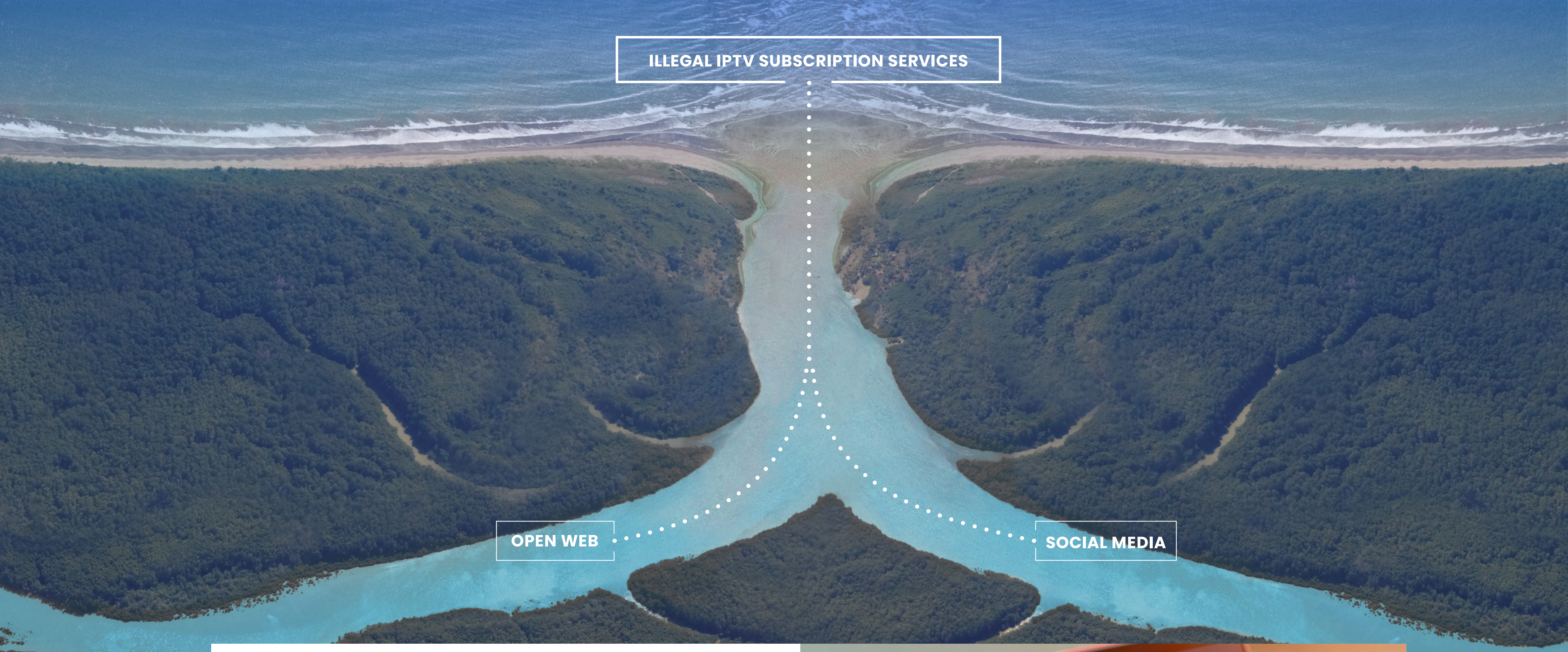
MYTH #1

Illicit IPTV Subscription Services: Not a Force to be Reckoned With



The Myth

When it comes to the distribution channels through which pirates operate, both the video industry and public tend to focus on the open web and social media.

Serving as the pirate's public façade, these two channels garner most of the headlines. But there is a third channel – illegal IPTV subscription services – that is worth keeping tabs on to better protect your business. Let's take a look at how pirates leverage these three channels, and what you can do about it.

