

Music-biz blues

by The San Diego Union-Tribune

It's easy to sympathize with the Recording Industry Association of America. Changes in technology have left the RIAA's basic business model in ruins. With young customers accustomed to buying individual songs for \$1 at a time over the Internet to listen to on portable devices, the old days of recording artists putting out \$18.99 CDs consisting of a hit or two and a dozen desultory afterthought tracks are over.

That legal body blow to the recording industry's cash flow is compounded by the illegal hits the industry is taking on two other fronts.

The first: Piracy of CDs (and DVDs, software and more) is a bigger problem than ever in developing nations - especially emerging economic powers such as China - which are unconcerned by intellectual property rights. International authorities appear either overwhelmed by the problem or uninterested in dealing with it. The second: In the United States, an entire generation of youthful downloaders and content-sharers struggles to take seriously the notion of intellectual property. Far from seeing the old version of Napster or the increasingly ubiquitous online peer-to-peer (p2p) networks as criminal, this generation seems to consider the frequent acquisition of unpaid-for products to be a fundamental right.

Given this backdrop, we can see why the RIAA is deeply frustrated. But we regret that the trade group's frustration has now yielded a crazy new policy: It is challenging the right of people to transfer the songs on their own legally obtained CDs to their own personal computers.

This is folly. For millions of people, their personal computers are their home music systems. This trend is certain to grow as PCs become de facto home entertainment systems.

Here's hoping the association heeds its own Web site. It says it's no big deal to copy your own CD to your own PC. It sure shouldn't be.

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