

# Anime firm boss gets online death threats

BY CHUA HIAN HOU

ONLINE hate target Stephen Sing admits he has made some mistakes by antagonising local fans of anime – animated Japanese cartoons.

But Mr Sing, 35, who runs anime distribution firm Odex, has no regrets over his crackdown on those who allegedly downloaded pirated anime from the Internet.

Hundreds of anime fans face financial claims of up to \$5,000, after Odex obtained a court order to get Internet providers to hand over details of anime downloaders.

This action has led to a bitter online campaign against Mr Sing, by anime fans – including death threats that he has reported to police.

It had been a “PR disaster”, Mr Sing told *The Straits Times*, and he had been “very wrong” to make dismissive remarks online.

Anime fans were incensed by a two-week-old online message by Mr Sing that was seized on amid publicity this week over Odex’s campaign.

Mr Sing explained that he typed the comment in frustration when he was having a bad day dealing with downloaders who were openly taunting him in his office.

So when friends asked him why he could not join them for a gaming session, he flippantly wrote the offending comment – that he was “busy suing people”.

Another mistake, he said, centred on the allegation that Odex was passing off “fansubs” or fan-subtitled anime as its own products.

He said this was partially true as he had hired anime fans to do subtitling in 2004, but “they took the easy way out and copied word for word the subtitles on fansubs they downloaded”.



ST PHOTO: TERENCE TAN

**I'VE MADE MISTAKES:** Mr Sing admits antagonising fans but has no regrets about the crackdown.

Nobody realised it at the time, the anime went on sale, “and we have been paying for this mistake ever since”, he said.

Media industry observers say the campaign against Mr Sing is probably the most vicious online attack here. A widely circulated digital “wanted” poster labels Mr Sing “the anime-community’s most-hated person”.

The irony is that Mr Sing is himself a self-confessed “Otaku” – slang for obsessive

anime fan – who started Odex eight years ago because he wanted to make the animated Japanese cartoons available to his fellow fans.

Online forums such as HardwareZone and sgCafe are filled with vitriolic messages about him and his company – many by users creating new accounts expressly to rant.

Blogs belonging to Mr Sing’s contacts have been defaced with profanities, and friends have even received anonymous anti-Odex e-mail.

Mr Sing says it has not been a good time but he had been willing to “live with it” until the threats got serious, along with the arrival of online pictures of him and his wife – due in October to give birth to their second child.

He made a police report over the death threats two days ago as “I cannot afford not to take this seriously”.

Mr Sing’s campaign against illegal downloading started quietly in May when he took action against 17 SingNet users. But the online hate campaign took off this week amid reports that Odex had successfully obtained a court order to get StarHub to disclose the names of up to 1,000 illegal downloaders.

Action against Pacific Internet users is expected to follow.

Mr Sing regrets his mistakes, but not the crackdown. “It is necessary,” he said, because “I want Singapore to be like Japan, where anime fans support, not rip off, the artists.”

He said he would like his company to do well, but “if you don’t think Odex products are good, fine, buy from someone else or parallel import it. As an anime lover I can agree with that”.

Posters online say the anime community is buying – just not from Odex as its heavy-handed tactics have turned them off.

Mr Sing accepts that this is true – for a small minority of real fans.

The others are just saying this to justify their actions, he says, because if it was true, there would be more parallel imports and competition in the market. The lack of such “tells you the real story”, he said.

And until this situation changes, he has no intention of stopping, he said.

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