The Truth

All pirate paths lead to illicit IPTV subscription services

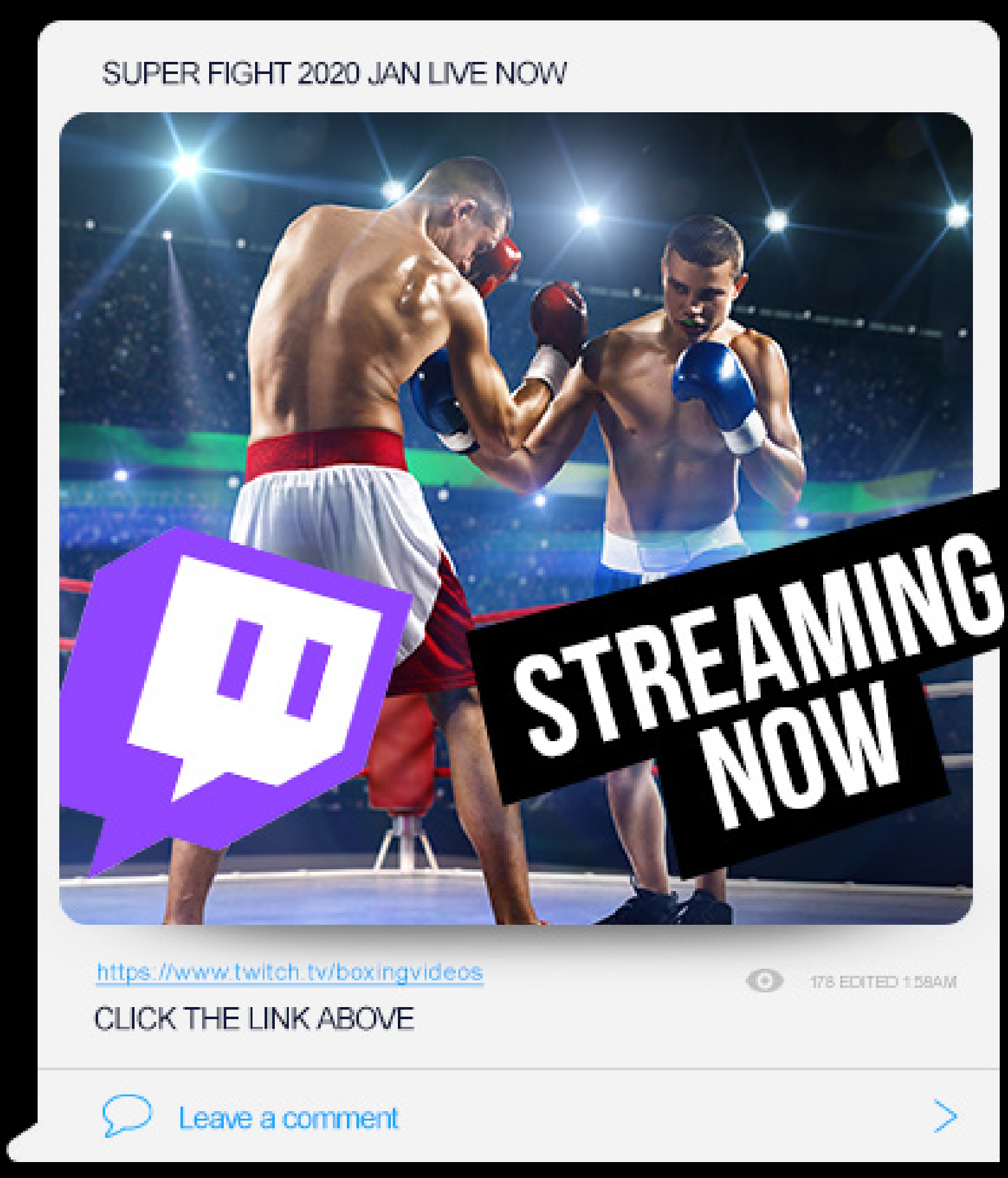
Viewers are regularly exposed to a range of piracy types, from illegal file sharing – aka torrents – through downloading, to counterfeiting. However, closer research of piracy on the open web and social networks reveals two primary types of activity. First, they serve as platforms for illicitly distributing stolen video content. Second, they are used to advertise pirate IPTV subscription-based services that offer a higher quality, more glorified viewer experience, with thousands of HD quality channels, VOD libraries, and even features like catchup-TV.

