

How to Make the Most of MP3 Downloads - Entering the World of Digital Audio

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Sample of Content:

Learn how to wade through the many services for music downloads to find one that fits your device and your life. The #1 service may not be what you think!

Content:

Some industry experts claim that the increasingly wide availability of MP3 downloads is showing signs of taking over the way that we buy and listen to the music that we love. The days of the CD may not be over as such but it's certainly true that many more consumers nowadays are using one or more download services to build their music collections.

After all, what could be easier? Digital downloads don't clutter up your house and they are instantly available. In many cases they'll cost you less than going out to buy a CD. And, with this kind of online store at your disposal you can cherry pick the tracks you want to download at any given time which could save you even more money. So, you can, for example, simply download and pay for a couple of songs that you like from an album rather than having to shell out your hard-earned cash on a full CD just to get these particular tracks.

Digital download services may be big news now but the concept of MP3 downloads has been around for a good few years. Nowadays it's real simple to find a fully legal service where you can buy and download all the music you could ever want but a few years ago you'd probably have been restricted to doing it the illegal way via peer to peer (P2P) web sites.

P2P sites still exist in a grey area of the music industry. These sites allow individuals to basically share their own music collections from their own computers at no/minimal cost - when you sign up to the service you can search for the music you want and download it from a fellow user that has it. In return you'll generally be expected to share your own music as well for other users to access. These kinds of site aren't generally recognized as legal although some sites such as Napster and Wipit have attained legal status whilst still retaining a P2P principle.

As the world of digital downloads has grown, however, it has seen a huge increase in the number of legal and recognized MP3 downloads services. The most famous of all here is indubitably Apple's iTunes store but many more online stores are springing up with similar services on offer. There are even digital downloads charts nowadays so you can see what's hot on the net as well as in the stores.

So, you may have your player equipment already or you may be thinking of purchasing a digital music player. Your next natural step is to look at your options in the digital download sites that are out there to see whether you want to use them to load your player with music. Bear in mind that you can download as little or as much as you like which is why these sites are so popular. You can download and build massive music collections or simply a couple of tracks every now and then. These stores are the online equivalent of a music megastore - you just don't have to leave the house to use them!

The main thing to consider before you choose any digital download site is player compatibility. Not all players can be used with all sites and their services. You'll probably find that most players can access these stores to buy tracks but subscription services (where you pay a monthly fee to access unlimited music) may not work with the player you have or the player you plan to buy. This is generally based on the fact that these subscription services need a DRM (Digital Rights Management) compatibility with the player before they can work effectively and not all players have this. So, it's worth while checking out a few stores first to see what will work best with their software and services before you go any further.

You also need to consider the format of tracks that are made available to you. The standard digital formats are MP3 and WMA but there are many variations out there. Apple's iTunes service, for example, works with AAC and Sony have developed a format called ATRAC. If you mix and match formats then you'll end up having to convert files at some point which can be time consuming. This can also result in the loss of some audio quality in some cases.

If you're an Apple iPod Nano fan then you probably won't look much further than the iTunes service which is fair enough. iTunes are arguably one of - if not the - biggest online music stores out there. You do need to be aware, however, that many other digital download sites aren't actually iPod compatible so you may have some problems here if you want to shop elsewhere as well. The same goes for MAC computers to a certain extent so do check on your computer's compatibility as well as your player's. And, your operating system may restrict your choices as well - some download services have been set up to work with Windows XP and/or 2000 and may not work on earlier operating systems. Again, check first before you commit to spending your cash.

If you're looking for some ideas then you should take a look at the sites listed below. These will give you a general idea of how these services work, the kinds of music on offer (both in terms of catalog size and genre) and how they may work for you (you'll also find more in-depth analysis of their services elsewhere on our site):

iTuneseMusicMusicMatchNapsterMSN MusicAudibleWal-MartSony ConnectBleepLiveDownloadsAudio LunchboxYahoo! MusicBuy MusicRhapsodyRealPlayer

One final thing - don't think that all legal MP3 downloads are going to cost you money. You can search for all kinds of legal free downloads on the Internet - these are usually offered by sites promoting up and coming bands or by artists and record labels themselves. You won't necessarily find full albums here but you'll certainly be able to pick up a few choice tracks!

By Carol Finch of <http://www.mp3-players-n-reviews.com>

Carol Finch is a regular contributor to [MP3 Players N' Reviews](http://www.mp3-players-n-reviews.com), a website built by MP3 player lovers FOR MP3 player lovers. Find everything from un-biased product reviews and tips here: <http://www.mp3-players-n-reviews.com/manufacturers.html>

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