

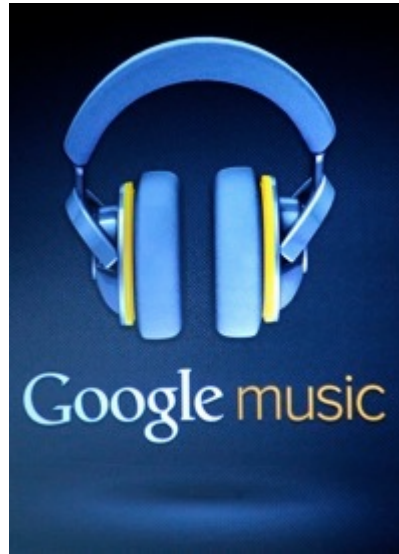


Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on November 18, 2011

Google Launches iTunes Alternative

Google's catalog of music will be available on the Android Market, the storefront it maintains for users of Android smartphones to download apps, books, and movies. The service is being rolled out this week to consumers in the United States with plans to offer the product to the estimated 200 million Android users worldwide.

The long-awaited announcement was made at an event in Los Angeles on November 16. The California-based company's senior product manager, Michael Siliski, hyped the new music store with a demonstration worthy of the company whose name has become a verb.



There are similarities to the iTunes distribution scheme. There is a segment of the catalog being offered for free download, while most of the tracks available carry a by now-familiar price tag of around \$1.00 (69 cents to \$1.29, to be exact). The initial cache of songs includes work by chart toppers Adele, Jay-Z, and Pearl Jam.

In all, the Google Music will feature 13 million songs. These tunes are made available by three of the four big players in the music recording industry: Universal Music, EMI Group Ltd., and Sony Music Entertainment. These giants will be joined by over 1,000 smaller, independent labels such as Matador Records, Merge, Revolver USA, and CD Baby, according to reports.

For the sake of comparison, the iTunes Store offers over 20 million tracks for sale, while the other competitor, Amazon MP3, boasts a digital catalog of 17 million songs.

During the L.A. promotion, the elephant in the room was the absence of the popular catalog of music owned by the Warner Music Group. Warner did not contribute songs to the store, which leaves the new Android Market music store without songs by Cher, Built to Spill, Eric Clapton, Metallica, Neil Young, R.E.M., Gucci Mane, and many others on the virtual shelves. Warner made no public statement as to the reason for its refusal to play with Google.

One highly anticipated aspect of Google Music is the ability it provides to users to swap songs with friends on the Google Plus social networking site. According to information published by Google, friends can click on the songs in each other's library and listen to it once without charge.

As consumers download tracks they are stored in a song locker. Then, the song can be streamed through computer and mobile web browsers. Reportedly, the service functions perfectly with Safari, the default web browser operating on Apple's iPad.

Android users can buy, stream, and store songs, making them available for offline access.

Google is accustomed to being the big dog in any Internet fight. When it comes to the world of digital music, however, there is no question that Apple's iTunes is the reigning champion. What Google lacks in music experience it makes up for in moxie.



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In an [article](#) published by the *Washington Post*, the head of Google's Android Market music service, Jamie Rosenberg, took a big swing at its record selling rival by pointing out the differences between Apple's cloud storage option, iTunes Match (subscription to which is set at \$25 annually) and Google Music's cloud service that doesn't cost a dime.

"Other cloud music services think you have to pay to listen to music you already own. We don't," said Rosenberg.

Given the size and saturation of iTunes in the digital song universe, why would record companies bother teaming up with Google? The answer is likely found in Google's reach advantage. Google is a global cultural phenomenon without rival. Its other services are popular beyond measure, and surely there is something to be gained from making one's product available to such a ready market.

As quoted in the *Washington Post*: "How many people do you know have both an iPhone and an Android device?" said Universal's president of global digital business, Rob Wells. "I encourage any new entrant into the digital music space who is going to help us reach a broad audience and sell legitimate songs."

Mark Piibe, EMI's executive vice president of global business development, said Google's plan to bring legitimately sold music to people in new ways "can only be good for the market as a whole."

The ace in the hole for Google Music may be its artist hubs and exclusive content. At launch there will be scores of free tracks from powerhouse performers like the Rolling Stones, Coldplay, and Busta Rhymes.

Apart from such consumer appeal, there is incentive for artists to ally themselves with Google Music, as well. As [reported](#) by PC World:

Artists, both independent and signed, can distribute their own original music on the Google Music platform. Bands or individuals can build their own artist page, upload original songs, set their own prices, and sell content directly to fans. Artists keep 70 percent of sales of individual songs or full albums.

Kyle Waters, a former indie musician, likens Google Music's Artist hub to a fancier MySpace Music. He likes the DIY aspect of it and sees potential in it. He said it could be really successful for both listeners and musicians if Google Music actually catches on with consumers. Bands can use it to generate buzz and might have a chance to get signed by a real label.

Google described the artist hub in a blog:

"With the Google Music artist hub, any artist who has all the necessary rights can distribute his or her own music on our platform, and use the artist hub interface to build an artist page, upload original tracks, set prices and sell content directly to fans — essentially becoming the manager of their own far-reaching music store."

Some [technology observers](#) reckon that the social media synchronization through Google Plus will be an add greater appeal to the service.

The other draw for indie as well as signed musician is the Google+ integration. The fact that users can share full songs and full albums with their friends is really awesome. It is a great, "viral" way for musicians to get their names out there.

The question that must be answered after the PR blitz is over is can the Android platform compete with the iPhone/iPad dynamic duo.



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One of the first manufacturers of an Android-powered smartphone, T-Mobile USA, signed on as a partner in the launch of the Google Music service. To add convenience to the Google Music download experience, T-Mobile USA announced that its customers would soon be able to pay for songs through their monthly bill.

The Android operating system was developed by the Open Handset Alliance (a consortium of several companies that include Broadcom Corporation, Google, HTC, Intel, LG, Marvell Technology Group, Motorola, Nvidia, Qualcomm, Samsung Electronics, Sprint Nextel, T-Mobile and Texas Instruments) under the direction of Google and is for use on smartphones and a variety of tablet computers. Curiously, one of the co-founders of Android, Inc. was a former vice president at T-Mobile, Nick Sears.

Besides the mobile phone and tablet app, Google Music is available for subscribers to the Google TV service. Purchases are synced via the cloud, making cell phone and computer purchases available instantly on the TV.

There is undoubtedly an uphill climb in front of Google Music, and Apple and Amazon are not the sorts to sit idly by and allow competitors to catch up unchallenged. Google can find some hope in the fact that beta testers of the service reportedly streamed music an average of 2.5 hours every day.

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