Sounds familiar? If so, it would be no exaggeration to consider these pirate networks as a real business threat to the services of legitimate content owners and distributors.

Social media channels

Recognizing the power of social media, pirates infiltrate large chat groups across all platforms to disseminate illegal content and to advertise their illicit IPTV services.

From there, group members are just one click away from becoming a subscriber. According to recent research, pirates particularly gravitate to encrypted platforms such as Telegram, where members can conceal their identity when sharing content.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Open web sites

Synamedia regularly monitors around five thousand open web pirate streaming sites impacting our customers worldwide. These are free, ad-supported sites that users can reach via a simple Internet search. Pirates create and maintain them for several unseemly purposes.

- **Identity theft**: The sites spread malware, giving pirates easy access to users' personal and login information.
- **Revenue source**: Pirates earn advertising revenue from third-party banner ads and pre-roll videos that run before the streaming of illegal content.
- **Illicit IPTV subscription service promotion**: By clicking on any of the myriad legal/illegal advertisements and pop-up boxes appearing on these sites, users are often lured to pirate IPTV subscription services. These super aggregators offer a more affordable, geo-agnostic viewing experience.

Illicit IPTV subscription services

Illicit IPTV services are the heart and soul of the piracy landscape. They look and operate like legal streaming services, and they're everywhere. Our research shows that nearly 30,000 illegal streaming servers worldwide fuel these services with virtually unlimited linear and VOD content. Bypassing all geographical limitations, illegal IPTV services are super aggregators, offering hundreds to thousands of channels, plus premium content, at a fraction of the cost of a legitimate service.

Unlike open sites, these networks are hidden from the Internet. But that's where the big money lies. According to Europol[1], illegal IPTV services in the EU generate €1 billion in revenue. In Italy alone, some two million people pay an average $12 monthly subscription fee to various pirate networks. Not a bad business, especially considering that illegal networks incur far lower costs than their legitimate counterparts.

It's clear that these networks are, in fact, a serious competitor and a force to be reckoned with.

[1] Intellectual Property Crime Threat Assessment 2022, EUIPO and Europol

The Response

What can your video business do to counter illicit IPTV services?

Get an intelligence assessment

One of the keys to tackling pirates effectively is gaining broad and deep intelligence about who they are and how they operate. Your best bet is to turn to a video security expert who collects and analyses intelligence to assess the full streaming piracy threat landscape impacting your business – whether it be through the open web, social media or illegal IPTV services. A comprehensive assessment should include a combination of intelligence, metadata and analysis covering diverse illegal network data such as hosting provider, country of origin, channel name, and display resolution.

Make sure that the expert establishes relevant key performance indicators (KPIs) periodically so you can assess your business' exposure to both common and new piracy threats over time.

Watermarking is a proven and effective method for detecting the source of leakage to help protect your content.

Insert a detect-and-disrupt watermarking and monitoring solution

Watermarking is a proven and effective method for detecting the source of leakage to help protect your content. However, not all watermarking solutions are created equal. Assuming that a covert, or forensic, solution is the way to go, you have several other decisions to make. Here are a few:

- **Do you need to support myriad devices and flavours?** A headend watermark not only takes these issues into account, but also considers other potentially relevant parameters such as robustness (resistance to watermark avoidance methods), deployment/maintenance (integration), and video duration extraction.
- **Do you need to consider user experience?** A content-aware solution, one in which the watermark is embedded within the frame, is indiscernible to the viewer, and enables you to meet studio compliance and the golden-eye standard.
- **Do you need to worry about total cost of ownership (TCO)?** Deciding whether to insert the watermark before or after encoding can impact the processing capacity you require and ultimately your costs.

There's a lot to think about in choosing the solution that's best for your business. But watermarking and monitoring pirate services are just half the battle.

To effectively fight illicit IPTV services, you need a solution that not only detects content leakage, but also lets you take action by disrupting it at the source in order to bring them down.

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