



**Warren C. Evans**  
**Sheriff**

# News Release

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## Sheriff's deputies bust Southgate man selling untraceable "stealth modems"

◆ ***Evans says such devices are prized by online child predators, movie pirates***

Wayne County Sheriff's Deputies, acting on information provided to them by investigators of a local Internet service provider, have arrested a 27-year-old Southgate man they say was selling high speed Internet modems he had illegally altered to be untraceable by the company - and law enforcement.

Benjamin Sturm, who installs modems for a competing Internet service provider, allegedly purchased the modems from a company overseas and rigged them himself so they could provide untraceable Internet service under the complaining company's service.

Evans said that while the motivation of those purchasing the devices may have been to obtain free Internet service, they also provide perfect cover for online criminals.

"These 'stealth modems' clearly open the door for child predators and pornographers to avoid detection and elude capture," Evans said. "A frighteningly plausible scenario is that they could find their way into the hands of someone who would use this cloak of invisibility to victimize other people, particularly children."

Evans said that his Internet Unit investigators indicate that such modems also are popular with online movie pirates because they are able to download movies at a faster rate and, again, avoid detection. Internet providers routinely look for accounts with uncommonly high volumes of downloads, a common trait among people who hoard movies and music to create and sell bootleg copies.

Evans said his office began investigating this case earlier this month after receiving information that Sturm, who states he has been rigging modems for about two years, was advertising them for sale online to be used with the complaining company's Internet service.

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Officers were able to contact Sturm and arrange an undercover purchase of one of the modems for \$200. They then were able to obtain a warrant through the Wayne County Prosecutor's Office to search Sturm's home, where they found 11 additional rigged modems they believe he planned to sell.

"The people at the Internet company were sharp enough to realize that the untraceable modems represented more than just a financial loss to the company," Evans said. "They clearly recognized the potential public safety threat associated with these devices."

#### How they work

Every time a person logs onto the Internet, they are assigned a unique Internet Provider (IP) address, which can be traced to a specific account under which the user has logged on. With these untraceable modems, however, Internet providers and police can identify only the IP address assigned to the user, not the user himself, or the street address to which the Internet service is being provided. That allows the person to conduct illegal activity that, through technological means, cannot be traced back to them specifically.

When Sheriff's Deputies raided Sturm's home, Evans said, they discovered he was stealing his service by illegally tapping into a neighbor's line, however, the modems can be attached to an existing line directly and still remain untraceable.

Sturm was arraigned Monday morning in Taylor District Court on Inappropriate Use & Sale of a Telecommunications Device, which is a four year felony. He has been released after posting a \$5,000 (ten percent) bond.

"We want to send a clear message to people who are rigging these modems and those who are purchasing them: Even though you think we can't find you, we can and we will; just like we were able to find Benjamin Sturm."