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STS.092

The Big Apple

Music speaks to our emotions, can you imagine watching the introduction to Star Wars without the blare of the trumpets, or going to a party without a DJ, or . . .not being able to download music? Having difficulty imagining NOT being able to download music. If you are, don't worry because you are like millions of other Americans who download their favorite songs from file sharing networks on a regular basis.

Ever since the shut down of Napster in 2001, its customers have found other sources. Kazaa is one of the most popular free file sharing networks, attracting tens of millions of users a day. Press Play and Music Net are another two companies that charge to play music. While Kazaa has been sued, its closing will only mean the opening of other file sharing networks. With hundreds of small startups entering the electronic music distribution market, it seems like a fair solution to the trade of music will never be possible.

Apple Computer, the latest to enter this fray, is the largest new corporate contender, as of April 25th, 2003. In 2001, Steve Jobs, Apple's chief executive kicked off the "Rip, Mix, Burn" campaign, designed to target customers who would be attracted to the copying capabilities of Apple Computers. Though this marketing concept did not go over well with music executives, their latest music sharing program has.

Apple proposes a new digital music sharing service, which will charge 99 cents for each download of a song. Although the song from here can only legally be used by the original purchaser, it is hoped the very low fee will attract more customers on the moral divide of whether to download for free. Apple, a company with 4.5 billion in cash, little to no debt, and a steady following, hopes this will increase their market base. Although critics of this new service say that unless Apple introduces something radical besides the low prices, the service will fall by the way side, music executives are in full support of the software. It provides a compromise never before made in the electronic trading of music.

In light of the latest Supreme Court ruling that two free file sharing services “Grosker” and “Stream-Cast Networks” were not guilty of copy right infringement, any compromise is looking more and more favorable. Even still, it seems unlikely that music trading will stop until rules are implemented that require hardware to also prevent the illegal trade of music.

So long as hardware manufacturers have the capability of broadening their market base by infringing on the market base of the music industry, it will do so. With IM, it has already infringed on telecommunication lines. With e-mail, it has infringed on the U.S. Postal service. Ultimately, the level of convenience provided by a computing system makes it far more favorable than any multi-step system. Unless the rest of the market adjusts, or rules are implemented, computing is the wave of the future.

In the long run, until Apple unveils its specific plans for its music sharing network, it doesn't look like music sharing will take a very hard blow from this latest announcement.