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CD includes
MP3 music,
players,
recorders
and more!

MP3:

Music on the Internet

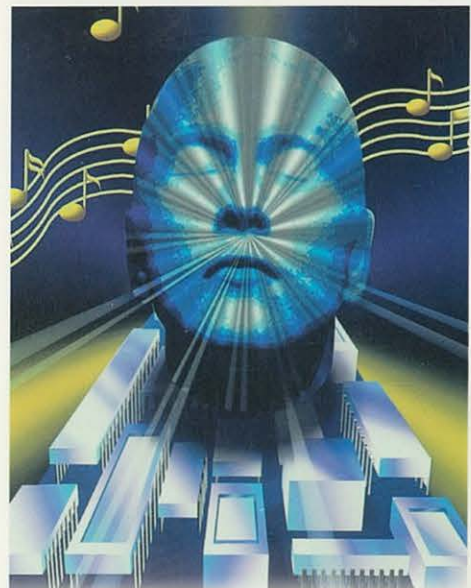
- ◆ **The quick and easy** way to learn the history and significance of MP3 technology
- ◆ **Idiot-proof steps** to finding the technology and music you want
- ◆ **Down-to-earth advice** on the legal challenges facing Internet music

Rod Underhill and Nat Gertler



"If you're interested in MP3, you're not an idiot; you're on the cutting edge!"

—From the Foreword by
Roger McGuinn,
former front man of
The Byrds and an
MP3 music artist



THE
**COMPLETE
IDIOT'S**
GUIDE[®] TO

**MP3: Music
on the Internet**

*Rod Underhill
Nat Gertler*

QUE[®]

201 West 103rd Street, Indianapolis, Indiana 46290

The Complete Idiot's Guide to MP3: Music on the Internet

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Foreword by Roger McGuinn

To begin with, if you're interested in MP3, you're not an idiot; you're on the cutting edge!

My first introduction to MP3 began back in 1996, when a college student came to our home for Thanksgiving dinner. He was aware of my involvement with computer recorded music from having seen my Web page, <http://folkden.com>. On this site, in an effort to preserve traditional folk songs, I place a new audio file each month in several different formats. The visiting college student gave me an MP3 encoder and suggested that I begin encoding my Folk Den songs in MP3. At that time, I didn't see the urgency of doing this, but gradually, as people bought faster computers and as the MP3 format became more popular, I decided that encoding my songs in MP3 would be a good idea.

I now see MP3 to be a silent revolution that will shake the traditional music business to its foundations. The future of music distribution is clearly going away from "brick and mortar," to online sales.

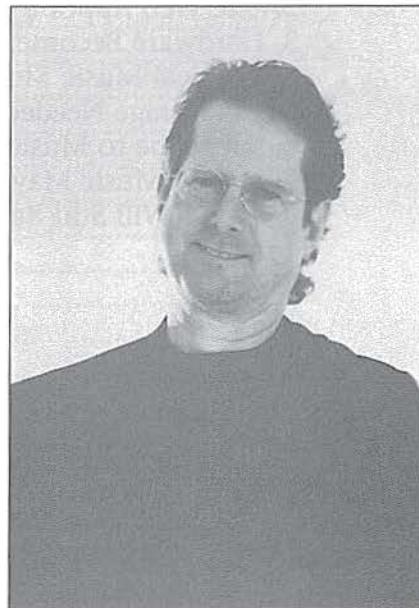
In February of 1999, MP3.com invited me to create a digital automatic music CD on its site. Since doing that, my CD has sold very well, and free MP3 tracks from *McGuinn's Folk Den Vol. 1* have been in MP3.com's Weekly Top 40 for many consecutive months.

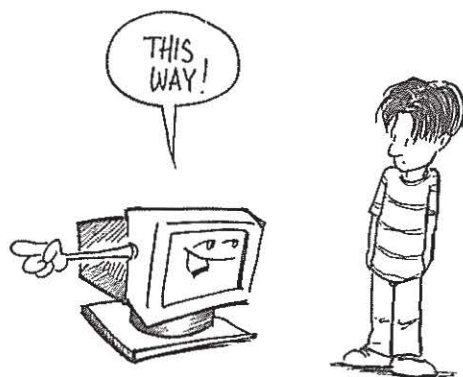
I'm extremely excited about this new avenue of artistic expression!

I receive email from people who say, "I'd like to listen to your MP3 songs, but just don't know how to get started." Now fortunately, Rod Underhill and Nat Gertler have written this comprehensive guide, *The Complete Idiot's Guide to MP3: Music on the Internet*, for anyone from the complete novice to the most computer-literate person. I feel confident that this book will provide the answers to your MP3 music questions.

All the best,

Roger McGuinn
<http://mcguinn.com>





Where to Get 'Em and How to Download 'Em

In This Chapter

- How do you find MP3 sites?
- How do you find the tunes you want?
- How do you store the tunes on your hard disk?

