Morals of Music Management

Music is arguably one of the top contending forms of entertainment for children, teens, and adults alike. Many turn to their favorite songs as an audio aesthetic to boost their spirits in times of despair, or to simply push them through their last mile on the daily jog. While music has been there for us for many years, a major change is altering how we obtain our favorite tracks from our favorite artists. Millions of people now do things such as copy CDs for friends or download copyrighted material off of the web. These types of activities are known as “music piracy”.

What exactly is “music piracy”? The unauthorized distribution of copyrighted music files has come to be known as "music piracy" (Brundage 1). The practice of music piracy seems to be a growing trend, especially with younger demographics... such as college students. The music industry has taken many approaches in order to minimize the pandemic, such as taking legal action against music downloaders and making efforts to force certain illegal music-sharing services to shut down. Even after all of the resources and efforts the music industry spends to tackle this trending trouble, the issue remains persistent. Why?

Persuaded to Piracy

There are many factors that are argued when the question, “What causes music piracy?” is posed. Many of us want to point the finger at Napster, LimeWire, and Kazaa, and are quick to pin the blame on these “person-to-person” music sharing services. While it is obvious that services such as these have contributed to the popularity of the problem, there are many other factors at work.
The CD Swap

One of the earliest forms of popularized music piracy was the simple exchange of a CD between close friends. There are many of us who find this tradition harmless, but we don’t often take the time to think of who may be affected by our desire for convenience. Let’s say Dave Mathews Band releases a new album… finally! The people have been waiting for this new album release for years now, and it’s supposed to be good. But wait, you only have twenty dollars in your wallet and that was supposed to be used for food. Well that is no problem because your best friend just bought a copy... you can borrow it from him! Although you just saved yourself an expense, you also just stole from the pockets of Dave himself, and the record company.

The iTunes Invasion

On January 9, 2001, Apple released a revolutionary new music downloading system called “iTunes”, with the iPod being released later in the year. This program would change the way music was obtained forever, opening up an entire realm of distribution possibilities. It also contributed to the rise of the music piracy pandemic. How so? Well, the iPod exposed music consumers to a new concept; the idea of this portable music device with self-storage... an idea that there seemingly was an endless amount of space to store entire collections of songs. Listeners then felt the need to fill this space any way they could, and there was no way that their collection of the “Bee Gee’s Greatest Hits” would fill it. People then sought other ways to fill this space. This is what led to the birth of the P2P (person to person) music sharing system.

-Managing Morals
There is also a much deeper root to the music piracy dilemma. According to a study conducted by The Barna Group, despite the widespread coverage of the legal arguments and fight against music piracy, most consumers possess no moral qualms about obtaining music illegally. “Instead, the vast majority of teens (86%) believe that music piracy either is morally acceptable or is not even a moral issue. Just 8% claim that such activities are morally wrong” (Barna Group 2). This concept illustrates the idea that attitudes drive behavior. According to the study, “4 out of every 5 teenagers (80%) have engaged in some type of music piracy in the past six months - including making copies of CDs for other people, downloading free music, or uploading their own music files to the Internet to share with others” (Barna Group 2). The study determined that a person’s moral stance on the ethical debate over music piracy was the leading attribute in determining how likely a person was to engage in music piracy. The study found that many other socioeconomic factors such as race, religion, gender, background, etc... played a minimal role.

One reason teens may embrace music piracy is that they are told to by the majority of their peers. The teenagers who participated in the Barna Group study were asked if they had ever heard anyone talk about when it is legal to copy music onto CDs and when it is not legal. Only 54% of the teens said that they had been exposed to such input. Even fewer teens (48%) had ever heard anyone discuss the morality of music downloading. Furthermore, when teens get information about the moral choices related to music piracy, it rarely came from older mentors or their parents. “Peers are the most common source of teenagers’ information about CD copying (32%) as well as about music downloading (28%).” Should teenage peers really be the ones guiding each other through the moral qualms related to music piracy? (Barna Group 2)
The Solutions

-Making Music Cheaper

There are many advocates for the theory that music pricing is a major contributing factor to the increase in music piracy. Therefore, reducing standard music pricing would decrease cases of music piracy. A study conducted by Duke University found three main things that have a negative impact on the likelihood a person will obtain a song illegally: “willingness to pay; perceived likeliness of facing a lawsuit; and morality (Billboard 1) “

In order to determine what students would pay for downloaded music, the study asked students if they would pay a random price for the song, “Right Round” by Flo Rida. The price each student was assigned was based on the last two digits of the student’s social security number. The study used a specific song because each person would place a unique value on the song. “Some may love it, some may hate it”. (Billboard 1) The study found that the average price that students were willing to pay for the track was $0.68.

The study also took notice of a trend. For every $0.01 increase in the price of a track, the probability the student's last song was downloaded illegally increased by 0.3%. Furthermore, a 1% increase in the student's perceived chance of being criminally charged for piracy, the probability that last song was obtained illegally fell about 0.4%. Perhaps the public feels that music is just too expensive. Reducing the average rates of a typical music download could be the solution to minimizing music piracy. (Billboard 1)
Stressing education to make it a moral issue

David Kinnaman, Vice President of The Barna Group, is one of the strongest advocates for music piracy education for youth. Kinnaman believes that tackling the root cause of music piracy, the “carefree” attitude towards music piracy, is the best way to minimize it. Kinnaman said, “That’s why a legal argument against music piracy rings hollow for most teens: they just don’t buy the idea that a company or even an artist can ‘own’ an experience - which is essentially what music represents to them - much less tell them what is right and wrong. (Barna Group 3) Kinnaman’s idea is to encourage parents, pastors and community peers to discuss music piracy with teenagers on a regular basis to help them understand the moral boundaries of music piracy.

Conclusion

The question of the piracy of intellectual property is always a complicated matter. There are many different theories and arguments, especially within the music piracy debate. The trend to illegally acquire music has become so popular that it has become a very hard beast to tame. In my opinion, I believe that awareness and education is always the first step to effective action... in this case, effective results. Therefore, I support Kinnaman’s idea to attack music piracy at the roots. If the morals of piracy are put into question by the youth of our culture... perhaps the attitude towards piracy will change.
Works Cited

"The Barna Group - Fewer Than 1 in 10 Teenagers Believe That Music Piracy Is Morally Wrong."


<http://www.billboard.biz/bbbiz/content_display/industry/news/e3i7d72e67f57c9816984798c2319cdba47>.

