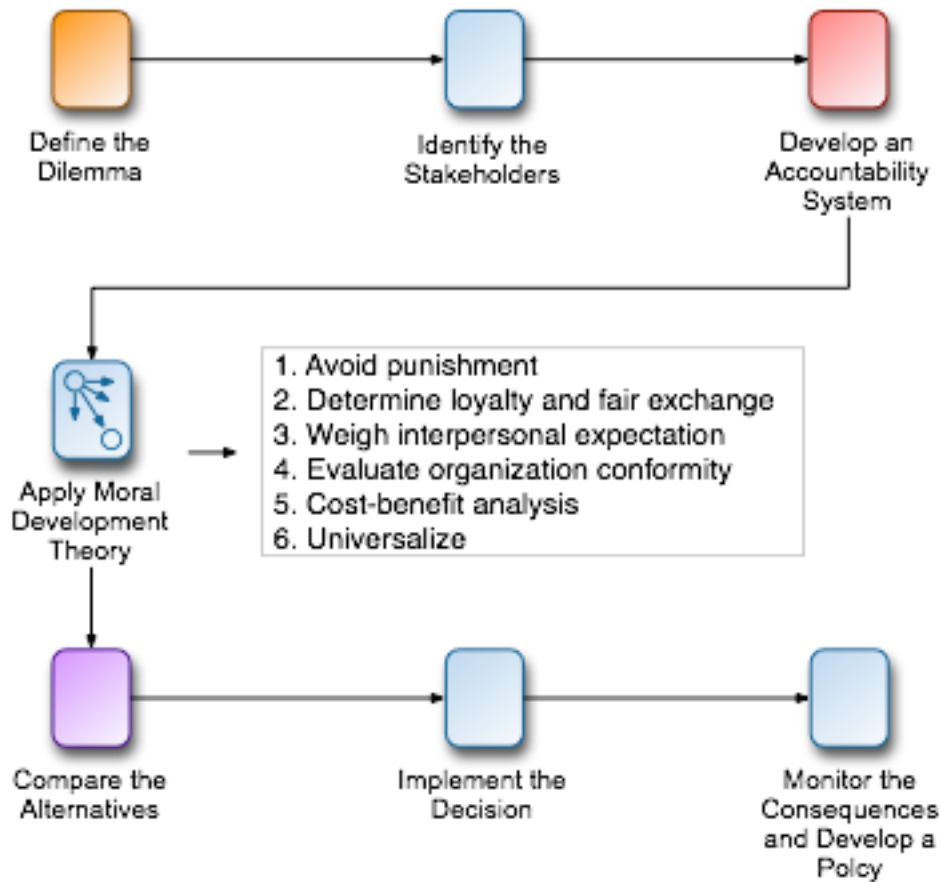
**Comprehensive Justification Model Step 1 – Define the dilemma**

This step is very similar to the first step of the Potter Box model. It is important to

define the situation so we have a foundation for the dilemma.

1. Someone other than the owner of the copyright made copyright protected content
available to the general public via the Internet.
2. The person who made this content available is a minor and the son of a good
customer
3. The number of downloads was so great that the bandwidth meter for Joan's

account exceeded her monthly allotment and her account was shut down. The hosting company's service agreement calls for a steep fee to reopen the account.

4. This steep fee feels like a punishment by Joan because she wasn't aware that her son had done something illegal.
5. The copyright owner(s) can sue both the hosting company and the customer. This presents a possible financial dilemma for both the customer and the hosting company.
6. Government authorities can confiscate the hosting equipment. This would leave the hosting company without a means to operate.
7. News about the situation could harm the reputations of the hosting company, the customer, the customer's son and even the copyright owner.

## Comprehensive Justification Model Step 2 – Identify the stakeholders

The stakeholders in this dilemma are as follows:

1. Hosting company
2. Customer (Joan)
3. Customer's son (Tom)
4. Copyright owner
5. Consumer (those who downloaded the illegal content)
    a. Possibly the parents of those who downloaded the content (assuming that they were under the age 18)
6. The record label
7. The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA)

## Comprehensive Justification Model Step 3 – Develop an accountability system

An accountability system (for the purposes of this document) is a structure

presenting standards by which all stakeholders must obey. We can use the laws enforced

in the United States as an accountability system for this issue.

