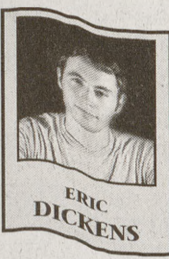


Everything for free

MP3 free-for-all about to end, record companies adopt technology

For years, a three-letter word was the term most often used in search engine requests — "sex." Trying to prove once again that



sex does sell, online opportunists ranging from established corporations to disgruntled guys posting pictures of ex-girlfriends, worked to make a buck off of sex on the Internet. However, sex's reign as the top search request was ended by three other keystrokes — "MP3." Now, the same spectrum of people, from huge record companies to garage bands, will soon try to make money off MP3s and

prove that the controversial file format can sell as well as sex.

But this is an entirely new concept — up until now, the term "MP3" has been synonymous with "free." Programs like Winamp, Napster and Gnutella have bolstered the popularity of MP3s and strengthened the belief that they are meant to be downloaded at no cost. Unfortunately for consumers, the MP3 free-for-all is likely coming to an end. Nonetheless, MP3 listeners should embrace the future of the format because it will benefit all sides involved.

While the world of music typically has

Artists also stand to benefit from the elimination of completely free MP3 downloads. Musicians should not have to settle for spreading their MP3s through programs like Napster where copyright laws are sacrificed for the sake of new exposure. While garnering new listeners is good for artists, Napster is not a necessary way to get that exposure.

When a listener hears of a band, it is as easy to type in the band's name followed by a ".com" as it is to type it in a Napster search field. And if listeners go to that band's Website, they will usually get pictures, biographies and information unavailable on Napster. Many times visitors can download some of the band's MP3s as well. Musicians and groups are posting MP3 tracks from their CDs and from live concerts on their Websites. Direct downloads from a band's website will be the future for free and legal MP3s — especially for independent and smaller-label artists.

For example, it is unlikely that a listener first hears about Hole by going to its website and downloading one of 50 MP3s the band has posted. However, it is quite possible for an A&M student to attend North by Northgate, watch local band Blue Earth play at Shadow Canyon, and go to the band's Website to see pictures, merchandise, tour information and, of course, MP3s from the latest album. Not only do artists control which tracks are on their Websites, but they can also track how many visitors and downloads their Websites have — which they cannot do with Napster.

As Napster backers watched their beloved program lose the first round of its court battle against the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), many users responded by downloading new MP3s in a frenzy with the attitude of "Get em while they are still free."

In reality, an Internet without a Napster free-for-all would bring a positive balance to the current MP3 controversy. Record companies trying to shut down Napster will see new revenues from MP3 services, no matter what form they may take.

At the same time, listeners will enjoy not having to worry about getting kicked off Napster or having the authorities ever knock on their door. And in the end, artists who embrace MP3s as an effective new form of music distribution will gain the most by exposing listeners to their music while being able to control where and how much listeners can download their files.

As for those Internet junkies who collected gigabytes of MP3s while Napster creator Shawn Fanning was still failing out of college, well, there is a reason they have watched the RIAA lawsuits without looks of concern.

Illegal MP3s will always be available on the Internet for users who know how and where to get them. A shut-down of Napster simply ensures a better download for listeners, musicians and record labels.

Eric Dickens is a senior English major.

