Beat: Business

Dotcom in tears; after Dutch company deletes Megaupload files

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USPA News - Controversial internet entrepreneur Kim Dotcom said he was "in tears" Thursday after a Dutch hosting company erased hundreds of servers previously rented by outlawed file-sharing website Megaupload, calling it the "largest data massacre" in history. Megaupload, which reached 180 million registered users and was listed among the 100 most visited websites in the world, was shut down by U.S. prosecutors in January 2012 after the site`s leaders were charged with running an international organized criminal enterprise.

They allege the owners were responsible for an estimated $500 million in losses to copyright owners. But with a court case still underway, Dutch hosting firm LeaseWeb announced this week it had erased 630 dedicated servers that had been rented by Megaupload. "Millions of personal Megaupload files, petabytes of pictures, backups, personal and business property forever destroyed by LeaseWeb," Dotcom said. The internet entrepreneur, who earlier this year launched a new website offering file storage, said he was "in tears" after finding out the data had been irreversibly lost. "This is the largest data massacre in the history of the Internet caused by the U.S. government, the Department of Justice and Leaseweb," he added. Dotcom said it had not been warned by LeaseWeb that it was planning to wipe clean the servers, and his lawyer Ira Rothken said Megaupload had "continuously urged" the hosting firm to preserve user data and evidence. LeaseWeb said it deleted the servers on February 1, but Megaupload was not informed until this week. "The LeaseWeb servers contained my personal files on Megaupload. Important evidence destroyed. How is this justice?" Dotcom asked in a series of tweets. "The FBI seized all my data and hasn`t given me a copy yet. And now my backups on Megaupload are gone too. How convenient." But Alex de Joode, senior regulatory counsel for LeaseWeb, defended the company`s decision to erase the servers and claimed nobody had shown an interest in them. "For over a year these servers were being stored and preserved by LeaseWeb, at its own costs ... without any request to do so and without any compensation," he said. De Joode, describing the storage of 630 out of 60,000 servers a "relatively small burden," said keeping the servers would have had to serve a purpose. "During the year we stored the servers and the data, we received no request for access nor any request to retain the data. After a year of nobody showing any interest in the servers and data we considered our options," he explained. The hosting firm said it had informed Megaupload about its decision to "re-provision the servers," but De Joode said the company had received no response. "To minimize security risks and maximize the privacy of our clients, it is a standard procedure at LeaseWeb to completely clean servers before they are offered to any new customer," he added. But Dotcom rejected De Joode`s statements, insisting it had repeatedly asked LeaseWeb to retain the data stored on the servers, which were part of a larger network of servers run by the file-sharing website. "LeaseWeb could have waited for the U.S. court to decide on Megaupload user data. They knew of our desire to pay if the court released funds," he said. "Leaseweb has taken it upon themselves to play judge and executioner," Dotcom continued, adding that he would seek to evaluate potential legal claims against LeaseWeb on behalf of Megaupload and its users. "Nobody should believe for a second that we haven`t tried everything to convince LeaseWeb not to delete Megaupload user data." When U.S. prosecutors shut down Megaupload in January 2012, authorities used helicopters and special forces to raid Dotcom`s multi-million dollar mansion in Coatesville, New Zealand. He was arrested along with three others, but as the U.S. is looking for his extradition, the process has been delayed with warrants being considered invalid. According to the initial indictment, U.S. prosecutors estimate Megaupload collected a total of more than $150 million from its premium users since its launch in 2005. Online advertising on Megaupload.com and its associated websites resulted in at least $25 million more in income.

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