

Peter Paunov

I have been a music fan for 30 years now, regularly purchasing new music and trying constantly to keep in touch with what is happening. My collection is extensive and I have no problem with changing technology. I quickly substituted my vinyl collection with CDs, I regularly use my MD player and I do own an MP3 player too. Somehow however Apple boss Steve Jobs' optimistic view that all music will one day be delivered on the Internet rings a little hollow. For a start, most of published music already is found on the Internet, as well as music by performers who are unsigned and unpublished. Yet people like me still prefer to buy their music from the record shop, get their news from old-fashioned means, like friends, radio and magazines. Yes I have bought music from companies like Amazon, but that is only when particular music is not available in the major shops where I live. In most cases mine and my friends means of getting new music has been largely traditional.

For this to change, the current technology has to be taken one step further, the ways which music is being sold can be revolutionised if only the tools are there. These tools prime concern should be with making downloading more rational and adapted to the way people actually listen to music.

People are now expected to rummage through numerous files on the Internet and make an effort to look for music, rather similar to the effort a mushroom picker rummaging through the forest to look for mushrooms has to make. You need time and chance on your side. Most mushroom lovers however are rather more comfortable with going to a market where they can easily cast their eyes through rows upon rows of different mushrooms and talk to a specialist about what they all are and how they should be served, or just purchase their favourite mushroom neatly packaged in a supermarket. People prefer to have what they like immediately, and not to have to go to a forest to look for it. Similarly most music lovers hear their favourite music first through their favourite radio stations, DJs and clubs. Somehow with all the technology in the world, they are expected to purchase their music not where they first heard it, but have to visit the "forest", i.e. they can only purchase music in a shop, perhaps the following day, or spend time looking for it on the Internet if they have all the necessary information beforehand.

I would love to experience a future like this; I am listening to the radio, or I am at a club, I like a song, I want to obtain this song and enjoy it in my own time. I press a button for the infrared link on my mobile phone, or on

the wristband provided by the club, or on my radio set. This links with a digital set transmitting the music and downloads and stores from it automatically some simple numerical information about the song, which is being played, in the form of a code, recognisable to sites selling music on the Internet. Once I have chosen a few songs I then use my infrared device at a selling post (my personal computer or a computer at the club) and transfer the song codes I have collected to a single site, which after payment allows me to download the actual songs. I instruct the computer to print all the songs on a simple CD-R. With three or four pushes of a button, I can then leave my home, my club, or my job with a copy of the song I had just heard and loved, which I can then enjoy whenever I wish.

The key in my opinion is to get DJs involved, they are the real marketers of music anyway. By having a coding system, which recognises where a particular song code was downloaded, i.e. what DJ, radio station or club, is the one, which brought a particular song to your attention and made you buy it, then distribution expenses can be more fairly allocated, which would in turn make more people get involved with this particular system of distribution.

Regulators like Ofcom may have a great opportunity to get involved in revolutionising the way we do things. They can set up, regulate and oversee the coding system. They can inspire and reassure manufacturers of technology, DJs, radio stations and clubs to embrace these new ways of distribution. I hope they do.