So far, you've heard *about* MP3 files. Now you want to just *hear* MP3 files. And the first step is to get some MP3 files.

The CD-ROM that comes with this book has hours of MP3 files on it. That sounds like an awful lot, but it's nowhere near enough to satisfy a real music fan. Luckily, there's plenty more music out there. How much? You could listen to MP3 music from dusk to dawn every day and never hear it all, because all the time you're listening, more new songs are being uploaded than you have time to listen to.

So now let's hunt down some of the most music-filled sites and see what they have to offer. (We're assuming that you know how to use the World Wide Web; if you don't, maybe you should head on over to the store where you bought this book and see if they have a copy of *The Complete Idiot's Guide to the Internet*.)

MP3.com: Digital Compressed Music's Central Core

The Web site MP3.com is the best known and the most active of the free 'n' legal music sites. It boasts thousands of artists offering tens of thousands of tracks, causing hundreds of thousands of downloads every day. It's popular because it has a lot of music, and people keep putting more music there because it's popular.

Finding a Track on MP3.com

There are many different ways you can select music on MP3.com. For example, from the opening page you can

- Click the **Song of the Day** link to get one new song selected each day by my co-author, Rod. This should be a good song, although it may not be in your favorite style of music.
- Click one of the songs featured in the Hot New MP3s list. Each one is listed with its genre. This is a good place to find quality new tracks and tracks by big-name recording artists. (If you see an interesting track by a big name, grab it quickly! Sometimes the artist's label gets mad that the artist has uploaded it, and moves quickly to get the song removed.)
- Click the **Music** link at the very top of the page to go to another page with links for many new artists and new tracks. It also has the Top 40 list, with links for the most popular songs currently on MP3.com. Some are popular because they are very good; others are popular merely because they have a cool title or have been well promoted. There's also a search field, in which you can enter a word to search for, and then click **Search** to see a listing of all songs and artists with that word in the name.
- Click a musical genre on the **Songs by Genre** list to go to a list of subgenres, see a listing of the top 40 MP3s in that genre, and view a list of popular artists in that genre.

The only one of these techniques that immediately starts a download is clicking the title of the Song Of The Day. Click any other song link and you'll be taken to a page on MP3.com focusing on that artist. It lists all the artist's available MP3 tracks. It also has a lot of information about the performer or group, such as a list of CDs available (many of which are available directly from MP3.com), the artist history, description, and comments.



The Three Beavers and Their DAM CD

A lot of artists on MP3.com offer Digital Automatic Music (DAM) CDs on their page. These CDs are usually made up of a mixture of tracks available for download and tracks that can only be had on the CD. What makes them different from standard CDs is that they also have all tracks on them in MP3 format, so you can put the disk in your CD-ROM drive and quickly copy the compressed tracks onto your computer.

Downloading or Playing a Track

For each song on the artists page, there are three links. The HiFi link is designed for people with high-speed Internet connections, such as a cable modem, a permanent network connection, or a direct line link at a university. Clicking this link launches your MP3 player and plays the song as it downloads, *if* you have your Web browser set up so that it knows where your MP3 player is (as described toward the end of Chapter 3, "Installing and Using MP3 Player Software"). This process won't work if you're using a phone modem, because these modems are too slow. The player would have to keep stopping and waiting for the rest of the song to download before it can play. If you have a phone modem, you can use the LoFi link, although the sound quality is much lower.

Clicking the Save link is supposed to just save the file to your hard disk. Note that I said "supposed to." Depending on how folks have used your PC and Web browser in the past, clicking this link may just save the file somewhere on your disk. Or it may open a dialog box that asks if you want to save the file or *open* it (start playing it with your MP3 player when the download is done), or it may just open it without asking. Opening sounds good, right?

Well, it really isn't. When your Web browser thinks you want to open a file, it assumes you want to treat it like a typical Web page: look at it now, and when you're done, you don't care what happens to it. So either after you close your MP3 player or after you've surfed the Web for a while longer, the song file is automatically deleted from your hard disk. If you want to hear that song again, you'll have to download it again, and with a long slow download, that's a pain in the neck.

Unless you're using an old or strange Web browser, the browser has a command to save the file a link goes to. For example, Windows users should right-click the **Save** link. On the resulting pop-up menu, there is a command named something like **Save**

Target As or **Save Link Document As** (the exact wording depends on your Web browser). Choose this command, and a file navigator appears letting you choose where to put the file.

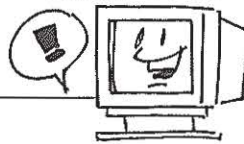


The Songs Don't Remain The Same

Once a book is printed, it doesn't change. Once a Web site is put up, it changes all of the time. Because of this, when Rod and I write about how a Web site works, we can only write about the way it works when we're writing about it. It's quite possible that the day after this book is released, someone will change how their Web site works, and what we've said will no longer be accurate.

