



Powered by

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#)

Advertisement

New law allows website hosts to just say no to drugs

By A.J. Perez, USA TODAY

Website hosting companies are moving swiftly to rid their servers of sites that advertise the illegal sale of controlled substances — including performance-enhancing drugs — even though legislation signed by last week President Bush won't take effect for months.

The wide-ranging statute sets new standards for online pharmacies, including the requirement that a patient has to see a doctor and needs a prescription for a controlled substance, which can range from pain killers to some diet drugs, that would be part of a normal course of treatment. Online pharmacies also will have to register with the Drug Enforcement Administration, just like their brick-and-mortar counterparts, once the law goes into effect in April.

The impact of the new law is already being felt on sites that sell anabolic steroids and human growth hormone.

"Previously, we just left them alone," says Christine Jones, general counsel for GoDaddy.com, a popular web-hosting company and the world's largest website domain name registrar. "We didn't have any laws behind us that allowed us to take them down."

GoDaddy.com has shut dozens of sites targeted by the new law, Jones says, although some remained functioning as of Thursday afternoon. Jones said GoDaddy.com isn't able to constantly monitor the 31 million domain names the company has registered or the thousands of websites it hosts, but it acts on tips from law enforcement, everyday web users and organizations that monitor such activity.

Other Internet hosting and registrar companies are moving in the same direction. Aaron Hollobaugh, spokesman for Hosting.com, says "illegal pharmaceutical companies will be added to our extensive list of organizations we deny service to." Steven Vine, deputy general counsel for Register.com, says he's still studying the details of the law, but believes it will enable his firm "to further help law enforcement while still providing for the privacy of our customers."

Federal and state authorities currently have to seek injunctions to get websites pulled, a process that could take months to wind through the courts. Once the new law is in place, state attorneys general or federal law enforcement can just give notice to a web-hosting or registrar company to shutter a rogue pharmacy.

"This is a law that will get implemented quickly," says DEA spokesman Garrison Courtney. "Most (web-hosting companies) are socially responsible, and they try to do the right thing."

Websites will still be able to advocate the use of controlled substances and provide pricing information. But once the site crosses into distribution, its operators will be violating the law. A person caught selling controlled substances over the Internet faces up to 10 years in prison — double the previous maximum penalty for unlawful distribution.

Sens. Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., and Jeff Sessions, R-Ala., drafted the legislation in response to the death of Ryan Haight, an 18-year-old high school honors student from California who overdosed on Vicodin in 2001. He purchased the painkiller from an online pharmacy without having met with a physician concerning an ailment for which Vicodin might have been a treatment.

DEA officials say they realize the law, which will alter the Controlled Substances Act, won't be a panacea: Those pushing drugs can have their site hosted outside the USA, putting them out of reach of federal authorities.

"Is this the overall solution? No," DEA spokesman Courtney says. "But this is definitely a tool. Other countries are working with us. A lot of them recognize that this isn't just a drug issue, but a health issue as well."

Find this article at:

http://www.usatoday.com/sports/2008-10-23-online-pharmacies-get-boot_N.htm

Click to Print

[SAVE THIS](#) | [EMAIL THIS](#) | [Close](#) Check the box to include the list of links referenced in the article.