

All the Music You Can Listen To, Whenever You Want, for \$10 a Month

Sony break the major label mould and enter the subscription market
By Andrew McMillen

IN A SURPRISING MOVE, Sony Music Australia will this month add a streaming subscription service to Bandit.FM, the direct-to-the-public website that the company launched in No-

INDUSTRY

vember last year. Priced at \$10 a month, the streaming subscription service marks a massive leap forward for the major label business, which has traditionally been resistant to anything but unit orientated sales.

One of Sony's motives with Bandit.FM - which will continue to offer traditional downloads as well - would seem to be contained in the latter two letters of the site's name, positioning it as a subscription-based online radio service. "To some degree, that's it," says Gavin Parry, Sony's General Manager of Digital and Brand Development. "It's a radio-like ability to create your own playlist."

As downloads move to replace compact discs as the preferred method of music consumption, the record industry has been attempting to identify alternative revenue streams. One proposed answer to the quandary is the notion that music-hungry consumers would prefer to shed their portable hard drives and instead play music from "The Cloud", that fantastic metaphor for externally-stored data.

Streaming-based music subscription services have been making waves overseas for several years. In 2005, authors Gerd Leonhard and Dave Kusek described in their book *The Future of Music* a scenario where music becomes synonymous with household services such as water or electricity. In essence, you'd barely notice the small monthly surcharge appended to your internet bill, while enjoying unlimited access to music - or so the theory goes.

While there is no secret that Sony are marketing their first steps in that direction squarely toward teenagers and young adults - typically the most voracious music consumers - Parry also sees

benefits for families who become Bandit.FM subscribers. "A family who adopts the subscription model will have access to unlimited music online, so they can set up playlists and use the service via their stereo. In that case, families can essentially set up customised radio stations at home."

Naturally, a streaming service relies upon its catalogue to satisfy a wide audience demand, and Sony have licensed music from acts that appear on the three other major labels, EMI, Warner and Universal. It's an approach that mirrors that taken by Universal when they developed their own pay-per-download store, GetMusic. That site - launched in 2007 - sells tracks from all majors direct to the public, although

handset, but ultimately, Nokia believes in the importance of two screens," says Karen Farrugia, Nokia's Music Manager, referring to the dual access of mobile phone and PC. Unlimited access to their web store is included in the user's monthly phone plan; tracks downloaded from the phone can be transferred to the user's PC, and vice versa.

But whether streamed or downloaded, music is data, and data ain't free. While a subscription service named Spotify has this year found its feet within the U.K. market, their broadband infrastructure is significantly superior. Whereas many Australians are still bent over a metered, limited barrel, Internet users in the U.K. and U.S. benefit from the absence

Streaming versus Download

Play from the Cloud or own the files - which is for you?



Streaming



Download

	Cost	Size of Catalogue	Portability	The Bottom Line
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Bandit.FM service is \$10 a month, but remember there will be data charges every time you play a song. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 99 cents to \$1.69 a song; most albums start at \$9.99. Nokia do unlimited tracks for \$979 a year (with phone). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Depending on the vendor, around 10 million songs, including most indie labels. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Web enabled phones could stream the music everywhere you go, but again, data limits will be prohibitive. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> iTunes, Nokia Music and Bigpond Music can all be accessed on mobiles. And the tracks go where you do.
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 1 million songs from all major labels. Deals with indies are in the pipeline. 			<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Once our broadband improves, this type of service will be very hard to resist. Even now it is exciting. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The ingrained idea of "owning" something - even a virtual something - is still hard for people to let go of.

at this stage doesn't offer a subscription option.

Sony's new service will also compete with Nokia's Comes With Music, which debuted in April 2008 as a pay-per-download web store and recently added an all-you-can-eat annual subscription that allows users to download unlimited DRM-protected song files.

"Comes With Music is about tying the music service with the

of a dominant telecommunications entity such as Australia's Telstra, which has clogged the market and prevented the development of genuine high-speed broadband in this country.

Until Australia's broadband coverage is improved, the financial reality of excess data charges and sporadic network coverage may dilute the music-as-water pipe dream.

HOT LIST



WEEZER

"(If You're Wondering If I Want You To) I Want You To"

Despite semi-retarded lyrics like "We watched *Titanic*, and it didn't make us sad," the tune's "Cherry, Cherry" hand claps and hypercatchy chorus totally won us over.

MAYER HAWTHORNE

A Strange Arrangement

White people love retro-soull (Us, too.) This cardigan-rocking crooner's debut has a silky-smooth Smokey-meets-Bacharach vibe that has the oddball bloggers frothing at the mouth and the trainspotters working over time. Pass the Courvoisier!

R. KELLY

"Pregnant"

There's baby-making music, and then there's *babymaking* music. As one YouTube commentator put it after hearing this molasses-slow jam: "omg i would love it if kelly got me pregnant! i would damn well enjoy it."

CHRIS SMITHER

"It Takes a Lot To Laugh, It Takes a Train To Cry"

Criminally underrated white bluesman Smither once again manages what very few others have by doing justice to a Bob Dylan cover.

GOLDEN SILVERS

"True No. 9 Blues"

Big Audio Dynamite + EMF + Joe Jackson = our fave new Brit band of the summer. It's unbelievable!

THE STANDELLS

"Riot on Sunset Strip"

This punky garage blast about longhairs getting hassled by the fuzz kicks off the new L.A. *Nuggets* collection - which includes 101 shagadelic jams by the Byrds, Love and the Electric Prunes.

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