In an incident that has no doubt caused waves of uncontrollable delight in the world of intellectual property (IP) piracy, the Motion Picture Association of America (MPAA) has admitted that it violated a film-maker’s explicit instructions and duplicated his movie without permission (see for example Eric Bangeman’s report at <http://tinyurl.com/axkdw>).

Mr Kirby Dick made a film called “This Film is Not Yet Rated” about the movie-rating system in which he apparently used some espionage techniques (e.g., Dumpster®-Diving) to gather information about the secret process used to determine which films get various ratings <http://www.mpaa.org/FilmRatings.asp>. The difference between a “PG-13” and an “R” can be worth millions (see for example a 2005 study at <http://tinyurl.com/86rg2> that showed that between 2000 and 2003, PG-13 films made more than 250% on average of the profits of R-rated films).

The MPAA states categorically on its home page that “Manufacturing, selling, distributing or trading movies or televisions programs without the consent of copyright holders is illegal.”

You will understand the embarrassment, then, when the MPAA was discovered to have made copies of Mr Dick’s films for distribution to its employees despite his request not to do so and notwithstanding the MPAA’s written assurance that they wouldn’t do that.

Despite the perhaps reasonable explanations proposed to justify the action, the situation is still embarrassing: one cannot help finding it incongruous that an organization so intent on protecting IP actually ignored its own rules.

I think that network security managers can see implications for our own work. We must not, for example, preach about protecting security to our security staff or to the employee base at large and then violate our own policies.

The lesson for us from the MPAA debacle seems clear: walk what we talk.

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My thanks to Norwich IS342 student Barry Sheridan for pointing out this situation in an online class discussion.

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