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File-Sharing Website Claims to 'Buy' Desolate Russian Town

By JEREMY KIRK of [IDG News Service](#) [London Bureau](#), [IDG](#)

You can call it a sort of Robin Hood situation. One of the most popular file-sharing sites is in apparent negotiations to name a rural Russian town in Siberia after its website, with money generated from its advertising.

[Torrentreactor.net](#) wrote on its [Web site](#) that it has bought the rights to rename the city of Gar, which is about 500 miles north of Kazakhstan's border in eastern Russia, for about US\$148,000.

Torrentreactor runs a search engine for torrent files, or bits of information that enable the download of digital content using the BitTorrent protocol in applications such as uTorrent. The site generates income through advertising, which features torrents for some of the latest movies, TV programs and software.

The story has made its way around the Web, earning a posting on the popular technology clipping site Slashdot. But commentators said Torrentreactor is known for pulling shenanigans now and again, and many decried the posting -- and accompanying photograph of Gar's new Torrentreactor sign -- as fake.

But Torrentreactor is sticking to its story. Shortly after IDG News Service sent an e-mail through the Torrentreactor Web site, an official made contact on instant messenger. The truth to the story seems to be somewhere in the middle.

"Technically, we have not finished renaming procedure," said Paul Ivanko of Torrentreactor, a native Ukrainian speaker via instant messenger. "Unfortunately there are a few more proceedings that need to be done by Russian authorities. The documentation package is being approved at a federal level in Moscow."

"We will be able to provide more details as soon as the deal is done," Ivanko said. "Some government officials are worried that all this media buzz might influence the deal in a negative way."

Ivanko said Torrentreactor had given some money to the town already, which the website describes as a town of 214 people who survive by selling vegetables in a nearby town.

About \$30,000 will apparently be used to fund a broadband connection for the town, with some money given to villagers and the rest used for the local school, to repair roads and to buy agricultural equipment and other machinery.

Gar is about 100 miles from Seversk, a city formerly known as Tomsk, which hosted the Siberian Chemical Combine, a group of key uranium processing facilities used for the former Soviet Union and Russia's nuclear weapons programs, according to [GlobalSecurity.org](#).

Torrentreactor said the village has only three computers, two of which are in a school and one in an administrative office. According to Torrentreactor's blog post, most people in Gar thought Torrentreactor.net was either a large U.S. nuclear facility or an environmental organization fighting against

nuclear reactors.

Torrentreactor said Gar was one of several thousand "godforsaken places around the world that are close to operating nuclear reactors" that the website found when hunting for a candidate to rename.

"The list was numbered and a random number was picked by a generator," according to Torrentreactor's blog post. "The number 377 was a lucky one for Gar village. We think it was a good choice since Gar citizens are very kind and generous people."

Officials in Gar could not be reached, although a call was placed after working hours. Torrentreactor quoted Gar's allegedly most respected citizen on the name change, Nikolay Prokhorov, who said "Of course, we lose some of our history by renaming the village. But we will be able to create perspectives for our youth and the village in general. So we think it's a fair deal."

The photograph of the sign on Torrentreactor's site was "slightly processed," Ivanko said.

Torrentreactor, which launched in 2003, ranks as the 806th most frequently visited site, according to Web traffic statistical firm Alexa.com. The website's users are described by Alexa as "disproportionately male, and they tend to be low-income, childless people under the age of 35 who browse from home and school."

The U.K.'s Federation Against Copyright Theft decline to comment directly on Torrentreactor, but said it is "actively engaged in targeting a number of sites and services providing access to copyright content."

"In many of these cases we are seeing examples of considerable sums of money coming from advertising revenues generated," said Eddie Leviten, FACTs head of communications.

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