

Im a regular reader of Billboard and some other music related publications. Its not a fun read these days as total sales continue to fall and music companies alter their models to include every revenue source they can find.

A smart move of course, but what really needs to happen for the music industry to prosper ?

The first thing that dawned on me as I thought about this was simple, yet scary. I cant remember the last time I bought a CD Player of any kind, nor can i think of a reason why I would. Sure, my PCs have one, but its rare I use it for music. If the music industry is going to rebound, rather than trying to find ways to sell more CDs, they have to either find a reason for people to start buying CD players again, and I cant think of a single reason why anyone would, or the industry has to quickly as possible find a way to get rid of music CDs. Their ongoing dependency is creating an imbalance that drags them further away from turning their business around.

Thats not to say that selling digital downloads, or even worrying about the format of digital downloads (DRM free, or not) is going to lead to a solution.

One of two things has got to happen. There has to be a new financial model that excites music consumers into spending more money on music, or there has to be a technological advance that creates a new experience with music.

I've always been a big believer in the DRM free music subscription model. Charge people an extra 5 dollars on their cable bill for DRM free, unlimited use music and the total money spent on music will grow and exceed net margin dollars currently earned by the music labels. There is no reason why each label cant be a "network" comparable to Turner, NBC Universal, HDNet, etc that gets paid by the subscriber by a distributor who then marks the cost up to consumers. Consumers get a simplified delivery of music, Labels and hopefully artists get more dollars put directly in their pockets. Its not good for the retail side of the business, but as long as CD players are dying, so will retail.

The 2nd option is to use technology to develop something out of left field. Im a big believer that music is not just entertainment, but a tool for people to describe themselves to those around them. We use music in our ringtones, on myspace pages, blasting through the windows of cars to let people know something about who we are. Technology is now in a position to allow people to broadcast their personalities and positions about themselves as well as enhance music consumption.

We have evolved from boomboxes to walkmans to portable CD players to Ipods. Only the shoulder carried boombox made a statement. Today the one constant we all have and really the only place i have increased my spending on music playback is headphones. Some are wireless, some are fancy, some are earbuds. Maybe we need a range of new, completely differentiated devices that we just plug our earphones into

Im guessing and pulling things out of left field here, and these arent devices that I would ever invest in, but maybe we need simple, inexpensive playback devices that project what we are listening to ? Rather than updating our iPod hard drives, we just insert a simple flashdrive into any number of playback devices that are more an accessory to life than a dedicated music/video/phone device. These devices might mashup a skin that plays back on the exteriors of our MP3 players or phones or even bluetooths animations to belt buckles or hats or a car hood ornament or any device or clothing we can integrate. Why not have devices that are programmable or preprogrammed to do any number of fun things that define who we are ,with the music being the perfect plug in complement ?

Maybe the way to change music isnt by changing the music formats, but by enabling new ways for us to say new things about ourselves using music as the foundation or catalyst ?

I dont know for sure. . However, I do know this: Trying to figure out new ways to sell music on CDs... That ain't it.

The CD is dead. Long live music