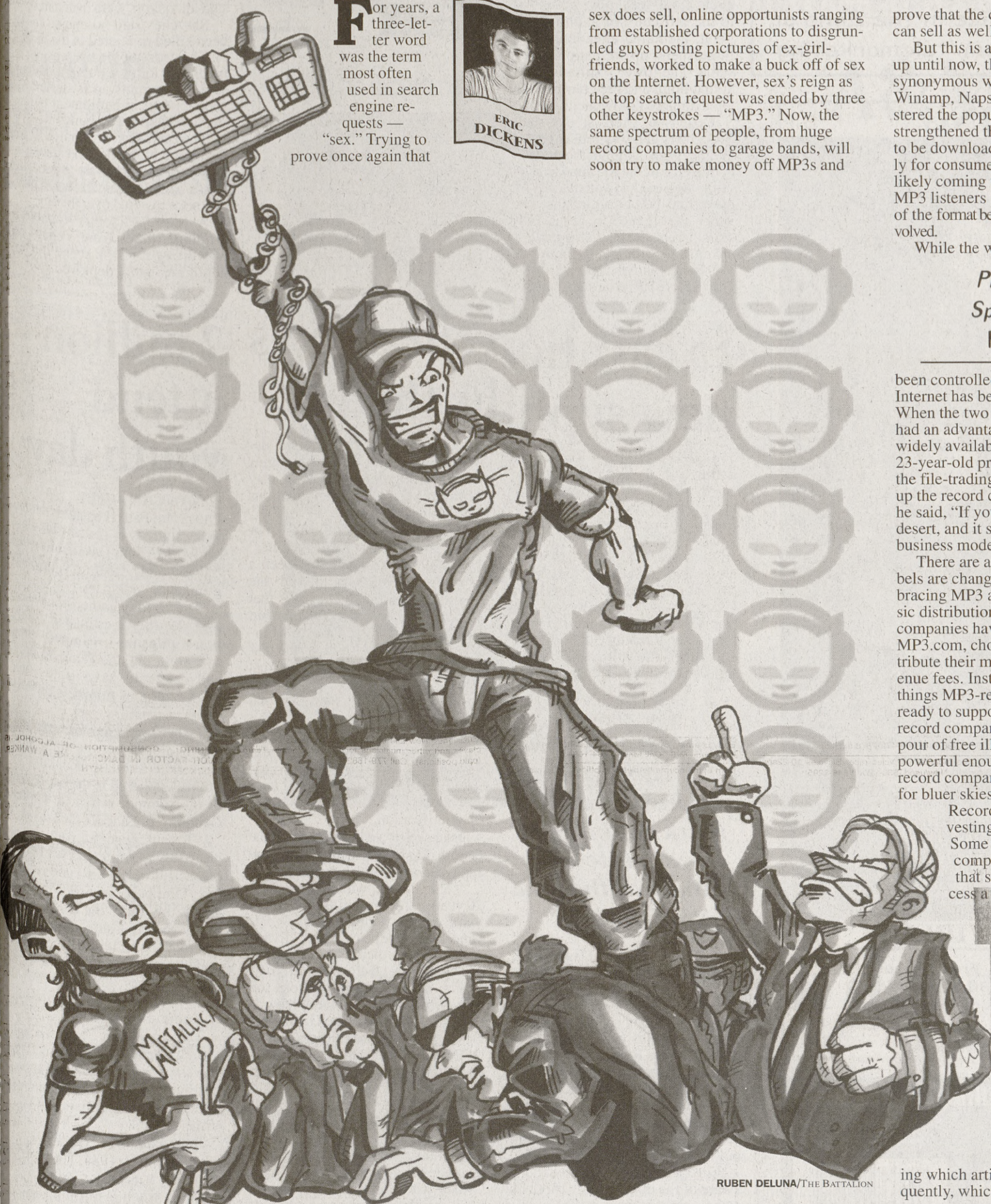
Piracy Online Special Series Part 2 of 3

been controlled by record companies, the Internet has been the consumer's turf. When the two worlds collided, consumers had an advantage — digital music became widely available at no cost. Ian Clarke, the 23-year-old programmer who developed the file-trading software Freenet, summed up the record companies' position when he said, "If you're selling water in the desert, and it starts to rain, you need a new business model."

There are already signs that record labels are changing their models and embracing MP3 as the next big thing in music distribution. Four major record companies have settled lawsuits with MP3.com, choosing to let the Website distribute their music while collecting revenue fees. Instead of suing any and all things MP3-related, the industry seems ready to support the new format. Though record companies cannot stop the downpour of free illegal MP3s, when one is powerful enough to control the weather, as record companies are, the forecast calls for bluer skies.

Record companies are already investing in high-tech alternatives. Some legal experts suggest record companies could release software that subscribers could use to access a label's MP3s. Similarly, Napster could continue operation with users paying a per-download fee with those revenues going to record labels.

Whatever happens, the change to legal, but not free, MP3s will occur on the Internet — where consumers still have the upper hand. Although record companies will be gaining a new source of revenue, listeners will influence that revenue by choosing which artists to download and, consequently, which artists get paid.



RUBEN DELUNA/THE BATTALION

Mail Call

Chalk messages viewed as vandalism

It has come to my attention that gay students here at A&M have begun an alternate form of advertising to promote their agenda.

For the past week, they have been vandalizing our campus with chalk. In the morning when most students are thinking about what they have to do today, they are swamped with such propaganda as "Queer Aggies R Here."

It is a shame that they stoop to such low levels as to sneak around at night and illegally deface the campus. Acting the way that they did creates an eyesore for everyone on campus and causes unnecessary work for the already burdened ground crew — requiring additional workers, who are paid for by increasing student fees.

The best example to follow is that of Gandhi. Through obeying the rules and doing things legally, he set an example for us all. If they want their rights respected by others, they should start by respecting everyone else's rights by following the guidelines of the University.

David Rushing
Class of '01

In support of 'wildcat,' off-campus bonfire

In response to David Lee's Aug. 28 column.

I completely disagree with what David Lee said in his Aug. 28 opinion column "Through Unity, Strength."

KTFB is doing us all a true favor. Although I praise Dr. Bowen for finding a way to keep Bonfire in some senses, it is unfortunate that, due to legal issues today, the University is not able to carry on Bonfire as it has evolved.

From what I read about their "wildcat" bonfire, they have made the changes deemed necessary by the Special Commission on the 1999 Aggie Bonfire.