Don't worry, though. Web sites usually don't change *that* much. The basic concepts remain the same, although the exact words, placement of links, and other similar items may change.

Tune Talk



Streaming versus Downloading

When you're dealing with MP3.com's LoFi and HiFi links, you'll find that you are downloading files that end with the .m3u extension. This is still an MP3 file, but it's a special format of MP3, designed for *streaming* audio, which means audio that you listen to at the same time as it's coming across the Internet, without storing it permanently on your hard disk. MP3 had to be somewhat redesigned for streaming, since streaming has issues that simple downloadable files aren't faced with (such as what happens when the download falls behind, or starts in the middle.)

Before the M3U format was settled on, MP3.com used the RealAudio format, the most popular on-line streaming audio format.

Other MP3.com Features

At the top of each MP3.com Web page is a series of links leading to different sections of the site:

- The News link takes you to probably the best-maintained site for news and opinions about MP3 and other compressed digital music formats. You'll find all sorts of information here on who's announcing what, who's suing whom, and so on.
- The Software link takes you to pages where you can download a wide array of MP3 players, encoders, and other MP3-related software.
- The Hardware link takes you to a page where you can find listings of various hardware-based MP3 players. Some of the listings are a bit too indiscriminate; you can't always tell quickly whether the item listed is something you can buy today at your local electronics shop, or whether it's just something that a student somewhere bets that he and his pals and some hired experts could come up with if they just had the money.

MP3.com also has what they call *radio stations*. These use the M3U streaming format to play music continuously. This is a nice way to listen to a lot of new music while you work, although it uses up some of your Internet bandwidth and thus slows down anything else you're doing on the Internet at the same time. Plus, the radio station often pauses while you do other things on the Net.

Most MP3.com artists have their own radio stations, which will loop through all the artist's available-for-download songs. There are also radio stations available for each genre of music on that genre's main page.

Non-Musical News, Non-Musical MP3s

Also on the front page of MP3.com is a Listen to the New York Times link. It can be a little hard to find, so if you can't find it easily, just go right to <http://www.mp3.com/audible/> to find the New York Times entry. That's right, headlines and articles from the New York Times, fresh every weekday, read out loud and stored in the MP3 format. Maybe they should change their ad-line to "All the news that fits your Rio!"



Why All the Legal Sites?

You may wonder why the sites I'm listing in this section are all ones that carry only *legal* MP3s, distributed with the permission of the creators. Don't I know about sites out there that have all the latest CDs, ripped and compressed and ready for download? You bet I know about them. And I'm against them.

Pirating music may seem like a victimless crime. It's not like shoplifting, where you're walking out with a physical object, right? So who loses out?

The musicians and the people they work with lose out. Recording artists make most of their money off *royalties*—their cut of that \$16 you shell out for a CD. It isn't a big cut, but it's how they make their money, how they pay for the recording and all the people that helped them. As a writer, I make my money off book royalties, so I understand the position they're in.

There are some standard arguments in favor of music piracy. Let's take a look at them:

"Well, I wouldn't buy the album anyway, so they're not really losing anything."

Except all that music your stealing is filling your need for music, and thus may be leading you to buy less legal music in general, hurting everyone in the business. And the recording artist is losing something: control over his music. Besides, if the recording isn't worth buying, is it really worth stealing?

"They should really be giving out samples for free anyway, to convince me to buy the CD." But because it's their music, isn't that their choice? If you believe in free samples, you should be supporting the artists who give out free samples, which is what all those songs on the free 'n' legal sites are.

"But I could listen to this song for free on the radio, and there's no difference between that and listening on my computer." Actually, there is a difference: the radio station is paying for playing the music.

"Information wants to be free!" Funny how the recording studio time doesn't want to be free, the cups of coffee don't want to be free, the braces for the mixing engineer's daughter's overbite don't want to be free...

EMusic: Music Worth Paying For

EMusic, located at www.EMusic.com, is the leading *commercial* MP3 download site. That's right, you have to pay for most of the songs on EMusic. But for the price (generally, 99 cents per song, charged to your credit card), you're not getting the same would-be up-and-comers that make up most of the tracks on the free sites.

Instead, you get commercial recordings from some medium-to-big name folks. Some of the biggest names are actually big-but-dead names, ranging from Leadbelly to Frank Zappa. And these folks aren't offering entire albums, but a song or two from one CD and a song or two from another, so you're really buying more of a sampler than a full album. If you're really into these artists, you probably won't be satisfied with what you get here.

But they do have other, living, breathing recording artists. Many are folks who are seemingly past the peak of their career, generally people who have left their major label and are moving on. This doesn't mean that their music isn't better than ever, it's just not what the kids are buying these days. If you're into what The Pixies were doing, you can check out front man Frank Black's new recordings with his band The Catholics. If you like Gene Loves Jezebel, their new music is here as well. And with these folks, you aren't just getting individual tracks, you are getting entire albums.

