

Careful planning behind Dotcom swoop

The high-profile operation centred on Megaupload founder Kim Dotcom in Auckland was the culmination of several months of careful planning by staff in Auckland and Wellington.



Luxury vehicles were among items restrained when search warrants were executed at the Dotcom Mansion.

Kim Dotcom and three others were arrested last month as part of a global operation led by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) targeting alleged large scale criminal copyright infringement and money laundering around the world.

The arrests, carried out by the Organised & Financial Crime Agency New Zealand (OFCANZ) and New Zealand Police, followed a mutual legal assistance request from the US Department of Justice to arrest individuals for the purpose of extradition.

“The mutual assistance procedure is used internationally by law enforcement agencies to facilitate investigations into transnational crime,” says Malcolm Burgess, Assistant Commissioner Investigations / International.

“A reciprocal arrangement means we can also use it to gather evidence when we investigate actions offshore by individuals or entities who offend against New Zealand law.”

Termination phases were simultaneously carried out in nine countries: New Zealand, Australia, Philippines, Hong Kong, Germany, Canada, Netherlands, United Kingdom and the United States.

While the global investigation was led by the FBI, its staff were completely hands-off in New Zealand as they have no jurisdiction to conduct investigations here, says Detective Inspector Grant Wormald, Taskforce Leader at OFCANZ.

“Our police already have a good reputation for being competent and capable. This operation reinforced our long-standing relationships with international law enforcement agencies,” he says.

An OFCANZ team of five picked up the case last September and worked intently to meet their goal of a mid-January termination.

“The level of commitment shown by the OFCANZ investigative team was outstanding. We also benefitted from input by staff from several specialist groups who contributed their expertise before and during the termination phase.”

Ten search warrants were executed at addresses across Auckland and equipment including computers and documents were seized for evidential purposes. Luxury vehicles were restrained by the Official Assignee, along with artwork, electronic equipment and up to \$11m in cash.

Detective Superintendent Mike Pannett, New Zealand Police Liaison Officer in Washington, monitored termination activities around the world from the FBI’s Multi Agency Command Centre. “Feedback on the New Zealand operation has been extremely positive from our international law enforcement partners including the FBI and US Department of Justice,” he says.

