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Apple Offers Music Downloads With Unique Pricing

By LAURIE J. FLYNN

SAN FRANCISCO, April 28 — [Apple Computer](#) unveiled its online music store today in a move that both the company and the record industry hope will be the beginning of a lucrative and legal partnership for downloading popular music.

The new service stands in contrast to both the free music swapping services that have proliferated on the Internet and the record industry's own initial efforts to develop a method for downloading songs to computers, which generally require consumers to subscribe to a service.

Apple will offer individual songs and full albums for downloading from the five largest record companies — Warner, BMG, EMI, Sony Music and Universal — that together represent most of the industry's top artists. Initially the service plans to make 200,000 songs available for 99 cents each, or, in most cases, \$9.99 for an album. New songs will be added on a regular basis.

Customers will be able to listen to the downloaded songs on an iPod, Apple's personal music player, or record them onto a CD. The service can be used through software that at the start will only work on computers made by Apple, but the company plans to produce a Windows version by the end of the year.



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Kim Kulish for The New York Times
Steve Jobs of Apple Computer announced the creation of an online music service that offers songs from the five major record labels.

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To music executives, the Apple service is the most serious effort yet toward overcoming the digital rights mess that has plagued the music industry ever since the arrival of the now-defunct Napster file-swapping service in 1999.

Apple's per-download pricing strategy is a departure from existing services, like Rhapsody and Pressplay, which are based on subscription plans. In many cases these services allow users to listen to songs they have downloaded only as long as they continue to pay for the service.

"These services treat you like a criminal," said Steve Jobs, Apple's chief executive. "We think subscriptions are the wrong path. We think people want to own their music."

With the Apple approach, customers will be allowed to record songs on CD's, making up to 10 copies, or save them on an iPod. They can also legally play the songs on up to three computers.

"People buy music because they want control over it," said Hilary B. Rosen, chief executive of the Recording Industry Association of America.

For the music industry, Apple's new service is not just a test of what price customers are willing to pay, but of whether an easy-to-use system will catch on as an alternative to the services that let users download music free. Ms. Rosen said that the fact that Apple was a small player in the personal computer industry, with about 3 percent of the market, has made the music companies more willing to join its experiment. Apple now has eight months to work out any problems with the system before it opens it up to the huge base of Windows PC users.

"It's a step in the right direction," said Sylvia Rhone, the chief executive of Elektra Records, owned by Warner Bros. Records, a unit of [AOL Time Warner](#). "Being easily accessible is a big thing."

Ms. Rhone said the Apple service could help make purchasing music online attractive across age groups because it will carry a huge assortment of songs in one place.

Tom Walley, chairman of Warner Bros. Records, said he expected to make the company's entire catalog available on the service, and that any delay would be due more to problems in working out the technology than to business issues.

In an attempt to thwart all-out piracy, Apple has created a built-in limit of 10 CD copies of a single playlist of songs. Users need only make a slight change in a playlist to make another 10 copies, but

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Apple is hoping that measure alone will keep people from profiting illegally from albums they download.

The new service also offers 30-second previews, cover art and quick access to videos and other content from artists. Twenty recording artists, including Bob Dylan, U2 and Sheryl Crow, will offer songs exclusively for download from the service.

In announcing the new service, Apple also introduced new iPod portable music players that are lighter and equipped with more memory than earlier versions. The company has already sold about 700,000 iPods, making it one of the most popular portable devices on the market.

Musicians have long shown an appreciation for the Apple Macintosh, and from its earliest days Apple developed software specifically for music editing and synthesizing.

And while Napster made it easy for people to listen to music without paying for it, Mr. Jobs said, it also proved that the Internet "was made for music delivery."

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