You can buy an entire album for \$8.99, or you can buy any individual track off most albums for 99 cents. There's even one free track on many albums, something you can download and listen to and then decide if you want the whole thing.

Look for EMusic to grow into carrying not only a larger selection but more impressive work as time goes on. They've announced a new album by respected off-beat pop charmers They Might Be Giants, an album that will *not* be released on CD but will *only* be available in MP3 format.

Getting MP3s from EMusic

On the EMusic front page, click the **Artist Index** link, and you are taken to a list of the performers they currently carry, which number in the hundreds rather than the thousands you'll find at a good CD store. Click the name of an artist to be shown a list of albums and non-album tracks he or she has available. Click on an album name to see a list of tracks on that album.

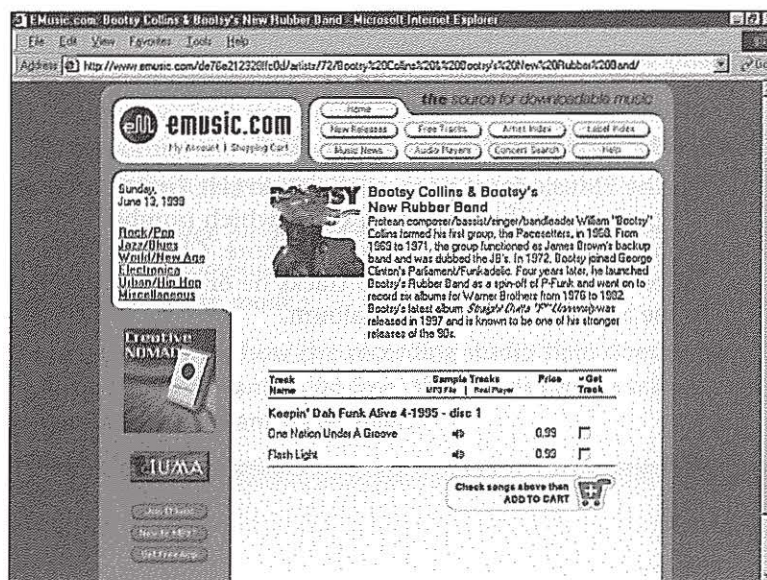


Is Buying an Album Online Worth It?

Whether shelling out the bucks to download an album is worth it depends on how you're listening to your music. Let's consider, for example, Gene Loves Jezebel's album *VII*. If you want to buy the album in a store, the list price is \$16.97. Of course, most stores discount some from the list price, but you may have a tough time finding this album in a store because it's not by a currently hot band. If you order the album from online discounter CD-NOW (www.cdnw.com), it'll run you \$11.88, plus shipping, and then you have to wait days for it to arrive. But then, you actually have a physical CD. If you're not totally converted to MP3, you can still play it in your car CD player, on your Discman, and so on. And when you're tired of it, you can probably sell it for a couple bucks to your local used CD shop.

Still, if you've built your previous musical life around CDs, you probably already have enough CDs to serve your car and Discman needs...and you can store up the money you save towards buying that portable MP3 player that will let you take it on the road.

An example of an EMusic page for an artist who offers just individual songs, not an entire album.



For each listed track, you can download a sample clip. Just right-click the icon in the MP3 column and select **Save Link As** or **Save Target As** or some similar command (depending on your browser), then use the file navigator that appears to navigate the file list. The same instructions go for the Free link on the free tracks. (Some tracks also have a RealAudio symbol that you can click to hear the track more quickly, but at lower quality, if you have a RealAudio player installed.)

Ordering Individual Tracks

Each track you can purchase has a check box next to it. Put a check in the box for each track you want to buy. After you've checked off all the tracks you want for the page, click the **Add to Cart** button. Doing so adds these tracks to your online *shopping cart*, a list of the things you plan to buy. When you add items to your cart, you will be shown a list of everything in your cart. This list also has controls that allow you to remove items from your cart. One of the nice things about a virtual shopping cart is that, unlike a real shopping cart, when you remove something from it, you don't have to look both ways to make sure that nobody notices you sticking the item back on the wrong shelf.

Ordering an Album

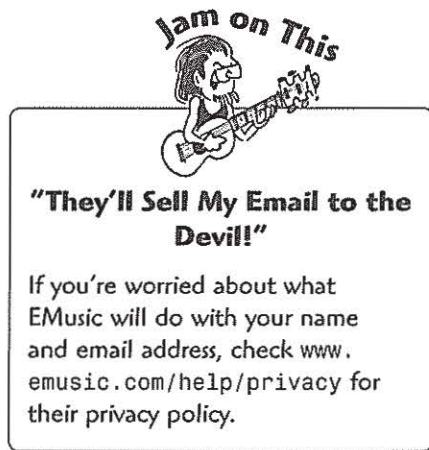
When you've found an album on the artist's page that you want to order, click the **Download Album** link under the album's cover image. If you don't have an account, you are taken to the Log In screen; go through the steps described in the following section, "Getting an EMusic Account," to create your account. If you do have an account but told the system not to remember you, you must enter your account name and password now. After you do so, the album is added to your shopping cart.

