

BUSINESS

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A Messy Age for Music

Changing Her Tune on Apple's iPod

By Tom Ichniowski
Washington Post Staff Writer

I've basically stopped buying music because I'm stuck in a digital music divide.

Every 99-cent song I buy from the iTunes Music Store disappears into an ecosystem that depends on \$250 (or more) replacement iPods and clones or all from other color-incompatible devices made by non-Apple Computer companies.

But who among us doesn't find the ease of iTunes totally seductive? The 30-second sample clip? Love it. The option of buying one song off an album? Brilliant. And so

wasn't peeling off that super-adhesive tape they put on CD packages?

Once upon a time, music used to come for a measurable chunk of my monthly spending. Now, I go to the store, I get what I want, and then I go home and I don't have it.

I got to this point the way I imagine many others might have. Three birthdays ago, my generous, tech-loving boyfriend bought me an iPod mini.

I loved it. I used to use, like, the old cassette players that came before it.

I loaded my favorite CDs on her. I had her rip playlists from my younger brother. I even Google'd old lyrics, hunting for songs that I had occasionally bought from iTunes.

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Confusion Reigns In the Expanding Digital World

By Mike Muscovitz
Washington Post Staff Writer

As progress, it used to be that you just went out and bought a compact disc and you didn't have to worry about whether it would work on your player.

These days, in the age of digital distribution, we don't need to buy CDs anymore. What we have, instead, are a host of online music services, offering songs for sale or rent via quick download to a host of digital music players that might or might not actually play them.

The music biz's Chaucery, Cantelero, has a whopping 100,000 songs in his subscription Yahoo! Music account. But he can't put Yahoo! Music songs on his iPod, and he can't put songs purchased from the iTunes Music Store on his phone.

Cantelero knows that iTunes is the most popular online music store, but he avoids it because of the playlist restrictions. Instead, he prefers to shop at eMusic, which will let him track in the MP3 format, an open technology that works on every music player on the market, even the iPod.

"The fact that they don't have [playlist control] on them is absolutely a major plus," he said. "I don't have to segregate my music into various playlists."

Thanks to competing file formats and business models, the digital music world can be a little confusing — and it's about to get more so.

The holiday season, Microsoft and RealNetworks are bringing new offerings to the market in an attempt to unseat Apple Computer, the king of the digital music world. The two companies are, separately, offering a new pair of devices and services that are related to each other in the same way Apple's iPod is related to the company's iTunes service.

Microsoft's 1240 Zone will play songs sold from the company's coming Zone Marketplace store. RealNetwork's has teamed with wakelife. Best Buy and Best Buy Card maker Best Buy will offer a device that will work with subscription programs such as RealNetwork's Rhapsody service. The device, called a Stream player, ranges from \$139.99 to \$249.99; subscriptions to the service cost \$15 per month. Both will also play MP3 files, as does Apple's iPod and most other digital players.

It is too early to say whether these devices will affect

the MUSIC biz, Oct. 1

Good Apple, Bad Apple

When it comes to the iPod, some consumers have strong opinions. Two from opposing camps make their case.

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iPod Cheers

Once a Skeptic, Now Baptized Into the Mac

By SCOTT STERNBERG
Special to *The Washington Post*

I've gone from being an iPod-hater to a full-fledged believer.

When Steve Jobs launched his first-generation iPod, I was still in high school. I didn't buy into the hype early; I already had a PC-based MP3 player that was marginally functional. The hip advertisements didn't faze me and I knew iPods had problems with batteries.

But in college, I was baptized by the Mac. Apple sold me on two things none of my previous audio devices could give me: cool and easy. I've been through two iPods so far, selling a 20-gigabyte iPod to a friend (thus converting him, too) and buying an iPod Shuffle, which is still rocking for me today. I'm even in the market for a Pod-upgrade.

My conversion to iPod is like a proverb: You can't criticize something for being "too easy."

The iPod completes my conversion to Mac in general — even though I held on to my PC beliefs long after my friends had switched over. iTunes is so functional, whether for managing songs or listening to friends' music. It's simple, seamless integration. And maybe that makes me less hard-core — a sellout who bought into the marketing and joined the bandwagon. It's

not because I can't figure out computers — it's just easier. I may never buy another PC again.

Since moving to the District earlier this year from Louisiana, I have begun to truly appreciate my iPod. Every morning I wake up, plug my iPod into my Apple laptop and download my morning podcasts. On my walk to the Metro, I listen to sports pundits Tony Kornheiser and Michael Wilbon, some NPR news, and then I top it off with some Pink Floyd or Kanye West.

The critics have launched their salvos, but five years later, the success of the iPod single-handedly has shown us there are other options beyond bug-ridden Windows-based PCs and the bulky music players that once dominated the market. You also can't beat Apple's unyielding service and support. Comparatively, the price can be hefty, but this iPod generation has learned that you get what you pay for. Jobs, of course, already knows this: I certainly will come back for more.

Scott Sternberg, 22, lives in Washington and works at the Student Press Law Center, a nonprofit group in Arlington.



Sternberg can't criticize something for being "too easy."

iPod Jeers

Van Halen Fell Silent On Top of the World

By NEAL MUELLER
Special to *the Washington Post*

Last year my team on Mount Everest witnessed firsthand how lousy the iPod is.

On our expedition, we brought enough electronic gadgetry to outfit an army. What broke first? The iPods. The batteries croaked, the cases scratched and the hard drives seized from the rarified air.

After that, we began to look askance on pretty iPods. I like gadgets, but I also like simple. As a mountaineer, I can't put up with the iPod because it's too high-maintenance.

That makes me a big fan of the Creative MuVo, because it has what I want: battery life, light weight and rugged reliability. It might lack pizzazz, but it delivers substance. The tiny MuVo had no problem cranking out Van Halen when I stood on the summit of Mount Everest.

To expound a little more on the things I like about MuVo over iPod: My device is extremely light, ruggedly durable and it takes AAA batteries. It doesn't need a case because it won't scratch.

The MuVo is an open system and can accept music from a variety of sources. By comparison, iPods live in their own little world. They only work with custom cords and other special accessories. They only work with their own music format. Basically, the iPod perpetuates its own exclusive clique. It's

no team player.

Watching my fellow climbers lug their broken iPods up and down Mount Everest gave me some strong opinions. I'd go as far as to say I think Paris Hilton is to Hollywood what the iPod is to portable music players. Both are radiant, glossy and coveted, and like any flash-in-the-pan they are overpriced and cantankerous.

When a device is priced at a considerable premium and derives the majority of its sales from chic mystique or verve, I say it's a fad. My climbing friends agree, making our team 100 percent anti-iPod. Buying an iPod for its musical value is like buying a BMW for its high-speed cornering. The iPod is conspicuous gadget consumption. It's bling.

For all the incremental benefits that the iPod offers — like its beauty and its ease of use — it is still just a portable music player. Compare the \$250 30 gigabyte iPod price tag to the \$80 launch price of the Sony Walkman in the 1980s. Perhaps we have gotten just a bit frothy for portable music, or maybe it's just the sexy case and finger wheel.

Neal Mueller, 28, is a first-year graduate student at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School of Business.



The first gadget to fail on Mount Everest was Mueller's iPod.