Verizon's Music Service Hampers MP3 Ability - Yahoo! News

By BRUCE MEYERSON, AP Business Writer
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NEW YORK - The first edition of a new music service from Verizon Wireless hampers a cell phone's ability to play MP3 songs acquired elsewhere, a handicap the company says is purely temporary and unrelated to larger battles over digital copyright restrictions.

The new V Cast Music store does, however, weigh in definitively on one side of the music download industry by employing the newest version of the Windows Media Player from Microsoft Corp., which doesn't work with Apple Computer Inc.'s Macintosh operating system or iTunes software.

Verizon Wireless spoke out Monday after criticisms began appearing on Web logs including PCS Intel and Techdirt regarding the new service, which the company launched last week at the International Consumer Electronics Show in Las Vegas.

Customers wanting V Cast Music who already own one of the two compatible handsets need to visit one of the company's retail locations for a software upgrade.

The two phones, one from Samsung Electronics Co. Ltd. and one from LG Electronics Inc., come with slots for removable storage disks and an application to play MP3 digital songs on those disks.

The V Cast upgrade disables that capability for now, though users still can convert music copied from CDs and other non-digitally protected MP3 files into a Windows Media format and then transfer them to the phone with a USB cable.

Verizon dismissed accusations on certain Web logs that this decision was made for any ulterior profit motive such as forcing users to repurchase music through the V Cast store.

Instead, the company said, the MP3 capability was temporarily disabled so that it can be integrated into the V Cast application, rather than appearing as a separate application that might confuse customers.

Verizon Wireless also emphasized that the upgrade is voluntary: Customers who'd prefer to keep their current MP3 capabilities over an immediate upgrade to V Cast Music can wait until the next edition of the application is released at an undetermined date.

The company also dismissed assertions that customers aren't being informed that they'll lose certain capabilities with the upgrade.

"Our training program makes sure that our customer representatives have in front of them what the tradeoff is, and they're told they need to provide that information," said spokesman Jeffrey Nelson.

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