## Comprehensive Justification Model Step 4 – Apply moral development theory

1. Avoid punishment
    a. It is important that all stakeholders obey and evaluate personal risks and rewards. Tom was reward driven when he posted those songs. It was under the intention that his site would garner attention because his current songs were not being downloaded.
    b. Joan, Tom's mother, is a good customer. Punishing her may harm the reputation of the company if/when she tells her friends what happened. However, the hosting company does have policy in place that states that a large fee is required before the account can be re-opened.
    c. The copyright holder (and the record industry at large) should be careful about how they remedy this situation. Suing the mother of a fan of the musicians' music may bring negative press.
2. Determine loyalty and fair exchange
    a. This is based on what is owed. In this case, the downloads can be counted using the statistics (analytics) package that the hosting company has in place. Therefore, it's possible to know just how many copies of each song were downloaded and when. If a dollar amount could be place on a per-song basis, a fine could be established for the owner of the hosting account – or the hosting company.
    b. The time and labor that will be required to remedy the situation on behalf of the hosting company and the record industry (including the musicians) will be significant. It may be possible to tie a dollar figure to this labor as well.
3. Weigh interpersonal expectations
    a. There are 2 relationships at play in this circumstance that would involve interpersonal communications and expectations:
        i. The relationship between Joan and her son Tom
        ii. The relationship between Joan and the hosting company
    b. I would assume that the relationship that will see the most stress in this circumstance is the relationship between Joan and her son Tom. However, it is possible that Joan could blame the hosting company for allowing the files to be downloaded several times. She may feel that the hosting company's "technology" should've protected them from this situation.
4. Evaluate organizational conformity / Evaluate values and principles
    a. The values and principles at stake here are really no different than the ones described in the Potter Box model.
5. Cost-benefit analysis
    a. The hosting company would have to make a decision about the value of the customer in this circumstance. It may be less expensive in the long run to lose this one customer in an effort to protect the business
    b. The record industry will have to weigh the costs associated with suing the

Tom, his mother, the consumers and possibly the hosting company. Their desire to sue these groups would related to the actual number of downloads and how the hosting company dealt with the problem.

6. Universalize – to develop a caring response and justified distribution of resources
    a. This section (item 5 of part 4) of this model doesn't work well with this situation. The model (as a whole) tends to focus on the ethics of care. For this document, I am subtracting it from this analysis.

## Comprehensive Justification Model Step 5 – Compare the alternatives

The alternatives to this situation go to both sides of the spectrum. One way to avoid this problem is to stop allowing certain types of digital media files on the server. Because competition in the hosting space is tight, this solution doesn't make sense. It would, however, protect the hosting company from further trouble. The second way the hosting company could deal with this situation is not deal. One could ignore the problem and hope that the record industry goes directly to the account holder. This situation will not sit well with the hosting customer, but the hosting company may lose less money in labor and research costs.

## Comprehensive Justification Model Step 6 – Implement the decision

Like the Potter Box Model, this solution will be directly related to the actions of the hosting company. The solution is based on the needs of the hosting company.

It is clear that the wrongdoing was the responsibility of Tom. However, the accountability of the hosting account customer Joan is also responsible. Because she allowed her son to use her account, she should share the responsibilities of Tom's actions. It

is also important that the hosting company take appropriate actions to stop this from happening again. The best way to accomplish this goal is to educate the customer base with current laws. Educating the customer base may entail some expense, but the benefit would be a greater measure security. I would assume that if a case like this was to go to court, that a hosting company with an education/notification system would fair better than a hosting company that didn't take any action to protect the copyright holder.

Like the Potter Box model, it is important that the hosting company protect their assets and business. However, I believe that they could do this in a way that shows the customer that they want to keep the business. It would involve being apart of the conflict between the customer and the record industry. The loyalty shown by the hosting company may be beneficial in keeping this customer and obtaining new customers. This is a risky proposition.  If this solution backfires, the customer will lose, the hosting company will lose its customer and the time that was invested into the legal situation. Also, the reputation of the hosting company could be damaged.

The longer Comprehensive Justification Model is useful in that it forces the decision maker to take their time and answer more questions. For this paper and this decision, it helped me disconnect from the immediate issue and look at the different stakeholders and how they are affected by the situation.

## Conclusion

Through this document I've outlined the relationships between the creator, distributor and consumer. I've summarized the role of technology and how the economically beneficial standards of web hosting have created a stage for ethical misbehavior. I've listed, and detailed, major ethical issues that are faced by online content distributors. And I presented a case study and two solutions – both using different ethical decision-making models.

Through these details, one can now see that the Internet, and the distribution of content are going through a hurried evolution. Business needs, economics, and cultural norms are applying pressures to our virtual environment. The relationships between the creator, distributor, and consumer (in an online environment) can create new and interesting dynamics. Those dynamics can, at times, seem unnatural to humans who were raised in a physical world. Moreover, these dynamics can, and will, lead to behavior that is destructive and problematic. Today's laws don't keep pace with the speed at which technology develops. This is both good and bad. The brief window of opportunity often gives rise to great ideas. However, this same window of lawless opportunity can turn on itself and create problems where real people are taken advantage of, mistreated, and fooled. The Ethical choices many take support a healthy society – it is only the choices of a few that cause the majority of problems.