I would like to remind people that this "wildcat" bonfire is separate from the University. That means that Dr. Bowen, Dr. Southerland, as well as any other A&M official may express all the displeasure they care to. However, to my knowledge, they cannot legally enforce any punishments.

I urge Aggies to support the "wildcat" bonfire. One thing that should not happen is having this activity split the student body. I believe that an off-campus "wildcat" bonfire truly would show the Aggie Spirit in a student-run bonfire supported wholeheartedly by Old Ags. Gig 'em.

John Hart
Class of '01

Bull Board

Good Bull

Finally, Walton Hall has been remodeled and has air conditioning in every room. Coincidentally, it is one of the most-requested male dorms this semester.

Even with individual air conditioners in each room, the price for a semester of "luxury" is still cheaper than all other air-conditioned dorms on campus. Now, the only nonair-conditioned dorm on campus is Hart Hall.

So if Mother Nature is the preference, the windows will not close at Hart. But if the smell of cold processed air tickles the fancy, T. O. Walton.

Bad Bull

As incoming students start beginning-of-the-semester tasks, they are welcomed by none other than Parking, Traffic and Transportation Services (PTTS).

After students complete a busy day of classes, they discover clever fluorescent orange and yellow notes liberally posted to their vehicles. These unwelcome warnings are PTTS' way of invading what might otherwise be a memorable move-in experience.

PTTS wastes no time engraving their infamous calling card as a written proclamation: "We hold the force, and we will tow your car."

— Cayla Carr

Good Bull

Ideally, few character

traits are more appealing than unabashed honesty. In the case of pop music princess Jessica Simpson, this standard certainly applies. During Sat-

shell admitted that she "likes to fart." Way to go, Jessica. Although her comment is disgusting, a person has to respect her honesty. It bravely flies in the face of the spotless, manufactured images that dominate the pop music scene today. Just remember to open a window.

— David Lee

Bad Bull

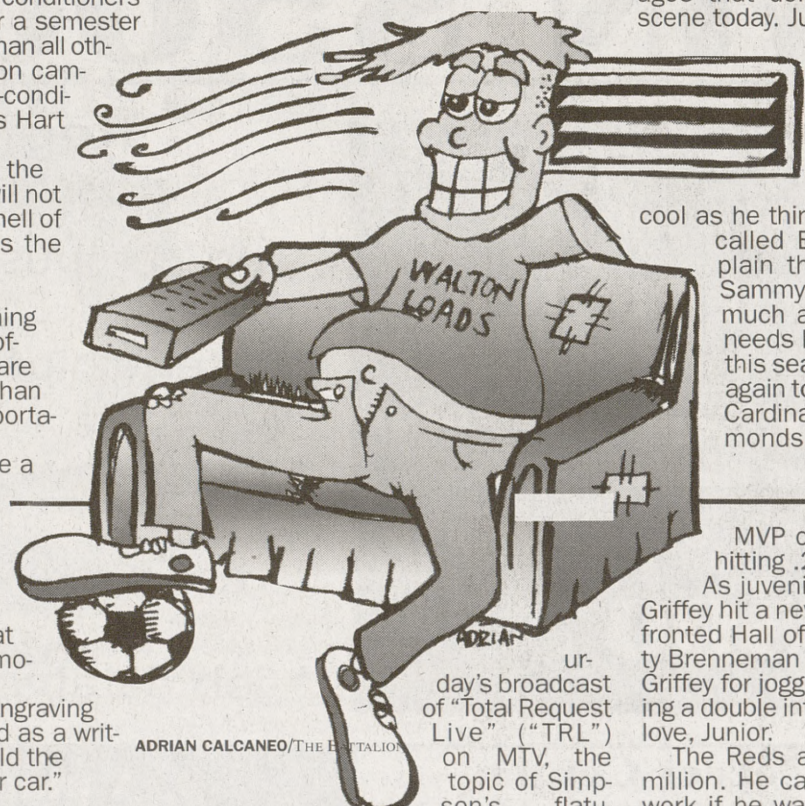
Cincinnati Red Ken Griffey Jr. is not as cool as he thinks he is. The man who called ESPN in 1998 to complain that Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa were getting too much air time at his expense needs his pacifier back. Earlier this season, Griffey called ESPN again to complain that St. Louis Cardinals center fielder Jim Edmonds was being hyped more than he was.

Could it be that Edmonds is a legitimate MVP candidate and Griffey is hitting .250?

As juvenile as this complaint is, Griffey hit a new low last week. He confronted Hall of Fame broadcaster Marty Brenneaman after Brenneaman ripped Griffey for jogging to first on a hit, turning a double into a single. No hustle, no love, Junior.

The Reds are paying Griffey \$108 million. He can buy a television network if he wants, but he cannot buy class.

— Mark Passwaters



ADRIAN CALCANELO/THE BATTALION

cast of "TRL" this summer, the bomb-

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