Software Helps Musicians and Fans Find Each Other

Programs such as Indy and IRate identify users' tastes, then send them songs they might like.

By Jon Healey, Times Staff Writer

Daryl Scairiot is a singer-songwriter from Santa Rosa, Calif., who has never had a record contract, which is why you probably have never heard of him.

There are no advertising campaigns for Scairiot, no posters at the shopping mall, no appearances on "The Tonight Show With Jay Leno."

And on the Internet, Scairiot's haunting country tunes are lost in a crowd of songs being given away by obscure artists trying to attract a following.

"It still puts you in a position of having to launch a gigantic marketing campaign in..."
order to get a sizable number of people to notice you," he said in a recent interview.

But technology is giving musicians such as Scario a new, more efficient way to find their audiences. New software pushes independent artists' songs through the Internet to the people with matching tastes, exposing their music to the people most likely to become fans.

One example is Change.TV Inc.'s Indy, a program that downloads songs to users' computers based on how they rate the tracks they receive. Another is iRate radio, a similar program being developed collaboratively online.

Their approach recalls the "push" craze from the 1990s, led by PointCast, which pushed personalized news programs to customers through the Internet. PointCast was a hot commodity for a few years, only to be felled by slow delivery and management problems.

The new crop has at least two notable advantages over its predecessors: faster Internet connections for its users and more powerful technology for tailoring programs to the audience.

Indy and iRate start by downloading to their users' computers a number of songs that artists have agreed to distribute for free online. Each time the programs run, they download more songs for users to play and rate on a scale from one to five stars.

The ratings help the software match each user to others who have parallel likes and dislikes. Once a match has been made, the software sends people songs that others with similar tastes have rated highly.

This process, called collaborative filtering, "is really a very human thing," said Ian Clarke, chief technology officer of Change.TV. "It's not some magic computer