

Analysts question demand for online music sales

A horde of iTunes-style pay-per-download clones are hitting the web in a bid to copy the success of Apple's music sales in the PC environment.

Napster, now owned by Roxio, will relaunch in time for Christmas. MusicMatch has announced it will be selling tracks through its jukebox application. Then there's RealNetworks, AOL, Amazon and even Microsoft (see below) all of whom unveiled plans to sell pay-per-download songs to Windows users.

Even though new online music services have sparked headlines during the past year, they have failed to fuel significant growth in online music purchases, according to Jupiter Research analysts.

Apple's iTunes, for example, allows consumers to burn songs on to CDs but the service is available only to users who can supply a valid US billing address – not much use to law-abiding music fans in the UK. Apple

has delayed the launch of iTunes Music Store in Europe because of the requirement to meet complex licensing terms.

Meanwhile only 17 percent of US adults say the threat of legal action from the recording industry has led them to cut down on illegal filesharing, according to Jupiter.

Jupiter's analysts say that the situation is much the same across the globe as it is in the US, stating that online music in Europe has been "stuck" just as it is in the States.

On the bright side, Jupiter believes such problems should start to be resolved with online music purchases predicted as growing from just nine percent this year to 48 percent in 2008.

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Microsoft gears up for Windows-based iTunes

Microsoft looks set to develop a music download service, extending the company's set of multimedia apps further still. A Media Player-based digital music store is a tantalising prospect for the big five record labels, which have so far been reluctant to take a pan-industry approach to the issue of pay-per-song downloads. Not only does it provide a massive potential customer base, there's also the safety of the Microsoft brand.



According to company chairman Bill Gates, the music service is unlikely to prove a moneyspinner for the software giant. "A music service may be a feature your platform should offer, but it's not like you're going to make some [big] markup," Gates said at a meeting last month.

The hints came as Microsoft announced updates to its MSN 8.0. The new version is set to be released in the UK before the end of the year and, according to Microsoft's Yusuf Mehdi, will be aimed squarely at broadband users. New features include a pop-up ad blocker, improved picture sharing as part of MSN Messenger and the Outlook Connector tool that will allow an Outlook email client to work with MSN and corporate email systems.

One in four PCA readers wake up to Wi-Fi

If broadband was the big story of 2002, it looks like Wi-Fi (wireless networking) is going to take its place in 2003. Home wireless networking is officially The Next Big Thing, according to the results of a recent PC Advisor online poll.

More than a quarter (25.4 percent) of respondents indicated they would be installing a wireless network over the next six months, joining the 13.7 percent who said they had already done so.

IT consultant and forum editor Peter Thomas wasn't surprised by the results: "Wireless networking seems to be inextricably linked with broadband internet access. For home users it's the possibility of sharing a broadband service between PCs that drives any move to wireless connectivity.

"I don't see too many home users adopting wireless networking for file or application sharing in the home and that is certainly the case with quite a few of my private clients. All they care about is being able to share broadband with other family members – for example, children with computers in their rooms."

