Grudgingly, Labels Sell Songs Online

By AMY HARMON

Increasingly desperate to woo customers away from an Internet music piracy party that shows no signs of abating, several major record labels have resolved to make more music legally available for less money online — even if it means sacrificing lucrative CD sales.

For the music industry, it is a turning point. For consumers, it means the advent of new ways to buy music, including the closest approximation so far of a "celestial jukebox," where they can search for and listen to a vast range of recorded music at low cost.

Three years after Napster unleashed the first wave of music-trading over the Internet — and a full year after the company was shut down by a court order — the labels are coming to terms with the notion that Internet file-sharing is reshaping their business, and they must compete with piracy or risk losing a generation of customers.

The Universal Music Group plans to announce today that it has licensed its catalog to Listen.com, making Listen.com the first to provide customers access to the catalogs of all five major labels over the Internet for under $10 a month. Other services are making individual songs cheaper to get and easier to burn to CD's legally.

"We could be 100 percent correct morally and legally that it is wrong to trade copyrighted files, but from...