

iTunes by Apple

While much of today's news is focused on the war in Iraq, a war of different sort is being waged in the world of cyberspace. The controversial issue of media sharing has taken over a small portion of the media spotlight. The conflict over music piracy and sharing has consumed the minds, efforts and most importantly budgets of several major music companies for the past several years. Recently, these companies, represented by the RIAA, Recording Industry Association of America, have filed suits against all of the popular software-exchange companies such as Morpheus, Imesh, Kazaa, and Grokster. A recent ruling by a US District court judge set the precedent that these companies can not be held accountable to restrict the exchange of material through their software even if the material is copy-righted. This landmark decision has contributed to the music industry's overwhelming problem of music piracy.

As of April 28, 2003, an alternative means of transferring music has been opened by Apple Computer Inc. iTunes.com is a commercial site that is owned by Apple Computer Inc. and licensed by the top five recording labels in the music industry. The groundbreaking venture is focusing on providing high quality reliable downloads of popular music for a low price. Each song will cost users \$0.99 to download. These songs will come with an unlimited license to copy and play the music. This allows users to burn songs onto cd's, record onto mp3 players, and utilize other playback methods.

The primary user of this new feature is intended to be the Apple iPod. The extremely popular mp3 player has had tremendous sales in recent months and allows up to 30 Gigabytes of space for recording hundreds of hours of music.

The advent of this service comes as an alternative to the illegal forms of music acquisition that occupy today's cyberspace. The indication of lawmakers has been that exchange programs like Morpheus and Imesh are only going to be around as long as nothing can be legally held against them. The recording industry is pressuring lawmakers and the entire legal system to prosecute the owners of Imesh, Morpheus, Grokster, and other such utilities. Soon, with the help of ventures like iTunes and a little bit of competitive pricing, the future of music might very well lie in the consumer world once again. Such a prospect brings a bright horizon for the recording industry as a whole, and ventures like Apple, who stand to control an entirely new industry of digital music sales.

The major question on everyone's minds is whether people will pay for something that has previously been free. The music industry says they will have to pay for the music or face legal consequences. Apple says that they will pay for the music because the quality is better and the convenience is built into the system. The people in charge of Imesh and Kazaa don't have to say anything at all, because the thousands of mouse-clicks an hour say more than they could ever say in response. It is a touchy subject that must be watched in the coming months.