

Survey: 67% of students don't care about illegal downloading

By: Chris Hynes, Collegian Staff

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Even with the risk of becoming involved in legal trouble with the Recording Industry Association of America (RIAA), it seems college students nationwide are overlooking the repercussions of illegal downloading.

According to a survey conducted last week by SurveyU – a Brooklyn-based group of technologists and researchers with expertise in creating interactive survey research dialogue for the modern college student – 67 percent of students on college campuses are still not concerned with their illegal downloading habits.

The survey, which was conducted during the weekend of March 24, polled students on how many songs they own and how they received them; whether or not they side with musicians and the music industry, the government or other college students and how informed they are on legal issues surrounding digital rights.

Five hundred online interviews were conducted between March 24 and March 26 throughout college campuses nationwide.

The results showed that 53 percent of college students in the country are actually aware of the issue, but only 35 percent of that group are familiarized with their legal rights.

This rash of illegal downloading has led to drops in revenue throughout the music industry with factors like single-song purchases and file-sharing networks acting as contributors. When respondents were asked to guesstimate the amount of music purchased in their collection versus the amount that was not purchased SurveyU found that only 57 percent of people's total libraries had been bought.

"Clearly there's a sense among college students that once a song has been digitized, it's free," said Dan Coates, Co-Founder of SurveyU. "This is a generation that has grown up around digital media and is living on the fault lines of a digital rights issue."

Although revenues in the music industry are decreasing, students don't appear to believe that affects the well-being of musicians whose files they are sharing. When

asked if they agreed with the statement, "Musicians don't suffer since their growing fan base buys concert tickets and makes other financial contributions to their success," 60 percent agreed.

Facts show the average ticket price rose 62 percent from 1996 to 2001, while the Consumer Price Index increased just 13 percent. The price of sporting events, movies and shows rose 24 percent according to figures written by Eric Olsen of blogcritics.org.

Jeff Rabhan, a manager for artists such as Jermaine Dupri and Kelis said in the Wall Street Journal, "Sales are so down and so off that, as a manager, I look at a CD as part of the marketing of an artist, more than as an income stream. It's the vehicle that drives the tour, the merchandise, building the brand and that's it. There's no money."

"Concerts have been booming with double-digits growth, but the record companies aren't in on the profits made at concerts," Coates said.

The RIAA was most startled by the statistic that 98 percent of the 500 students interviewed said they had at least one song that they acquired without payment.

"If you ask me, 98 percent of people are doing it – it's not just a group of bad kids. It's like we have to punish an entire generation," explained Coates. "It's small things, like the subtle change in words, from file-sharing to piracy. Those two phrases conjure up very different images. What I'm saying is that you'd have to do a lot of talking to convince me that these kids are profiting off these files."

Coates also touched upon the dichotomy between the Baby Boomer Generation in opposition to the Millennial Generation (those born between 1982 and 2002).

"Boomers started out seeking to redefine society by focusing on the injustices of their time: race relations, the Vietnam War and the role of women in society," he explained. "Two generations later, their children, the Millennial Generation, are seeking to redefine society as well, but this time the injustices they perceive are digital in nature. The irony is that the generation that sought societal change is now 'the man,' and they are defending digital rights with the same force that was used in the '60s to thwart their own efforts."

SurveyU is an organization recruiting students to become panel members eligible to participate in their surveys. Their research data has been purchased by groups from the public and private sectors, foundations and academic institutions. More information can be found on their Web site at www.SurveyU.com.

Chris Hynes can be reached at chynes@student.umass.edu. © Copyright 2007 The Daily Collegian