



Piracy has become rampant within the Android ecosystem. In the case of my own apps, I was appalled to see piracy rates hit as high as 90%. I interpreted this as "lost sales", and spent a considerable amount of time trying to turn pirates into patrons with [Automatic Application Licensing](#). This licensing technology is now included in my own apps and a growing number of other applications being sold on the Android market. The ultimate effect on sales remains to be seen, but so far things are looking good.

Digital piracy is nothing new. It has been around since the commercial sale of digital goods began. But what is driving software theft to the epic levels that it is reaching on the Android platform? There are several key contributors to this perfect storm of application piracy that has engulfed Android...

- The Android platform facilitates piracy. Android makes it easy to install applications from ANY source. Generally you can download an APK from any source and install it just as easily as you can from the Android market. Some carriers [have chosen to lock things down to specific markets](#), but so far this has been rare and poorly received. This ability to install applications from any source without jail breaking your phone makes it exceptionally easy for users to Google an app, and then install an APK from one of the many matching pirate sites.

Napster created the same effect in its day. It became so easy for users of any skill level to download music illegally, that there remained only ethical or legal barriers to doing so. So, everyone did it. Many argue that in the case of Napster the market simply hadn't caught up to

user demand (i.e. there was no *legal* way of downloading digital music, so users were left with no option other than theft). The same arguments can be made for Android.

- Android Market doesn't support the sale of apps globally. Since [installing AAL into my own apps](#), I've started receiving many requests from international users asking me to let them buy Screebl Pro directly (via PayPal or some other mechanism). So far I haven't tackled this problem with AAL, but I have some intriguing ideas that I'm looking into that would make it even easier to turn international pirates into patrons.

- Android "copy protection" is a joke. There really isn't a platform-supported mechanism for stopping piracy. Individual developers are left to roll their own. This is a touchy subject, as we can all agree that digital rights management (DRM) is generally something hated by devs and consumers alike. The management of licensing for mobile applications needs to be seamless and invisible for end users. Users should generally not need to think about it. They should be able to migrate from phone to phone, back up and restore, upgrade, etc.

There are those that think that [piracy is something that developers should accept](#). Many claim that piracy in the mobile domain is part of the

[cost of doing business](#)

, and should be fought only when absolutely necessary. These view are correct, assuming that the barriers to piracy are not so low that it becomes just as easy to pirate as it is to buy from legitimate sources.