MP3’s: The Future Of The Music Industry Essay, Research Paper

MP3 : The Future of the Music Industry

Despite the rumors and hearsay about MP3?s, they are the future of the music industry. The Record Industry Association of America (RIAA) has tried to sue MP3 hardware and software makers, like Diamond Multimedia, yet have been unsuccessful. The Internet is changing the way that musicians can sell their work. In turn, musicians who support MP3?s are not supportive of computer piracy but have found themselves an effective outlet to advertise themselves.

MP3 is a file format that can store audio files on a computer. They are very small in file size and the songs sound nearly perfect. All you need to play these files on your computer is an MP3 player. Anyone with an Internet connection can download an MP3 player for free off the Internet. There are many different types of players that you can download, they all look different but support the same idea. They look and work like a car stereo for your computer. The average download time of an MP3 player on a 56K modem is about one to two hours; the average download time of a song on a 56K modem is about fifteen to thirty minutes. It sounds like a lot of time to waste but it is free music. Many of today?s college campuses offer a free Internet access to their students. Most of those campuses use an Ethernet connection rather than a 56K modem. In layman?s terms it means that students who are on these Ethernet connections are always connected to the Internet and can download files over 100 times faster than a normal 56K modem. Therefore, it only takes about five to ten minutes to download a player and about one to four minutes to download a song. It is not very surprising that a huge percentage of MP3 users are college students, ages 18 to 24.

On campuses that offer Ethernet connections up to 75% of students are music pirates (Greenfield 58). Also, that is probably the reason that the percentage of music buyers who are between the ages of 15 and 24 years old has declined from 32.2% in 1996 to 28% in 1998 (Reece).

The question at hand is ” Are MP3?s legal?” The answer is yes and no. Like many technologies, MP3 can be implemented for both legal and illegal uses. It is similar to Zip compression, common to most computer users. Zip files may be used to distribute copyrighted materials illegally or for legitimate purposes. MP3 users work on the honors system. They can go to a site and download a song that is on the top 20 charts. They are given instructions not to distribute the song and to erase it within 24 to 48 hours. Whether or not they wish to do this is their own choice. On the other hand, some bands allow MP3 users to keep and distribute their copyrighted material. This is a fast and effective way to advertise for a band that does not get their songs played on the radio every day.

MP3 files are allowing a whole bunch of new musicians to reach a worldwide audience without dealing with record labels. Today, everybody who has an Internet connection can have a web page. Web pages are easy to make and are a great way to advertise. Bands who have their own web pages can make their own MP3?s and put them on their web page for the public to download for free. Making an MP3 is about as easy as downloading a player to hear a downloaded song. Anybody who has access to a computer with a CD-ROM drive can do this. All you need to do is download a program called Music Match and install it on your computer. Put in the CD that you would like to make an MP3 of and click the record button. Then just sit back and wait while the CD track is encoded in the MP3 format.

This type of technology is great for small bands that need to make a name for themselves. Many people have given MP3 a bad name because it is often associated with music pirates, but it is the best way for the little guys to get their music out without paying an arm and a leg to do it. Small artists now have a chance to be heard that they did not have before.

After seeing how successful the little bands were, The Beastie Boys went out on a limb and became the first known band to use MP3?s. They used MP3?s as an important part on their entire online strategy. They realized that every music pirating MP3 site had Beastie Boys songs, and some even had bootlegged versions of live shows. The Beasties knew that they could not put songs that had been copyrighted on their site for free to the public. They came up with an idea to kill two birds with one stone (Robertson, Beasties). They released live recordings and remixes to the public for free on their official site. This strategy both counters bootleggers and gave Beastie Boys fans a little something that they could not have gotten anywhere else. The Beasties just ask two things from the downloaders; an email address so that they can be mailed newsletters and the public is asked not to distribute the songs, but to direct people to the Beastie Boys web site.

Since the Beasties huge step, many other known musicians have followed in their footsteps with distributing their music via MP3 on the Internet (Robertson, Top Tier). Including among these musicians are Taylor Dayne, Willie Nelson, The Beach Boys, and The Blues Brothers to name a few. These artists are playing the game very smart. They are offering the public their music for free, in turn, people are telling their friends, who check out these bands sites and eventually like them. The public gets a sneak peak at what the band has to offer and if people like it, they have the option to purchase merchandise from the bands. Some bands are even rebelling against their own record labels. A rock group, Less Than Jake and the rap group, Public Enemy, have released MP3?s tracks off their new albums free of charge to the public on their web sites. This has, in turn angered their record companies. The public loves the idea that the artists are supporting them and not the large record labels.

MP3?s are already changing the music industry. In fact, Diamond Multimedia is in the process of creating a portable MP3 player. Robertson says, “The Rio portable MP3 player will kick the digital music movement into overdrive”(Robertson,Rio Rocks). It will not happen overnight, but from the research that I have done I strongly feel that in five to ten years MP3?s will be standard that CD?s are today. The public doesn?t want to pay $15.99 for their music; the typical price for a CD. They would rather buy the portable player and download the songs that they would like off the Internet for free, or for a minimal amount of money. The RIAA has to face the facts that we as a society are moving toward a digital age, and we are moving rapidly. The new portable player will also come with Music Match software that allows the consumer to easily convert their CD collection into MP3?s, therefore eliminating CD?s all together.

Despite the music industries threatening reactions to MP3?s, MP3 has gotten impressive support from users and artists alike. The artists realize that it is a great way to sell themselves to the public. Over 600 artists have signed up with MP3.com( Robertson, Rio Rocks). The RIAA has to understand that the conventional way that music is sold is over. The only way that they will survive is to change with the times. Robertson says that MP3 will have the impact on the music industry that the copying machine had on the publishing industry (Phillips). At first publishers could not control what people were copying, and now look, copier machines are in every office today. The future is coming fast; the only way to be prepared for it is to educate yourself about the new technologies that are on the rise. Ten years ago, nobody thought that with a computer you could talk to somebody across the globe. Look at the advantages that the Internet has given us. With a click of a mouse you can download a top 20 hit or a golden oldie. I invite music fans alike to try out MP3 and you will realize that the future is here today with MP3 technology.

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