The screenshot shows the EMusic.com website in a Microsoft Internet Explorer browser window. The address bar displays the URL: <http://www.emusic.com/de/6e212320/cd/album/1303>. The page features a navigation bar with links like Home, New Releases, Free Tracks, Artist Index, Label Index, Music News, Audio Players, Concert Search, and Help. A sidebar on the left lists various music genres. The main content area is for the album 'His Greatest Hits' by Gene Autry, with a 'Download Album' button and a price of \$0.99. Below the album description is a table of tracks with checkboxes for selection.

Track Name	Sample Tracks MP3 File	Price	Get Track
Back In The Saddle Again	MP3 File	0.99	<input type="checkbox"/>
I Hang My Head And Cry	MP3 File	0.99	<input type="checkbox"/>
Tears On My Pillow	MP3 File	0.99	<input type="checkbox"/>
Be Honest With Me	MP3 File	0.99	<input type="checkbox"/>
Goodbye Little Durlin'	MP3 File	0.99	<input type="checkbox"/>
Lonely River	MP3 File	0.99	<input type="checkbox"/>

You can select any individual song from this album. The link to buy the whole album is at the top of the page.

Getting an EMusic Account



Before you can pay for and download all those phat tracks you've put in your shopping cart, you're going to have an EMusic account. Otherwise, they'll think of you as a no-account kind of person, and won't deal with you.

To set up your EMusic account, click the **My Account** link toward the upper left of any EMusic page. You are taken to a Log In screen, where the system wants to know your name and password. You don't have a password? No surprise, because this is your first time here!

Click the **Create New Account** link to set yourself up. A form appears asking for your name, email address, and your choice for a password. Fill out this form, and then click **Update Our Records**. Now you have an account! You also have a screen listing various

mailing lists you can join. If you join a mailing list, you will get occasional emails about EMusic, their partners, or specific musicians, depending on the topic of the list.

Getting the Music You've Ordered

After you've got all the songs you want in your shopping cart, it's time to check out. Click **Shopping Cart** at the top of any page to view the contents of your shopping cart. You'll see a list of the items you've put in the cart, as well as the price of each. If you've changed your mind about some item ("Wait, that's not *Disco Inferno*, that's *Discount Inferno!*"), click its **Remove** check box, and then click **Update Cart**.

When you're happy with the list, click **Check Out**. If you haven't logged in this session, you'll need to enter your email address and password, so EMusic knows that it's you. The log-in form also has an option that instructs the system to always remember you, so when it's time to log in, you can just click the **Log In** button and skip entering your name and password. This option is a good idea for your computer at home because it saves you time each time you use EMusic. It's a bad idea for your computer at work because EMusic will think that anyone who uses your computer is you, even if they have a really funny-looking haircut.

An invoice of what you've ordered appears. At this point, they're going to want a bunch more information so that they can bill your purchases to your credit card. Click **Add a New Credit Card** to get a form of credit card information. Fill out the form, and then click **Add Credit Card**. On the next screen, click the **Continue** button. (You'll only have to go through this rigmarole the first time; after that, EMusic remembers your credit card information as part of your account info, and you can charge automatically to that card.)

After you've entered your credit card information, EMusic puts the purchase order through, so your credit card is billed. A list of songs you've ordered appears. Each of these songs has a download link. Use these links to download the songs, as described earlier.

Yes, it does take quite awhile to download entire albums. Don't worry about something going wrong in the midst of a download; after you've purchased a song, you're allowed to download it up to three times.



Conquering Credit Card Crime!

If you're worried about someone stealing your credit card number when you send it over the Internet to a site like EMusic, you're causing yourself unneeded stress. Modern major browsers all support *secured* mode, a communications mode where everything you send via a Web form is encoded so that people using Internet snooping tools can't read it. You can tell your browser is in secured mode by looking at the bottom bar of the browser window; if you see an unbroken key or a closed padlock, the security is in force.

Remember that you don't have to wait for one file to finish downloading before you start the next. Your Web browser can usually handle several files at a time. That way, you can start the various files downloading just before going to bed, or before heading off on a trip to the Himalayas. Those of you with high-speed links shouldn't have much problem getting the music you bought, but those of us still using the same phone modems our grandparents used when they were kids will find getting that album a bit more trying.

Other EMusic Features

EMusic doesn't just support music by selling MP3s; it offers a number of useful informational links. Other features of the EMusic site include

- A page of downloadable MP3 players (not nearly so many as MP3.com, but with more description)
- A concert search (you can find out the next time that The Wascally Weasels are coming to your town)

- A general music news page (so you can find out that The Wascally Weasels have broken up because the lead Weasel got elected to Congress)

AMP3: Music, and Just a Little More

AMP3 seems to have taken a cue from commercial radio. At AMP3.com, you can download free music from hundreds of bands. And that's not all! In addition to the free music, there's something else you get for free:

Advertising

That's right, attached to each song is a short little ad clip, just a few seconds long. Every time you play the MP3, you'll hear a little jingle for some sponsor.

