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Seattle, Washington Man Arrested for Hacking into Internet Search Engine Alta Vista

The United States Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California announced that FBI agents arrested a Seattle, Washington man today for allegedly hacking into the computer system of the Internet search engine Alta Vista to obtain source code, and for recklessly causing damage to Alta Vista's computers. Laurent Chavet, 29, of Kirkland, Washington, appeared in federal court this afternoon in Seattle on a two-count indictment that was unsealed today.

The indictment, which was returned by a federal grand jury sitting in San Francisco earlier this week, charges Mr. Chavet with one count of unauthorized access to a protected computer in violation of 18 U.S.C. § 1030(a)(4) and one count of reckless damage to a protected computer in violation 18 U.S.C. § 1030(a)(5). According to the indictment, Mr. Chavet, a former employee of Alta Vista, unlawfully accessed Alta Vista's computer system in March 2002 to obtain computer source code belonging to Alta Vista. The indictment also alleges that Chavet unlawfully accessed Alta Vista's computer system again in June 2002 and, in doing so, caused damages in excess of $5,000 to that computer system.

Mr. Chavet appeared in a proceeding this afternoon before a United States Magistrate Judge in Seattle and was released on a $10,000 bond. Mr. Chavet is scheduled to make his initial appearance before a United States Magistrate Judge in San Francisco on July 20, 2004, at 9:30 a.m. to be arraigned on the indictment.

The maximum statutory penalty for each count in the indictment is five years imprisonment and a fine of $250,000, plus restitution if appropriate. However, any sentence following conviction would be dictated by the Federal Sentencing Guidelines, which take into account a number of factors, and would be imposed in the discretion of the Court. An indictment simply contains allegations against an individual and, as with all defendants, Mr. Chavet must be presumed innocent unless and until convicted.

The prosecution is being overseen by the Computer Hacking and Intellectual Property (CHIP) Unit of the United States Attorney's Office and is the result of an investigation by agents of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. Kyle F. Waldinger is the Assistant U.S. Attorney in the CHIP Unit who is prosecuting the case.

A copy of this press release may be found on the U.S. Attorney's Office's website at www.usdoj.gov/usao/can/press/index.html. Related court documents and information may be found on the District Court website at www.cand.uscourts.gov or on http://pacer.cand.uscourts.gov.

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