

The Price of Digital Music

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It is not hard to find digital music in school. Students are often seen with Apple iPods and MP3 players. Each of these is capable of holding hundreds of digital songs. Digital music is convenient; anything they desire is at the click of a mouse. To an unsuspecting teen all the music they want appears to be on the Internet for free. Or is it?

There are a number of ways to get digital music and videos. Some options charge a fee and some appears to be free. One option is to go to an online digital music store like AppleiTunes, BestBuy, Wal-Mart, or Yahoo Music unlimited. Here you can buy a single song or an entire album for a set price. Another option is to copy a purchased CD onto your computer. The last option is to go to a peer-to-peer network (P2P) and download music files for free. Some familiar examples are Limewire, Kazaa, and Morpheus. P2P networks supply the software, which allows you to search the hard drives of others on the network to download songs. By doing this you receive the music free of charge, but you may also pick up other unwanted things such as spyware, viruses, and trojans. You may also be opening your hard drive up for others to read confidential files stored on your computer.

The Recording industry is feeling the lost revenue from downloading music. Sales have dropped as millions of people are using P2P file sharing. This means there are millions of songs not being paid for (RIAA). It is not the millionaire musicians that are suffering. It is those in producing and

distributing that are combating financial challenges (WhatstheDownload.com). Illegal distribution of copyrighted music in both physical and digital form costs the music industry thousands of jobs and hundreds of millions of dollars every year (RIAA). Music companies are entitled to be compensated for the work they do. There have been recent additions to the copyright laws such as the No Electronic Theft Law (NET Act), which sets forth that sound recording infringements (including by digital means) can be criminally prosecuted even where no monetary profit or commercial gain is derived from the infringing activity. Punishment in such instances includes up to three years in prison and/or \$250,000 fines. The NET Act also extends the criminal statute of limitations for copyright infringement from three to five years (RIAA).

Why should consumers be concerned about the loss of revenue in the music industry? Back in the age of tapes we were able to copy them and it was no problem. The difference is it is so easy now. There is potential of much more financial damage. The music industry is also fighting back. They are able to hunt down who is illegally downloading music and bring charges against them. This can cost a teenager thousands of dollars. The funny thing is it is the individual users, not the P2P companies that are being sued. This is because it is not illegal to make the software, but it is illegal to download music with it. This is a scary thought to a teenager. It is a game many are playing, each week 250 million tracks are downloaded from P2P networks (WhatstheDownload.com).

This has been an argument for the past couple of years, but it appears the financial future of the music industry is looking up. As of April 2006 digital sales have gone up (Garrity, 2006). This is encouraging to the industry whose goal is to continue to grow business, not make up for lost

sales (Garrity, 2006). The word is getting out through legal settlements and the media, causing many to pay for their music. The music industry is also seeing the potential for growth as wireless providers are starting to put music and video capabilities on their phones (Sharmal, 2006). This opens even more potential for music sales. It appears there is now a better understanding between the music industry and teens.

References

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