So why would you download from here when you can be downloading ad-free music from other places? After all, if you're a fan of music, you don't really want to have to sit through even a few seconds of ads, and if you're a fan of ads, you really don't want to have to sit through several minutes of music to hear each one.

The answer is that AMP3.com hopes to provide you with *better music* because of the ads. Every time someone downloads a song with an ad in it, the advertiser pays AMP3.com money. When that happens, AMP3.com passes half of the money along to the performer. By doing this, they hope to attract musicians whose music is worth paying for. The deal for the musicians is actually quite attractive because the amount they get paid per download (ranging from 5 to 25 cents) is around the same rate they would get paid for the song if it were on a CD. In the long run, you may see folks building careers from this sort of distribution, rather than getting some attention with a few free tracks and then hopping off the MP3 bandwagon onto the CD bandwagon.

Getting this arrangement fully working and profitable is a long-term goal for AMP3; they don't have everything going quite as well as they probably hope to. At this point, the ad jingles they run are jingles for the one advertiser they can most easily land: AMP3.com itself. And they give themselves a discount on the ads, only paying the performer 2 cents.

Finding Music on AMP3.com

The front page of the site has a list of their recent Pick Hit Of The Day picks. This is a spot that their artists really desire; not only does it mean a lot of visibility and more downloads, but they get a \$50 bonus for being the Pick Hit. Better still, if the same song is a Pick Hit for two days, they get \$1,000, and for three days, \$10,000.

Running down the left edge of the page is a list of musical genres, ranging from Alternative to Zydeco. Click any of these links, and you'll see the most popular downloads in each category. When I visited, their genre list was a bit overzealous, as I found at least one genre for which they had no music. That's another sign that their goals are set well beyond what they've achieved.



Every Web Site Aims to Grow

In my coverage of AMP3.com, you'll see a few comments noting that they clearly aren't yet at the level of success that they are aiming for. Does this mean they're failures? Heck no! Few of even the most popular Web sites have achieved their goals. Even those sites whose stocks are skyrocketing are losing money by the bucketful, and aren't that worried about it. They know that if they can get their Web site established now, there will be plenty of opportunities to make money when the Web has even more users and a much larger bandwidth.

For each song listed, you can use the link for the name of the song to download it, or click the performer's name to see an information sheet on that performer and a list of all their songs available to download, each with a download link.

Other AMP3.com Features

At the time of this writing, there isn't much more there. They have an introductory MP3 guide, some hardware reviews, and some links to a handful of MP3 software providers. Again, expect this site to grow.

RioPORT

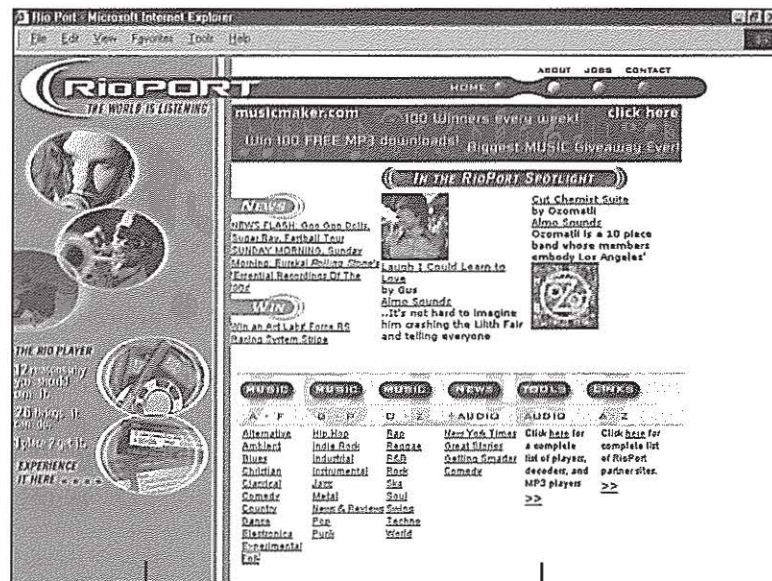
RioPORT is a site run by Diamond, manufacturers of the Rio portable MP3 players and other multimedia gadgets. As such, there is a visible emphasis on providing music for people with Rios, and convincing people who come looking for music that they should get a Rio to play it on.

Head on over to www.rioport.com and you'll see what I mean: some large ads for the Rio and Rio-related stuff, plus an alphabetically ordered list of links to various musical genres. Click one of those links, and you'll get a handful of tracks in that genre displayed, each with an illustration. The download link for the track is the track's title. There's another link for each track with the name of a Web site that includes the artist; click that link to see the Web site.

