

Why Shouldn't I Download Music from the Internet Free?

Let's answer this question based on the new forces we suggest are shaping the twenty-first century. First, the information revolution has given enormous access to all kinds of music and other information that previously you would have had to find in music stores or special outlets. The development of the personal computer, Apple's iPod, and wireless communications enables you and all your friends to access your favorite Web sites anywhere on this planet. However, the people who compose, play, and produce the music are not in the music business for free. They want to make money. Previously, their right to their product was protected under patents given by national governments, including that of the United States. If another country wanted the same product, it had to purchase it at market price or pay to have the patent extended to them. Now, because music is delivered over the Internet, not only can the music producer not control what happens to his music, but his national government cannot protect him.

The patent issue associated with music access has become transnational. For this reason, states are hard at work trying to agree on an international patent policy—and, of course, agreement is very hard to reach. The day before Microsoft released Windows 2000, copies of the program were being sold in Russian stores for \$15 apiece.

Chinese entrepreneurs are busy producing copies of music pirated from the Internet and marketing them for less than half of the producer's price. Each state thus seeks its own advantage and so makes difficult any international agreement that might benefit all. Because of new citizen activism made possible by rapid communication in online chat rooms, anyone can quickly learn where to get freebies or at least buy at the cheapest cost.

Getting a free ride may be cool to you. Musicians, music producers, and others engaged in the international invention, manufacture, and sale of music products do not think so. Hence, they have started lawsuits and raised patent issues to make it more difficult for you to obtain free music. If they succeed, an international agreement will centralize patent policy into one general document binding on every country in the world. This policy, however, will not deter your efforts to download freebies, and you will thus encourage companies in other states to steal music and make illegal copies so they can make money, too. And so the friction between efforts to create one world order and the undermining of these efforts through individual and group actions continues. Which side wins out depends a lot on you. (See chapter 12 for more information on the piracy of software, music, and movies.)