

'Sterile Burning' Future Of Recorded Music

Written by Robert ID1458

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It seems 'stealing' music is not only limited to the hip-hop and rap genre. Artists in all areas of the music industry are being 'robbed' of their work by 'bootlegged' cd or people just burning a 'copy' to avoid buying the artists work. It seems that Sony BMG Music is looking out for the artists and of course their own sales.

There are issues still to work out, but it is good to see someone is doing something to curb this illegal practice. Artists need to eat to. If you agree or dis-agree it seems this is the future of recorded music. This is what Sony BMG Music Entertainment is doing:

Sony BMG Music Entertainment is testing technology solutions that bar consumers from making additional copies of burned CD-R discs, as part of its mounting U.S. rollout of content-enhanced and copy-protected CDs.

Since March the company has released at least 10 commercial titles -- more than 1 million discs in total -- featuring technology from U.K. anti-piracy specialist First4Internet that allows consumers to make limited copies of protected discs, but blocks users from making copies of the copies.

The concept is known as "sterile burning." And in the eyes of Sony BMG executives, the initiative is central to the industry's efforts to curb casual CD burning.

"The casual piracy, the school yard piracy, is a huge issue for us," says Thomas Hesse, president of global digital business for Sony BMG. "Two-thirds of all piracy comes from ripping and burning CDs, which is why making the CD a secure format is of the utmost importance."

Names of specific titles carrying the technology were not disclosed. The effort is not specific to First4Internet. Other Sony BMG partners are expected to begin commercial trials of sterile burning within the next month.

To date, most copy protection and other digital rights management-based solutions that allow

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for burning have not included secure burning.

Early copy-protected discs as well as all Digital Rights Management (DRM)-protected files sold through online retailers like iTunes, Napster and others offer burning of tracks into unprotected WAV files. Those burned CDs can then be ripped back onto a personal computer minus a DRM wrapper and converted into MP3 files.

Under the new solution, tracks ripped and burned from a copy-protected disc are copied to a blank CD in Microsoft's Windows Media Audio format. The DRM embedded on the discs bars the burned CD from being copied.

"The secure burning solution is the sensible way forward," First4Internet CEO Mathew Gilliat-Smith says. "Most consumers accept that making a copy for personal use is really what they want it for. The industry is keen to make sure that is not abused by making copies for other people that would otherwise go buy a CD."

As with other copy-protected discs, albums featuring XCP (extended copy protection) will allow for three copies to be made.

However, Sony BMG has said it is not locked into the number of copies. The label is looking to offer consumers a fair-use replication of rights enjoyed on existing CDs.

COMPATIBLE FOR ALL?

A key concern with copy-protection efforts remains compatibility.

It is a sticking point at Sony BMG and other labels as they look to increase the number of copy-protected CDs they push into the market.

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Among the biggest headaches: Secure burning means that iPod users do not have any means of transferring tracks to their device, because Apple Computer has yet to license its FairPlay DRM for use on copy-protected discs.

As for more basic CD player compatibility issues, Gilliat-Smith says the discs are compliant with Sony Philips CD specifications and should therefore play in all conventional CD players.

The moves with First4Internet are part of a larger copy-protection push by Sony BMG that also includes SunnComm and its MediaMax technology.

To date, SunnComm has been the music giant's primary partner on commercial releases -- including Velvet Revolver's "Contraband" and Anthony Hamilton's solo album. In all, more than 5.5 million content-enhanced and protected discs have been shipped featuring SunnComm technology.

First4Internet's XCP has been used previously on prerelease CDs only. Sony BMG is the first to commercially deploy XCP.

First4Internet's other clients -- which include Universal Music Group, Warner Music Group and EMI -- are using XCP for prerelease material.

Sony BMG expects that by year's end a substantial number of its U.S. releases will employ either MediaMax or XCP. All copy-protected solutions will include such extras as photo galleries, enhanced liner notes and links to other features.