When you select a genre, you also get a list at the left of the screen of Web sites that provide authorized MP3s of that sort of music. You can click any one of these links to visit that site.

Part 2 ► Getting and Playing MP3s

The RioPORT opening page provides music and news links.

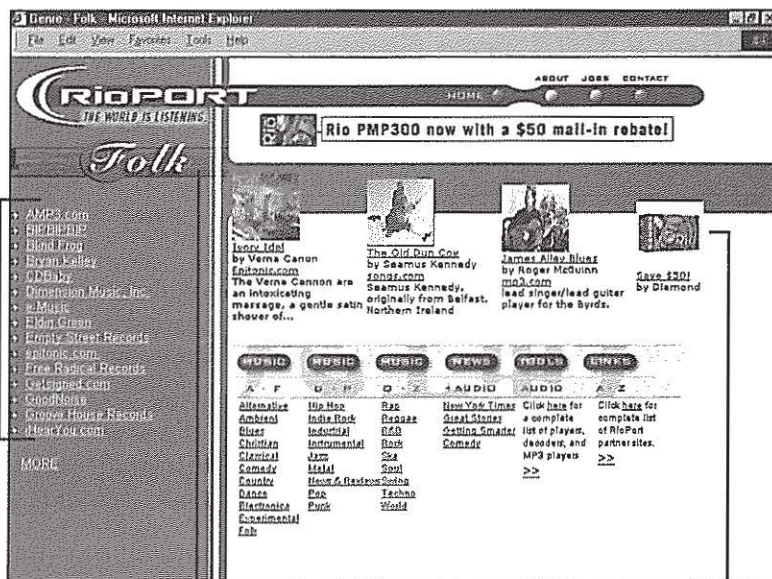


Diamond Rio information

Available music genres

RioPORT has folk music for musical folk.

Sources for other tracks in this genre



Genre name

Tracks available from RioPORT

All in all, there aren't that many songs on the RioPORT site (although they are hand-picked ones and thus tend to be good quality). What the site does best is help you find other MP3 sites that have music in a given genre.

Other RioPORT Features

In addition to musical genres, RioPORT has a list of spoken word genres (news, comedy, and so on). These categories all link to the Audible.com site, which I'll discuss in a little bit. The news is the same *New York Times* news that MP3.com carries. (Oddly enough, although clicking the link on RioPORT pulls up the Audible.com page with the *Times* news, a similar link on one of Audible's pages pulls up the MP3.com page!)

Audible: Lots o' Words, No Music

New Jersey-based Audible, Inc., is an interesting company. Years before the first portable MP3 players were available, Audible had their own portable electronic compressed audio player, the Audible MobilePlayer. This little handheld device doesn't have as much memory as the MP3 players (even the newer MobilePlayer-PLUS has only half as much memory as the earliest Rio), but they've been able to get hours of playtime out of the memory by using higher compression rates. The sound isn't as high quality as a good MP3, but that didn't matter so much for its intended use. Audible wasn't trying to replace CD players with their device; their target was the books-on-tape market.

Books on cassette tape are a huge market in the United States. I know that when I was driving from Minnesota to Alaska, my spirits were kept up by listening to such things as Richard Feynman's lectures on physics. Of course, that subject isn't to everyone's taste. (Some people I know would drive from Minnesota to Alaska just to avoid six hours of physics lectures.) But the good news is that all sorts of books, from the utterly vapid to the completely inscrutable, are available on tape.

One of the problems with books on cassette tape, however, is that they aren't cheap. Even an abridged edition will often take up four or six cassettes. Get a nice thick book like Stephen King's *Four Past Midnight*, and you'll find that the cassette edition is four volumes totaling 20 cassettes. That version will cost you about \$100 more than buying the printed book in paperback, which runs about \$8. The folks at Audible realized that if you didn't actually have to manufacture the cassettes, the costs come way down. If all they had to do was to have you download the electronic files, they could offer a lower price and still make a good profit. For example, King's *Bag Of Bones*—clocking in at more than 21 hours—costs about \$60 on cassette, and \$80 on CD, but if you download it for your MobilePlayer, it costs just \$18. That's less than the hard-back (\$20), although still well more than the \$8 paperback.

Sure, the MobilePlayer costs something (starting at about \$80), but it doesn't take a lot of Stephen King audio recordings to save you money. Plus, the ability to make a recording available quickly online means that they can offer things that would be impractical to offer on a cassette, such as fresh National Public Radio news and interviews.

Enough About Not-MP3! Get to the MP3!

Audible realized that the Diamond Rio was a hot seller. Suddenly, tons of people were getting this player that worked a lot like their own. If they could just sell the files in the MP3 format as well, they could open up a large market of people who might not cough up \$80 for a non-music player. And so they began converting the books that they offer to the MP3 format, and cozied up with Diamond so that they could help each other. (They may be delayed by the people who license them the rights to the recordings. After all, an MP3 of a book faces the same copying concern as an MP3 of a song.)

