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Amazon.com's Launches Music Downloads. First Impressions.

Amazon.com's greatly anticipated music download store launched today. Here is a bullet list of things that first caught my eye:

- The title alone says it all: Amazon MP3. No association whatsoever with other, doomed file formats. Protected WMA would have been a huge non-starter for customers.
- There are so many titles listed and the catalog is so well presented, one may not notice the gaps represented by the missing Warner Music Group and Sony BMG titles. The relatively thin catalog is more evident if you notice there is only one new age album and just two opera albums listed in the "bestselling new and future releases" section.
- Who said variable pricing is a bad thing? On the left sidebar Amazon.com has put links to bargain albums: \$4.99 and under, \$5.00 to \$5.99, \$6.00 to \$6.99, etc. Though I expected to find a lot of EPs mixed in with the albums, I was surprised to find legit catalog titles by Bon Jovi, John Coltrane and 50 Cent, as well as LCD Soundsystem's latest album (for a mere \$5.99). Albums priced at \$7.99 or less are showcased on the "New and Future Releases" page as well.
- Yes, they've got Radiohead...but full album downloads only (except for a couple of songs from compilations).
- Though prices for individual tracks vary, each of the Top 100 tracks has a price of \$0.89. The first track priced at \$0.99 is #149, Guns N' Roses' "Patience." Amazon's blog post claims one million of the site's two million downloads are priced at \$0.89 and "most albums" are between \$5.99 and \$9.99.
- While prices are cheaper than iTunes, it can still pay to shop around. Two of the first albums I saw, Manu Chao's La Radiolina (\$7.99) and Les Savy Fav's Let's Stay Friends (\$8.99), are available at cheap-o subscription store eMusic for far lower prices and in the same MP3 format.
- How to push album sales: Let people know the difference between buying the album and buying each song individually. For example, the pitch at Devendra Banhart's Smokey Rolls Down Thunder Canyon page: "Album Savings: \$6.85 compared to buying all songs." Well done.
- There are no customer reviews for the digital albums even though the album's CD page is filled with reviews.
- Lots of cross-selling. CD pages let the shopper know if the MP3 album is "Available To Download Now." For example, KT Tunstall's Drastic Fantastic costs \$11.99 for the CD or \$8.99 for the download. Download pages have links to the CD page.

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- The site lists upcoming MP3 albums and singles but unlike iTunes does not appear to allow for pre-orders.
- I haven't seen an attempt to sell MP3 players at any of the download pages.

http://www.coolfer.com/blog/archives/2007/09/amazoncoms_laun_1.php