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References

Frakes, D., Seff, J., & Snell, J. (2009). iTunes' DRM-Free Music: What You Need to Know. *Macworld*, 26(3), 18-19. Retrieved from Computer Source database.

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Section: MacUser
MUSIC

iTunes' DRM-Free Music: What You Need to Know

Wondering what Apple's dropping of DRM means for you? We can help

During his keynote address at the January Macworld Expo, Phil Schiller, Apple's vice president of worldwide product marketing, announced that the iTunes Store would soon completely stop selling music encumbered by digital rights management (DRM) restrictions. What does that mean for you? Read on to find out.

[I thought Apple already sold DRM-free tracks called iTunes Plus on the iTunes Store. How is this different?](#)

Format-wise, not at all. The difference is that originally only one of the big record labels, EMI (plus many smaller independent labels), offered its music as DRM-free on the iTunes Store. But Apple says it will now offer DRM-free music from the other three major labels as well: Sony BMG, Warner Music, and Universal.

[iTunes Plus tracks cost 99 cents now — will that change?](#)

Yes. As part of the switch to a DRM-free format, Apple is adopting a three-tiered pricing structure for iTunes music (we suspect it's a form of quid pro quo with the record labels — "you can have DRM-free music if we can finally have variable pricing"). Starting on April 1, tracks will cost 69 cents, 99 cents, or \$1.29. At this point, we don't know how prices will be determined for individual tracks — will new tracks cost more, for instance? — but Schiller did say that more songs are going to be offered at 69 cents than at \$1.29.

[How many tracks are available DRM-free?](#)

Apple says that 8 million of the 10 million tracks in its catalog are now available in iTunes Plus — that's an improvement over the roughly 3 million tracks available before the announcement. By the end of the quarter (March), the rest of the tracks in the iTunes Store should be available DRM-free as well.

[Can I upgrade my current tracks?](#)

Yes, but if 11 cost you, and it's an all-or-nothing proposition. In other words, you can't pick and choose which tracks to upgrade. iTunes charges 30 cents per song, 30 percent of the current album price for complete albums, and 60 cents for music videos. (Go to the iTunes Store home page and click on

Upgrade To iTunes Plus under the Quick links heading to see how much if 11 add up to.)

Can I get around the requirement to upgrade all my tracks by deselecting them in iTunes or removing them from my library?

Unfortunately not. iTunes looks at your purchase history, not what's in your iTunes library.

If I choose to upgrade, what happens to my old tracks?

When you upgrade your library, you should be given the option to delete the protected tracks or move them to your desktop for archival purposes.

What's so special about DRM-free tracks anyway? Why should I care?

Two big things: iTunes Plus tracks are encoded at 256 Kbps, twice the bit rate of standard iTunes tracks; and without DRM, you can play your files on as many Macs or PCs as you want.

Isn't AAC an Apple-specific format that isn't portable to other devices?

The only Apple-specific part of old iTunes files is that they're wrapped in DRM (these music files end in the file extension m4p — the p stands for "protected" — as opposed to .m4a). Apple's DRM is compatible only with Apple products, but AAC files play on a wide variety of players.

What kinds of AAC-compatible players are you talking about?

Most other portable MP3 players around — yes, even Microsoft's Zune — will play AAC files. Other products that let you play music from your network through your home stereo, such as Logitech's Squeeze-box products and the Sonos music system, can also play AAC files.

But what if I need MP3 files instead? Can I convert my iTunes tracks?

Yes. Since they're no longer protected, you can use iTunes (or other software) to convert them to MP3 or another format.

So I can give copies of the songs I buy to my friends now, right?

No, copyright law is still in effect — passing songs around is music piracy. However, the lack of DRM gives you a flexibility that DRM couldn't. For example, imagine parents and kids commingling their music libraries. And if you opt to share your iTunes library on your local network, other people can stream the songs you've purchased from the iTunes Store. But putting 1 song up on a file-sharing service and letting 20 of your friends download it? That's not exactly ethical. And remember that iTunes embeds your iTunes ID in every iTunes Plus file you download, so it's easy to see who bought the file originally.

What about movies and TV shows from the iTunes Store?

No changes there — this applies; to music tracks and music videos only.

As part of the switch to DRM-free music, Apple is adopting a three-tiered pricing structure.

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