Despite being close to Diamond, Audible will tell you that their own player is actually better for books than the Rio. After all, if you pause the Rio in the middle of a chapter and don't start playing again soon, Rio resets to the beginning of the chapter, and when you want to listen again, you'll have to fast-forward to find your place. The Audible player doesn't lose its place. Because they're friendly with Diamond, however, they don't tell you that some of the *other* MP3 players (such as the MPMan) also don't lose their place.

Because of the higher level of compression (using a non-MP3 format) they use, the MobilePlayer-Plus can actually store more audio than the standard Rio.

So Where Do I Get These MP3 Books?

Surf on over to www.audible.com/mp3/ to get to their MP3-oriented site. After you get there, you'll see that they really want you to sign up with them. They'll want your name, phone number, and email address.

At Audible.com's MP3 site, you'll find links for a number of types of spoken information and entertainment. They have news, literature, humor, and more. They even have some alternative rock and jazz. Click one of these links, and you'll see a list of available items for download. Click one to get a fuller description, with a download link.

At the time I'm writing this, most of the downloads are shorter items (20 to 80 minutes), which are available for free, as samples. Soon (perhaps by the time you buy this book), you can expect to see more material available for sale.



They Want Your Number

It really gets my goat when someone wants more personal information than they legitimately need before you can access their site. The Audible MP3 site asking for my phone number is a clear example of that. How do I know they won't give my number to the fine folks at Evil Jack's Phone Company, who will call me at 3 a.m. to offer me their new phone plan ("Buy 10 minutes of long distance for \$50, and your next 10 seconds are free!") Some sites at least offer you a privacy policy letting you know what they might do with your information before you give it to them; no such luck at Audible. And some sites don't give a fuss if you leave out some information; again, no such luck here. So consider these facts before you decide to give any site your information.



Mac Maniacs, Beware

To make longer works easier to handle, some of them are broken down into separate MP3 files for each chapter. In some cases, you can download a book chapter by chapter, which is fine. In other cases, however, they have combined the book's files into a single file that has a built-in program to split its component files back apart. This program is for Windows; it won't run on the Mac. If you see that the file you're downloading from Audible ends in .exe instead of .mp3, it isn't Mac friendly.

MP3now: An MP3-Less MP3 Site

The site at www.MP3now.com is supposed to be a central site for the MP3 fan. You might think they would have a lot of MP3s, some MP3 software, all the latest MP3 news articles, perhaps a search engine that lets you find the MP3s you want (legal or, alas, otherwise) and so on.

Actually, they don't have any of that stuff.

Links, Links, and (ummm, Let's See) More Links

What they *do* have is *links* to all that stuff. You can click a link on the site to pull up MP3.com's top 100 list from their site, another link to pull up the list of downloadable music from an online rap label, and so on. They have reviews of software, and they have a download link, but that link starts the download from someone else's server, not their own. Click one of the MP3-related news headlines, and it'll pull up the page from someone else's site, not from MP3now.com itself.

And whenever you do link to a page on another site, MP3now.com opens that page either in a new window or in a frame on the existing window, making sure that you still have their site open.

The site does offer some music and a top 100 list that it *says* is part of MP3now.com, but if you look at the URL in your browser window, you'll discover that it really comes from another Web site, www.nordicdms.com. If you surf on over to that site, you'll see that they offer all those songs themselves.

Do They Have Anything of Their Own?

They do have some original content, material that talks *about* MP3 in some way. They have information on how to make and play MP3s, reviews of MP3 software, things like that.

They also own Findsongs.com, a site designed to help you search for MP3s. But in the MP3now.com tradition, this site doesn't actually have a search engine of its own. Instead, it lets you enter the information your searching for and select from a long list of other people's search engines. The results get displayed in a frame, so you're always kept at the [Findsongs](http://Findsongs.com) site.

A Disposable Web Site

So if MP3now doesn't have original material, does that mean that it's useless? Not really. It's useful like a disposable tissue is useful: use it once.

MP3now.com can be a good place to find out about other MP3 Web sites. Go there once, see if any of the sites that they link to are interesting, and add them to your Web browser's bookmarks. You don't need to keep going back to MP3now.com every time you want to get back to a site that they link to because doing so will just slow you down.

The Least You Need to Know

- Go to www.MP3.com for tens of thousands of free, legal recordings to download.
- www.EMusic.com offers downloadable tracks by known musicians for sale.
- AMP3.com offers free downloadable songs with a short ad jingle attached to the beginning of each one.
- Diamond has a Web site at www.RioPORT.com which offers free music as well as information on the Rio portable players.
- The company Audible, set up at www.audible/mp3/, sells mostly spoken word recordings, but it now offers plenty of free samples, including complete stories.
- At www.MP3now.com you'll find links to content on other MP3-related sites.