

Digital Revolution

MP3 audio files create new ball game for music industry

BY MARIANO CASTILLO
The Battalion

Ask anyone with a computer and a Resnet connection and they will tell you the temptation to copy programs from other students' computers, and especially to collect the popular MP3 music files, is always there. It is so strong, in fact, that the majority of students on the campus server do not even bother to resist it.

MP3s are downloadable audio files that are virtually indistinguishable from CD quality music.

Mac Hooke, a freshman mechanical engineering major, said he has downloaded and played MP3s since he discovered them at Texas A&M, and it does not phase him that it may be legal.

"Honestly, I haven't given much thought that it's illegal," he said. "[MP3s] are just all over the place, and I think there is an inability to get caught on campus."

MP3s are the most popular files found on the Resnet not only at A&M, but on servers at universities across the United States.

It is, for the most part, very acceptable to create and share songs on MP3, but several laws are being broken.

The Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA) reports the industry loses approximately \$5 billion to piracy every year.

In the United States, \$1 million is lost daily.

According to the RIAA, the fastest growing field of piracy is online, which they describe in their piracy strategy as "the Internet culture of unlicensed use [that] means the theft of intellectual property is rampant, and the music business and its artists are the biggest victims."

MP3s are not all evil, however. It is legal to back up CDs you paid for on MP3 as long as their use remains private.

Wes Weibel, a Computer Information System worker and sophomore electrical engineering major, said the downloading of MP3s is not seen as a problem.

"It's definitely widespread, but no one is complaining about it," he said.

Campaigns led by the RIAA fight to get MP3s and other pirated software off university servers but with little success.

"It's like selling marijuana compared to selling heroin."

— Wes Weibel
Computer Information Systems worker

The RIAA began the Soundbyting campaign to curb illicit copying and distribution of MP3s and is geared specifically toward universities.

Weibel said the Internet makes suppressing the number of MP3s nearly impossible.

"It's like dubbing cassette tapes. It's cheap and easy to get songs from all over," he said.

Weibel said while MP3s are the most popular, they are not the only pirated programs found on the Resnet.

"There is tons of software out there," he said. "For example, [there is] PhotoShop, which you can buy at the MSC for over \$300 or download [from the Resnet] at the click of a button for free."

He said the most popular ripped-off titles are games such as "Quake" and "Starcraft." With access to all of these programs, entrepreneurs quickly emerge.

Students who own CD burners offer to make personalized CDs with MP3s for a small fee.

Weibel said selling the CDs and full programs are both illegal, but the repercussions for each are very different.

"It's like selling marijuana compared to selling heroin," he said of the CD burning and the programs, respectively.

With CD burners gaining popularity and entering the mainstream, companies are frantically trying to find ways to control digital music.

A company that has invented an alternative is sightsound.com, which offers music and movie rentals as well as purchases on their Website.

Through their site, customers can purchase either singles or albums and download them instantaneously for their enjoyment.

Scott Sander, chief executive officer and president of sightsound.com, said in a press release his idea to work on this technology was based on his doubts of the stability of digital music on CDs.

"Since 1993, we have been warning the major owners of audio recordings that, by the late 1990s, anyone with a PC would be able to steal CD music at will," he said.

"Our commitment to an open, secure standard for the digital download of entertainment and our ability to offer the protection of two United States patents will make sightsound.com a vital ally of SDMI [Secure Digital Music Initiative] and will be beneficial to artists, labels and, ultimately, consumers who prefer to purchase music directly over the Internet."



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

Can I take a bite out of my college credits?

of course you can!



This summer in Houston at

NORTH HARRIS MONTGOMERY COMMUNITY COLLEGE DISTRICT

North Harris College • Kingwood College • Tomball College • Montgomery College • The University Center

Take a BIG bite out of your degree requirements with a class at one of our local community colleges. Dine in with distance education, or satisfy your appetite at one of our campuses in North Houston, Tomball, Kingwood or The Woodlands. Make us your main course this summer!

CALL
1.800.96 STARS

Summer classes start June 7.

Full-credit, three-week "mini-term" classes start May 17.

The North Harris Montgomery Community College District provides equal employment, admission and educational opportunities without regard to race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age, or disability.